

FuturelabAE

change oriented adult education



Democracy Workshop

Learners as Leaders: Developing Democracy through
Change-Oriented Community Education in Ireland

Concept and Methodology

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Introduction

This methodology handbook has been developed as part of the FutureLabAE project. The project addresses two main issues; the situation of democracy in Europe and the high number of people in Europe with lower levels of education. It aims to strengthen the capacity of educators to tackle issues arising from an increasing number of citizens who are disengaging with the political establishment and leaning towards populist and xenophobic politics. It also looks at ways to address challenges arising from the large number of people in Europe who need support with digital literacy to benefit from the digital transformation.

This concept was piloted at an event called *'Learners as Leaders: Developing Democracy through Change-Oriented Community Education in Ireland'* as part of the project.

This handbook provides an overview of our concept and the specific methods used in practice. Readers can choose to use the full methodology or use activities within the handbook based on their interest to run simialar workshops.

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Aim, Objectives and Approach

AIM of the event:

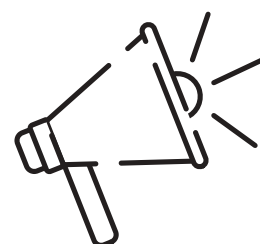
The aim of the workshop is to provide educators, practitioners, academics, policy-makers and learners in the adult learning sector with an opportunity to deepen their understanding of change-oriented adult learning theory, methodology, and practice.

Workshop Objectives:

- Examine the current political climate and rise of right-wing populist politics.
- Discuss and identify education-based solutions for democratic deficit considering the movement and impact from the local to the global.
- Examine and participate in democratic and change-orientated education methodology.
- Discover best practice examples of community education with the inclusion of learner voice activities and representation.
- Discuss the values and beliefs needed to foster an inclusive democratic society.

Approach:

The workshop should be delivered through an interactive session with opportunities for reflection and discussion



Methods and Tools Used

During the workshop methods and tools used should reflect the principles and values underpinning democracy education and change-oriented adult learning. This means ensuring an open and interactive session that provides a platform for learners to share their experiences and perspectives as equal and valued contributors during the session.

Learner Voice

Learner voice is the process of listening to and including learner experience in education. Hargreaves (2004) defines learner voice as “How students come to play a more active role in their education...as a direct result of their [educators] becoming more attentive, in sustained or routine ways, to what students want to say about their experience of learning.” It can and should improve the education programme design, quality and experience for learners. Academics in this area including Flynn (2017) call for a 'culture of listening' which is embedded within strategy and organisational structures to ensure a sustainable response of listening to and taking action on learner voice. Empowerment should be a core aim of all learner voice work and this is why the FuturelabAE project utilised this as a core method within this methodology.



Learner Voice Activities

For this workshop, we engaged with learners and shared their voice in several different ways. This included:

- Surveying learners
- Co-designing a change-oriented adult learning programme called '*Learners as Leaders Advocacy Series*' with learners
- Hosting 8 sessions with learners and discussing their experience in education, their advocacy concerns, representation, communication, and actions going forward
- Building the capacity of learners through workshops on advocacy and communication
- Hosting a learner panel to share their experience
- Hosting a democratic art workshop to support learners visualising their experience
- Supporting learners to speak at our event
- Creating an art exhibition video to ensure all learners involved were represented as part of the event
- Running an advocacy campaign after the event called '*Nothing about Us without Us*'



Ideas for your workshop:

- Meet learners in advance and identify their concerns and experience
- Host a learner panel to ensure learners are a core part of your event
- Ensure all activities are co-designed and meet learners needs

Interactive Discussion using Padlet

The aim of this method is to provide all participants with the opportunity to actively engage with and contribute to the workshop as part of a discussion. It provides them with the chance to reflect, share their perspectives, and learn from others in the group.

Resources Needed:

Padlet (for both online or face to face use) or flipcharts spread around the room. You can access Padlet here: <https://padlet.com/dashboard>



Step 1:

State the aim of the aim of this activity

Step 2:

Provide instructions for using padlet and access code and/or writing responses on flipchart paper

Step 3:

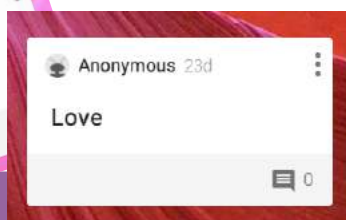
Provide the questions and ask participants to provide their answers now and throughout the session (it is suggested to keep padlet accessible oduring the workshop)

Step 4:

Share key points given by particiants (this can be done at any time during the session based on the workshop agenda)

Questions:

- What are the values and beliefs needed to foster an inclusive society?
- How do we use these to create change through adult learning?



Knowledge Cafe



This method is about bringing people together, making conversation, listening and sharing experiences. It helps build relationships and make a better sense of a rapidly changing, complex, less predictable world to improve decision making and the ways in which we work together.

The Knowledge Café is a simple but flexible, conversational event that almost anyone can run. You do not need to be a professional facilitator. The key is to allow natural conversation to flow and not work towards measured outputs.

It brings a group of people together to have a conversation on a topic of interest to better understand an issue.

The Café can help to highlight and share the group's collective knowledge; learning from each other; sharing ideas and insights; gaining a deeper understanding of a topic and the issues involved and exploring possibilities.

What is different about the Knowledge Café compared to similar methodologies is that no attempt is made to make decisions or reach consensus as part of the Café itself.

Focus on:

- Keeping things relaxed
- Being free to discuss and share ideas
- Informality
- listening and learning from peers

Instructions for using the Knowledge Cafe Method

Step 1:

Organise facilitators and note takers for the session. Provide them with clear instructions on the method and the context of the discussion.

Step 2:

Introduce the methodology to your participants and highlight the fact that there is no specific feedback or output desired. It is an open and reflective discussion between peers with all contributions equally valid and welcome.



Step 3:

Provide a set time and organise the group into smaller groups.

Tip: If you use a note taker ask them to capture key learnings from the session. However this is not a necessary part of the activity.



Learners as Leaders Advocacy Series

Background on the Methodology:

Learners as Leaders is an informal education programme that seeks to empower and create social change within the adult learning sector designed by AONTAS the National Adult Learning Organisation in Ireland. As part of the FutureLabAE project, a specific 'Advocacy Series' was developed in partnership with a group of learners from the Cope Foundation. These learners have a range of intellectual disabilities. Their experiences and perspectives acted as a powerful force in driving the programme and in developing their follow-up advocacy campaign that was delivered in March 2021 in partnership with AONTAS.

About the programme:

Learners as Leaders is a flexible participatory programme designed on the principles of adult learning including the work of change-oriented theorists such as Paulo Freire (1970), bell hooks (1994) and Jack Mezirow (1991)

Advocacy Series Workshops

- Introduction and Advocacy
- Democracy
- Campaign Planning and content
- Communications
- Art Workshop – Democracy Exhibition
- Advocacy
- Preparation for Democracy Education Conference
- Campaign Planning

Delivery of the Programme

The key to success in change-oriented programmes is ensuring that the programme is underpinned by values and principles which seek to empower and create change. Change that is sought for and by the learners themselves. It must be co-designed by the group and embrace their wishes at all times. Using a semi-structured approach is helpful and can allow facilitators to be proactive based on the energy and needs of the group throughout each session.

Focus on:

- Earning the trust of the group
- Being honest and transparent at all times
- Engaging in activities with learners instead of watching
- Ensuring it is a safe space with all opinions and experiences welcome

Exhibition

The art workshop was a central part of the Advocacy Series. It provided a space for learners to create visual representations of democracy. We captured all the work using a video to present live at the workshop. This meant that all of the learners in the programme had the opportunity to be included centre stage during the workshop.

Our learners have a range of different (learning) abilities and this was a really positive way for them to share their learner voice in a visual representation.



Conclusion

The methodology for this workshop included a broad variety of methods and tools to engage educators and policy makers in the adult learning sector. In addition, including inputs from learners, adult educators and academics allowed us to consider diverse perspectives and experiences for addressing the objectives of the FuturelabAE project.

The workshop was successful in showcasing the model of community education in Ireland as an example of change-oriented adult learning and piloting the Learners as Leaders Advocacy Series.

Throughout the development of this methodology and the delivery of the workshop the FuturelabAE team reaffirmed their belief and commitment to change-oriented adult learning as a tool for creating positive social change.

To use this methodology, please adapt it to the local needs and context of your organisation or institution. It must meet the needs of local people and local issues working from the local to the global.

If you would like more information on this project, please check out: <https://eaea.org/project/future-lab/>