



Report of the thematic workshop on change-oriented adult education and digitalisation 11.12.2019



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR
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Introduction

The main objectives of this report is to present the main outcomes of the workshop on digitalisation and change-oriented adult education, which took place in Helsinki on the 11th of December 2019. It is important to capture these discussions and reflections so that they can feed into the further development of the project but also be taken up by other adult education organisations and practitioners.

Rethinking adult education in the digital era

The aim of the workshop was to give the participants a chance to reflect how adult education could take a more proactive role in the digital transformation of the society, rather than just trying to adjust to the changes. The goal was to reach an understanding, what is change-oriented adult education and how we as adult educators could use a change-oriented learning approach to shape the society.

The workshop searched answers to the following questions: What kind of challenges digitalisation causes for adults, communities and society? What is change-oriented adult education? What examples there are of change-oriented adult education? How can we use change-oriented adult education as a tool to solve these challenges?

The workshop has been carefully organised in order to dedicate time for discussion for each of those question¹.



¹ See the workshop methodology at this link: <https://eaea.org/project/future-lab/?pid=12687>

What challenges and problems digitalisation causes for adults?

Type your answer here...

Submit

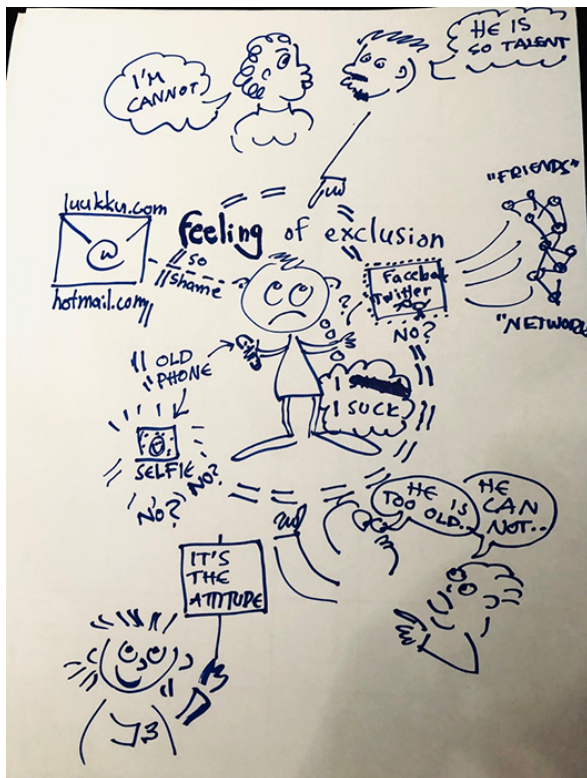
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Challenges identified before the workshop using Answergarden digital brainstorming tool

Challenges

As a reply to the first question, several key challenges were identified using a digital brainstorming method before the workshop, and in group discussions in the beginning of the workshop. The most frequently mentioned challenges were missing skills in digital technology, lack of critical thinking, low media literacy skills, fake news and digitalisation contributing to exclusion. The groups discussed the challenges further and selected some key challenges which they entered in Seppo digital game using pictures or words. For example, the following challenges were described:



"One must be rapidly adaptive in order to 'survive' and be an active member of the society."

"The digital tools could be able to support critical thinking but usually they don't. Many people are not aware of mechanism e.g. algorithm used in social media. Social Media is not necessarily promoting critical thinking and empowerment. It shapes the world in a biased way."

"We need more teachers who understand the challenges the learners face in the digital world. Sometimes the teachers are unaware of the skills level their students are at. This leads to the students digital self esteem remaining low or getting even worse."

Some groups created pictures to highlight different aspects of the digital challenges. Here is a description of "feeling of exclusion" by a group named "Brim"

What is change-oriented learning and why do we need it?

Professor **Jyri Manninen** from University of Eastern Finland presented the theoretical background of change-oriented adult education and the first output of the FuturelabAE-project, Change-oriented Adult Education in the Fields of Democracy and Digitalisation.

Change-oriented adult education helps people become aware of one's own and other people's beliefs and values, challenge the existing conceptions, help seeing things in alternative ways and encourage to do things differently.

According to Manninen the common feature in all change-oriented adult education is that it requires learning and teaching methods which facilitate dialogue and critical reflection.

Manninen made a case for change-oriented adult education and illustrated why change-oriented adult education is needed in our societies. He also challenged participants by asking how and by whom the need for change is defined.



Jyri Manninen



Workshop participants

Good practices of change-oriented adult education and digitalisation



Poster from workshop gallery

Participants had the chance to get inspired from best practices of change-oriented learning through a gallery walk and some interesting presentations. The gallery included posters, online tools and videos of projects coming from Finland and other European countries.

One example presented was Bad News Game, which confers resistance against disinformation by putting players in the position of the people who create it, and as such gain insight into the various tactics and methods used by 'real' fake news-mongers to spread their message. Another example was the Conspiracy Theories videos, which reveal how conspiracy theories emerge and how to identify them.

The presentations of innovative projects with change-oriented methods and goals included:



Meghan Schaible

- **Meghan Schaible** from Reaktor Education told us about a MOOC course which has a goal to revolutionise learning about artificial intelligence (AI) on a societal scale and empower all people to participate in shaping the society by coming up with new uses for AI.
- **Anne Tastula** from KVS and medical student **Mia Muhonen** presented a project which has effectively fought against false health beliefs spreading in social media. Project has trained medical students in how to fight the false health information and how to write about medical topics in common language. For that purpose the project founded a website which was awarded the price "Best act of journalism in 2019" in Finland.
- **Jonas Nakonz** from Swiss Forum on Foreign Policy gave a presentation how to use crowdsourcing methodology to co-create policy solutions to foreign policy challenges on a digital platform.

How can we shape digitalisation as adult educators?

The workshop participants were divided in two groups to brainstorm how could adult education can contribute to solve the challenges of digitalisation in a change-oriented way. Goal was to give the participants practical ideas, how they can implement change-oriented approach in their own work. Fishbowl and Timeout methods were used for group discussion because of their change-oriented approach which puts emphasis on dialogue and democratic exchange of ideas.

In the **Fishbowl** group the participants agreed that digitalisation doesn't exclude people, but other processes in the society do. Digitalisation is a tool and should be demystified. However, digitalisation is contributing to the social isolation of people with low digital skills. Adult education has a role in empowering people to face the challenges of digitalisation. There was a general agreement that all training is not change-oriented, because change-oriented learning is more than just learning a set of new skills. Some participants were of opinion that basic skills courses can also be change-oriented if teachers explain the processes behind.



Fishbowl group discussion

Change-orientated learning encompasses the German concept of “bildung”, which refers to personal transformation, challenging individual's accepted beliefs. To foster more change-oriented learning, Fishbowl participants suggest to use subjects that matter to the individuals and to work on them using diverse teams.

In the **Timeout** group participants were divided into smaller groups to reflect the challenges digitalisation presents to individuals.

The discussions brought forward several questions: How can we make sure we are the drivers ourselves, and not just being pushed? Are all the changes caused by digitalisation positive, or are some of them negative? The options are endless, how can we make sure which ones are right? There is a lack of motivation and capacity (can I learn it? There is a fear (will I be replaced?) and resistance (I'm afraid what the change will bring along).

The group concluded that critical thinking and media literacy are key competences to possess - also for adult educators.



One of the Timeout discussion groups

Adult education should inspire people to think about the future in a positive way, not just focus on the fears. We as adult educators don't have to change everything we do – baby steps to the right direction are enough. Combining our current methods with change-oriented approaches could work. Building a community of practice on change-oriented adult education is needed, and we need to continue discussion of this important topic among adult education practitioners and policy makers. In all adult education courses we could reflect, are we aiming for transformation or maintaining the current status quo.

Other conclusions of the day were that we need to providing inspiring learning experiences by using empowering non-formal methods, educate teachers how to adopt change-oriented approach and develop positive visions about digitalisation.

Conclusions

The workshop received very positive overall feedback from the participants, who felt that they were enriched with new understanding of change-oriented education and ideas to implement in their own job. When we asked “how could you apply the change-oriented approach in your organisation or in your own job?” participants replied for instance the following:

“I could be more aware of my own position and think about the schools goals in a more change-oriented way. To come up with empowering courses and develop my students self confidence in digital learning.”

“For myself as a non-practitioner I will be able to speak more knowledgeably about change-oriented adult education in my work advocating for the non-formal adult education sector in Ireland.”

“I trust more to my ability and others too to change things in a life and work. Courage to change things and act. It is also about processes and results what we are expecting.”

“I will share the learning with my students and enrich that approach in the intervention community projects that we develop.”

“I am trying to do it already. This seminar helped to realize it is not very common or easy.”

The workshop gathered teachers, adult education planners, project coordinators, managers of adult education organisations, policy makers of national and regional administration, as well as partners of the FuturelabAE-project. Total of 53 people attended the workshop. The workshop had 29 participants from Finland and 24 from other countries.

The workshop was organised by the Finnish Lifelong Learning Foundation (KVS) in cooperation with the FuturelabAE-project consortium. FuturelabAE-project is co-funded by the Erasmus+-programme.

Video of the workshop can be found in Youtube:

