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Proposals for professional training of adult educators

The proposals have been developed in the framework of Erasmus+ project “*Openness to diversity through community education*”, ODEon (Nr. 2016-1-LV01-KA204-022704). The project was developed in cooperation with three partners: Kurzeme Planning Region (Latvia), a non-governmental organisation OPEI (Cyprus), and a social theatre NUCLEO (Italy). The project targeted adults from disadvantaged backgrounds and aimed at the development of recommendations for involving adults from disadvantaged backgrounds in education. While analysing this problem and looking for possible solutions, the project has also addressed the issue of adult educators’ professional competence. In order to ensure that the measures taken to involve adults in education are effective, adult educators should have some specific skills alongside their general pedagogical qualification. These can be developed if adult educators have adequate professional training possibilities.

Proposals:

1. Professional training programmes should address competences required for understanding, respecting and supporting the needs of specific target groups.

Educators who work with disabled people should show tolerance. They should be patient with these people, have very good communication skills, be ready to invest in working with them and should be interested in making their lives easier. They should also have passion for working with this target group, should be organised and able to manage their tasks. Besides, they should be confident and emotionally intelligent people.

Educators who work with persons from rural areas should understand problems of their specific community. This is required in order to communicate with the community people, namely, to make one’s discourse comprehensive to the members of this target group and understand the way they think. The best option is if educators have once been or are still the members of that community. If an educator has no idea about the community life, then one of his/her specific professional training objectives could be a study of community lifestyle and their needs.

Educators who work with migrants face specific difficulties. A group of migrants can comprise both those people who sincerely want to start a new full life in a new place and those who hide malign intent behind their status of a migrant. An educator should be a careful observer. (S)he should have relevant knowledge of migrants’ home countries, their customs, traditions and religion. This would allow the educator to identify dishonest and dangerous people and at the same time to understand, respect and support those people who want to integrate in the local community. Adult educators should be able to prevent manifestations of racism both in their group and in the local community in general. They should try to make these people feel comfortable so that they could express themselves and feel free. Educators should have positive thinking about these people and be open towards their special needs.

2. Professional training programmes should involve the use of the methods that are effective for working with adults from disadvantaged backgrounds. These methods can be further used by educators in their own future practice. These are complex methods the use of which allows achieving several objectives at the same time. The methods are of informal nature reaching the participants through emotions, raising their self-confidence and developing their need for self-empowerment. The list of advised methods includes:

The drama method

The drama method allows the participants to develop understanding of their own body, to develop their emotional openness and improve their emotion management, communication and cooperation skills. It helps to remove psychological barriers, offers sense of internal freedom and the joy of self-expression.

Interactive festivals

The participants can take part in the festivals as actors, audience or organisers. The festivals include performances which integrate theatre, dance, music, literature, video, installation as well as other art forms. The festivals are organised around topical social themes, they are focused on understanding and enacting common values. The audience have the possibility to react actively to the observed performances, get engaged in them, express their opinion and promote new activities.

The festivals foster the sense of belonging to a certain community and/or certain ideas; they develop tolerance towards others, as well as communication and cooperation skills.

Practical activities – projects

Practical activities are those activities that result in the development of certain products. These products can include household items, such as food, souvenirs, and elements of home decoration. A practical project can also be organised in a form of an event, a study, and a social action. The shared activity can be beneficial for practicing a foreign language, developing specific skills and aesthetic perceptions, as well as for discovering local customs. A common project contributes towards the development of planning, communication and cooperation skills and promotes a natural exchange of experience. Being an essential element of learning skills, reflection is organised on various stages of the project. The achieved result is a source of satisfaction which improves the motivation for further growth.

Volunteering

Volunteering has often been associated with the youth; however, it is also an effective means for education of adults and the elderly. It is a way of learning through participation in a new social environment. It can also be considered as a pilot learning. When getting in a new environment and being involved in a new activity, a volunteer discovers new traits of his personality and new capacities. Trying their hand at this new activity, (s)he deepens understanding of his/her own potential and needs. This, in turn, helps to define his/her further learning paths. Volunteering contributes to the development of new specific skills, tolerance, adaptation, communication, and cooperation skills. Adult educators are recommended to organise volunteering work for those target groups that they will work further with as educators.

A problem lab

Problem solving has been recognised among top 10 skills required in the modern society. Organising learning around problem definition and solution relevant for the needs of a group helps to develop problem solving, communication and cooperation skills. Group participants should get to know different opinions and try to harmonise them, which leads to the development of tolerance and the acceptance of differences. Problem labs provide adult educators with the possibility to solve educational problems. A problem lab allows members of the target group to discuss problems topical for the community. The method will be successful if the participants can come to the constructive solutions that can be put in action in real life.

These methods can also be recommended due to the fact that they allow for interdisciplinary learning. Interdisciplinary learning is one of the factors in the promotion of entrepreneurship that also increases motivation to learn.