

from Pointless to
PURPOSEFUL



**Guidelines and practical steps
for applying positive education ideas
in adult education**

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1 INTRODUCTION

During an 18 month period in 2024-2026, the Erasmus+ project *From Pointless to Purposeful* between three partners Lahden kansanopisto (Finland), CEPA Torres de la Alameda (Spain) and Jurbarko Švietimo Centras (Lithuania) discussed and critically examined pedagogical practices for teaching and supporting adult learners, with particular attention to those whose study motivation is unstable and whose expectations for the future are either unstructured or not yet articulated.

Studies show that well-being in education can help students face challenges, prevent exclusion, and encourage further studies and more active participation as a citizen. Consequently, the project partners chose **POSITIVE EDUCATION** as the reference framework for the project.

Positive education has been widely implemented in early childhood and basic education. However, the project team initially had access to only limited information regarding how its principles and methods have been applied within adult education. This gap further strengthened the team's interest in exploring how the core tenets of this pedagogical approach might be meaningfully adapted to adult learning contexts. Identifying professional approaches and pedagogical tools with the potential to influence adult learners' mindsets and motivation in a substantive way was therefore a central objective.

Solving the students' problems set the project in motion but equal attention was paid to adult education professionals' fading inspiration, wavering well-being and satisfaction at work, signals of which the three project partners had witnessed.

This guide booklet provides its readers with short introduction to positive education. It outlines the workshops and 'test labs' carried out in the project and summarizes the conclusions derived from them. The focus is on meaning, relationships, engagement and accomplishment as they are introduced in the PERMA model. However, keeping these viewpoints apart and in their designated chapters proved - not surprisingly - impossible as in real everyday situations they are intertwined.

We hope this booklet offers useful guidelines, practical tips and encouragement for the adult education professional who believes that every learner has a purpose and that everyone at all stages of their adulthood has the potential to grow as a person and become an active citizen.

2 POSITIVE EDUCATION IN A NUTSHELL

There is strong empirical evidence supporting the value of positive education, and its principles are firmly grounded in research. Rather than dismissing traditional pedagogical approaches, it builds upon them by integrating established educational practices with insights from the science of happiness and well-being. The overarching aim is to cultivate flourishing and promote positive mental health within educational environments.

The authors of this booklet have familiarised themselves with the core principles of positive education, guided in part by *PhD Åse Fagerlund*, who has extensively studied and written on the topic. While many members of the team initially possessed only limited knowledge of the field, their understanding and enthusiasm developed rapidly.

Positive education is an accessible concept to approach. However, the authors recommend familiarising oneself with its core arguments in order to develop a coherent understanding of the approach as a whole. If you have previously explored the main principles of positive education, you may proceed directly to Chapter 3 with confidence.

What does positive education promise?

- emphasizes the importance of appreciative encounters and expresses positive emotions between teachers and learners, and thus creates a foundation for good learning through interaction
- introduces character strengths and socio-emotional skills as an essential part of teaching, alongside the subject
- underlines fostering a supportive and collaborative atmosphere which can enhance both teaching and learning experiences
- emphasizes the importance of help and encouragement in times of difficulty, and aims to develop an individual's weaker traits alongside recognizing their strengths

... and why apply?

- can be applied in all age groups
- teaches emotional skills and helps to identify and make use of one's unique abilities in studies and in everyday life
- strengthens an individual's resilience, i.e. the ability to face, overcome, and learn from difficulties
- helps to recognize and increase positivity in everyday life, which can be of great importance considering the growing mental health issues and the trend of social exclusion

In the project *From Pointless to Purposeful*, Martin Seligman's PERMA model was used as the primary background theory. It highlights five factors whose significance for an individual's well-being and resilience is crucial:

POSITIVE EMOTIONS

feeling hope, interest, joy, love, compassion, pride, amusement, and gratitude

ENGAGEMENT

living in the present moment, participating, focusing on tasks

RELATIONSHIPS

feeling supported, loved, and valued by others

MEANING

the need to have a sense of value and worth

ACCOMPLISHMENT

having self-motivation to finish what you set out to do



Notice. The model is often presented with an addition: besides the five components listed here, PERMA + sees **optimism, nutrition, physical activity** and **sleep** as crucial elements of happiness and well-being.

Find out more!

<https://positivepsychology.com/perma-model/>

3 "WHAT'S THE POINT?" - EXPERIENCING MEANING

Key definitions

Here, the M of PERMA model, i.e. **MEANING** can refer to individual's experience

- that there is **coherence** in their life and that the life they are living appears to them as a unified whole
- that their life has a meaningful **purpose**, which can be related to, e.g. working life, and which directs their activities towards a certain goal
- that their life has **significance** and that it is worth holding on to

Key themes & mindset

SENSE OF VALUE & WORTH

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

ATMOSPHERE

LOVE & RESPECT

FEEDBACK

The impact of experiencing meaning on learning...

The experience of meaningfulness is a key factor in learning. When students find learning meaningful, their motivation and engagement in learning increase significantly.

A positive atmosphere and focusing on students' strengths can improve learning outcomes. For example, strength-based teaching, which is part of positive education, helps students identify and utilize their strengths, boosting their confidence and joy in learning.

... and teaching?

According to studies, teachers who perceive their work as purposeful are more engaged, motivated, and committed to their profession. This sense of purpose may come from making a positive impact on students' lives, contributing to the community, or fostering a supportive learning environment. Experiencing meaning in one's work also strengthens resilience, helping teachers sustain their motivation even in demanding conditions.

Focus on CHARACTER STRENGTHS

Every individual possesses strengths that are valued across time and cultures. Recognizing one's own strengths and developing them can increase an individual's general well-being, but also well-being and success in studies.

Find out your strengths!
<https://www.viacharacter.org/>

A free strength survey for discovering what makes you consistently unique and valued.



"We asked each member of the teaching staff to take the character strengths test. By doing this, we wanted to outline the unique competence profile of our institution: what strengths particularly stand out. The competence map generated from the test results helps us clarify our pedagogical vision.

It is important to make visible the strengths that we all have, as we only see part of the work that each person does. When a teacher knows that their supervisor values their strengths and encourages them to work by utilizing those strengths, it can have a significant positive impact on the teacher's job satisfaction and, consequently, on learning outcomes.

- Maria Beirad, vice principal, Lahden kansanopisto



TOP 3 Tips - Approach

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCES

- 1 Honor the expertise and life experience adults bring, and remember that inviting their knowledge into the classroom strengthens your role rather than diminishes it.
- 2 Value every kind of strength - quiet, steady, bold, or curious – so all learners feel seen and capable. Guide the flow so quick thinkers don't set the pace for everyone.
- 3 Stay open and respectful toward every culture in the room, and invite adults to share the stories, traditions, languages, and ways of doing things that enrich the group's learning.

TOP 4 Tips - Practise

- 1 When a student uses their strengths, name it and acknowledge it. Provide positive feedback even for small efforts – and frame improvement areas through strengths. *"Your creativity really stands out! Now let's add structure so that your ideas will land even more strongly!"*
- 2 Create situations where students can use their individual competences and be genuinely seen and appreciated by their peers. Offer short 'strength spotlight' activities that invite positive, specific feedback among the group.
- 3 Match tasks and responsibilities to each learner's strengths, whether it's in class or through roles like buddy, group representative, or wellbeing helper.
- 4 Let students rotate through different roles – leading, supporting, organizing, or observing—so everyone gets a chance to use what they're naturally good at.



When I meet a new group, I use an activity in which learners ask one another questions about their areas of competence, such as: Are you good at drawing? Do you have strong English skills? Do you know a lot about films? Are you skilled at cooking? Based on their responses, learners move to the table designated for that particular strength. In this way, their abilities become visible to the group. Simple activities like this help form a foundation for a strength-based learning environment. They also promote an atmosphere of mutual respect."
- quote from a teacher in the project

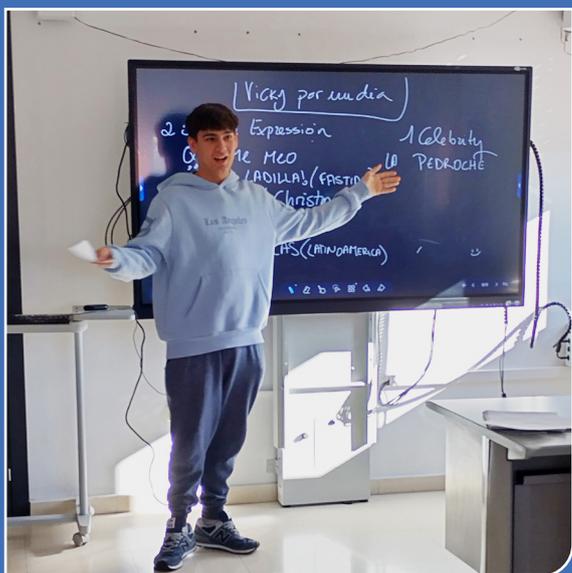
Flipping Roles

COLLABORATION ACTIVITY WITH LEARNERS

What we did: At CEPA Torres de la Alameda during the project's transnational meeting, two workshops were organized for the local students*. In one, a method was applied where **the students acted as teachers** and the international guests as learners. In the other workshop, more traditional **methods familiar to the students** were applied, such as searching for answers on the internet or playing Kahoot while the guests kept to monitoring and friendly commenting. The students participated in both workshops.

... and what was the student response: When participants were asked which workshop they preferred, 3 out of 4 chose the one where they could take on the role of a teacher. Even those who preferred the traditional learner role reported enjoying the Flipping Roles workshop. The primary reasons behind the positive opinion were the **joy of being able to teach something to someone else** and the **experience of feeling heard and respected**.

Conclusions? It is misleading to think that the key motivator in studying is an external reward such as a grade or credit. If a student has previously been labeled as an unlikely successor or as a "difficult case", and especially if their life situation is challenging, the experience of being heard and treated with respect can be a turning point in their educational journey.



*Who were the students? The group is composed primarily of students between the ages of 16 and 25, some are between 30 and 50 years old. They are studying the final year of compulsory secondary education.

The visitors were taught phrases, traditions and who's who in Spain by a student.

"I feel very proud of having made the decision to enroll at the CEPA Torres de la Alameda adult centre. Thanks to the support and motivation I received during the two years I studied there, I regained the desire to continue and return to school. Now I feel like I have a more motivating future and one in which my range of options has expanded.

- Ian Pérez Sáez, student, Adult Secondary Education





Student opinion

What makes me feel comfortable and motivated in education...

80 %
said

...good atmosphere in class

60 %
said

... dynamic and fun learning activities

Focus on ATMOSPHERE and FEEDBACK

The impact of the study atmosphere on overall student well-being and thus also on student motivation is undeniable. The students of CEPA Torres de la Alameda who responded to our survey considered atmosphere to be the most important factor for their comfort and motivation. Based on this, it is easy to conclude that a poor atmosphere is likely to reduce - if not kill - student motivation and undermine their well-being.

Then, how do we build and maintain an atmosphere that promotes learning and strengthens motivation? Respectful interaction with students play a key role in creating and maintaining a positive atmosphere. A part of that is giving continuous feedback during their learning process. Students who receive regular and

encouraging feedback are known to be more motivated and perceive their learning as more meaningful

Additionally, the physical learning environment can be modified to foster a good spirit and motivate participation. Small things like bringing in some color can make the space more inviting.

*"We laugh together. Sometimes we put on music and dance.
Every now and then we switch roles,
and the students get to be 'little teachers.'
When I see they're getting tired, we play Kahoot.
I try to tune in to whatever they're interested in right then.*

- quote from a teacher in the project



TOP 5 tips - Approach

- 1 Use humour to boost the group's study energy and mood. Stay sensitive to how different people and cultures might receive it.
- 2 Demonstrate that the teacher is also human who makes mistakes. It creates a more relaxed and forgiving learning climate.
- 3 Pay attention to group cohesion dynamics. Invest in helping new students form a group right from the start of their studies, and use a variety of interactive methods to support it.
- 4 Normalise imperfection and remove the fear of failure. Make it clear that not knowing and asking questions are natural parts of learning. Guide the process in the right direction without judgment.
- 5 Make encouragement and recognition a group habit and lead by example. It normalises positive interaction and builds psychological safety.

TOP 6 tips - Practise

- 1 Be attentive in an encouraging way. Look at the student. Smile. Make the right noises. Nod. Show that you are listening. Demonstrating attentive listening can prevent negative tensions.
- 2 Divide larger groups into smaller ones to better observe and interact with each student. With fewer people, tensions drop, cooperation increases, and the overall tone becomes more supportive.
- 3 Start sessions with check-ins or warm-up questions. Set the emotional tone with calm, respectful signals.
- 4 Pace the teaching to manage classroom fatigue. Allow coffee/tea breaks. Provide students with relaxation exercises (e.g. stretching, breathing).
- 5 Bring variety to where the learning happens. Whenever possible, take the group on small outings in the nearby area. Change classrooms or rearrange the seating.
- 6 Address offensive or disrespectful behavior or comments immediately. Remain calm and ensure everyone feels safe.

”

Adult education centers are, in essence, a second chance for our students; therefore, it is essential to offer a pedagogical approach that differs from the conventional one. Many of our students – particularly the younger ones – have previously experienced failure within the traditional education system.

Consequently, maintaining the same methodology and teacher-student dynamic found in secondary schools is, in practice, a recipe for failure. We must explore and promote more flexible methodologies that are significantly more focused on the human dimension, placing particular emphasis on the emotional well-being of our students.

If we, as educators, want them to succeed in their studies, we must listen to them, understand them, take an interest in their personal circumstances, and, above all, refrain from judging them.

- Ventura Ibáñez, headmaster
CEPA Torres de la Alameda



4 PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS, COOPERATION & COMMUNITY



Positive emotions are not trivial luxuries, but instead might be critical necessities for optimal functioning.

Any positive emotion can draw you to smile and carry yourself with a more open posture. And so any positive emotion can be taken by those around you as a sign to relax and connect.

When someone feels safe enough to accept that invitation and joins you with his or her own heartfelt good feelings, love's positivity resonance fires up."

- Barbara L. Fredrickson, author of Positivity



Key definitions

In this chapter we pay attention to the R of PERMA framework, i.e.

RELATIONSHIPS. It can refer to

- the social connections and interactions that contribute to our well-being by providing emotional support and feelings of belonging that help us navigate life's challenges

The **sense of community** concept is used to describe

- the perception of connectedness, trust, and mutual support among learners and educators

Key themes & mindset

RELATIONSHIPS

COMMUNITY

BELONGING

PRO-SOCIAL SKILLS

KINDNESS

The impact of relationships and community on learning

Being loved and cared for is one of the most essential foundations of well-being across times and cultures. This relational security also supports kindness and compassionate behaviour, which operate reciprocally: when we show kindness to others, we strengthen both their well-being and our own.

Positive social engagement is linked to improved learning outcomes in adults. Constructive social connections can motivate both learners and educators, and a strong sense of belonging provides an important basis for sustained, lifelong learning.

Creating and safeguarding a safe learning space

Pro-social teacher behaviors help create a classroom climate where adults feel safe and comfortable asking questions, sharing ideas, and making mistakes.

Teachers who demonstrate empathy and social awareness foster a sense of trust and safety, which is crucial for adult learners who may have past negative experiences with education or face life challenges. Fostering diversity of thought, background, and experience is crucial in adult learning groups. It is also important to ensure that learners from diverse minority groups feel socially safe.

Adult Learner Case Stories

OPEN WORKSHOP FOR EDUCATORS

Adult educators encounter learners of very different ages, in different situations and stages of life. Tools are needed to support both those struggling on the threshold of adulthood and those who have reached their third age.

What we did: During a meeting in Lahti, we organized an open space activity that presented five fictional student characters, all having different issues. Leo, Ali, Tuisku, Nora and Tuula were adult students like we might have met, cases constructed from authentic fragments. Workshop participants were asked to discuss their cases and propose advice on how teachers could encounter the individuals and help them sense well-being in education and achieve their goals.

FIVE CASE STORIES OF HOPES, GOALS, AND FEAR OF FAILURE

Leo, 22

habitual school drop-out, with family problems, anger management issues, and desire to change and start a new chapter in life.

Ali, 39

immigrant, struggling with language and role expectations, not finding his place in a foreign environment.

Tuisku, 21

aiming for university, talented but discouraged by failures, suffering from pressure of conflicting expectations

Nora, 37

single parent, stuck in a low-paid job, not finding a way out and to her dream profession in the pressure of everyday worries.

Tuula, 68

dentist, retired from a profession her parents chose for her, hoping to find her artistic side but not trusting her learning skills.

Conclusions? The wide array of teacher suggestions can be distilled into the following key points, each of which supports learners' growth and well-being **regardless of their age, life circumstances, or individual challenges:**

- 1 Consider life situations.** Understand time management and stress control issues.
- 2 Recognize prior skills and experience.** Make student strengths and skills visible and something to be proud of.
- 3 Support intrinsic motivation.** Find direct connections to learners' goals and values.
- 4 Promote individualized and goal-oriented guidance.** Tailor study paths and offer personal guidance
- 5 Emphasize the importance of community and peer support.** Apply discussions and peer mentoring.
- 6 Apply flexible and diverse learning methods.** Offer purposeful ways to learn.

- 1 Stop in the hallway to chat with the student, make them feel cared for. Small moments like this signal that they matter – and help build a more connected learning community.
- 2 Compliment the students every time you see them promote the group's well-being. Be specific and name the exact behaviour you noticed. This usually helps students feel valued and capable of shaping the classroom community in positive ways.
- 3 Acknowledge social tensions and offer space for emotional processing but remain in the role of teacher. When you sense strain in the group, invite students to pause, share, and reflect on their feelings together. If deeper or more personal issues emerge, collaborate with available support professionals – school principal, counselor, nurse etc. – so students receive the attention they need and you're not carrying those concerns alone.
- 4 Establish dialogues based on common interest to bridge cultural and language gaps. Short activities that reveal common ground help reduce distance and create natural connections. Start e.g. by mapping learners' interests through quick surveys, visuals, object, or digital tools. Use common themes in different situations to support communication and interaction between different groups (age, language, ethnicity, etc.).
- 5 Offer individual tutoring and support outside of class – but don't repeatedly exceed your working hours. By keeping clear boundaries, you protect your own well-being and ensure that the support you give remains focused. Students, in turn, benefit from a teacher who is able to guide them with steady energy over the long term.
- 6 Promote inclusive language and recognize the learners' growth as a group, acknowledging the unique character they've developed together. Highlighting what makes this group special strengthens their sense of belonging and community.
- 7 Model how to disagree respectfully. When you show calm, constructive ways to handle differences, you strengthen students' sense of safety and help the group grow as a community.

”

We regularly discuss how each group member is doing right now, so that we can understand things that may be affecting each other's state of mind, and current ability to participate and learn.

It is also important to know where each other's boundaries are: what things each may find offensive or disruptive for whatever reason. This way we create and maintain a safe space for learning and avoid unintentionally offending or making the other person uncomfortable.

A time and place for these discussions is given in the weekly schedule.”

*- Emma Härmä
student, Drama & Theatre
Lahden kansanopisto*



5 ACCOMPLISHING THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

Key definitions

In this chapter we have come to the A and E of PERMA model.

ACCOMPLISHMENT can refer to

- the pursuit of goals that are meaningful to an individual
- not only achieving success or recognition, but striving for personal growth

... and **ENGAGEMENT** to

- being involved in activities that are both challenging and enjoyable
- finding activities that use one's strengths and provide a sense of fulfillment and purpose

Key themes & mindset

ENGAGEMENT

SELF-DIRECTION

OWNERSHIP

FOCUSING

RESILIENCE

The impact of engagement on learning...

In learning, engagement is reflected in interest, curiosity, and purposeful work. A learner who is engaged is generally attentive and persistent, and experiences studying as meaningful and personally relevant.

Engagement in learning yields a range of positive outcomes that extend beyond improved academic performance. It is also likely to enhance the learner's overall well-being, strengthen interpersonal relationships, and facilitate the development of social and professional networks.

... and teaching?

Teacher support enhances learner engagement. When learners perceive that the teacher cares, listens, and provides clear instructional structures, their engagement in learning strengthens, which in turn leads to improved learning outcomes.



"For me, adult learning is first and foremost a respect for human experience. Each learner comes with their own life story, burden of responsibilities, previous successes and failures, so our task as educational organizers and educators is not to "teach from above", but to create an equal dialogue.

An adult learns when they feel safe, heard and see a clear meaning. It is very important that the learning process is flexible, relevant and focused on real life needs. Motivation does not arise through coercion or formal requirements, but through trust, recognition and the opportunity to experience success. Therefore, we strive for learning to be based on cooperation, reflection and recognition of strengths – both of learners and educators.

*- Jurgita Voroniniene
director, Jurbarko Svietimo Centras*

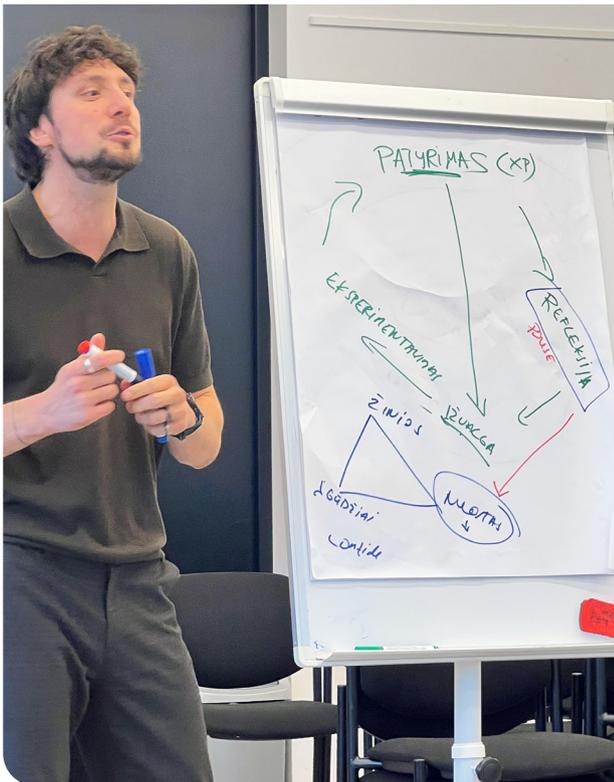


Where and how does learning happen?

EXPERT DISCUSSION SESSION

Adults cannot be assumed to be inherently competent or adaptable learners solely on the basis of their age or accumulated life experience. From a pedagogical perspective, learning in adulthood requires a readiness to engage with unfamiliar content, to tolerate uncertainty, and to reflect critically on one's own assumptions. This often entails questioning and, when necessary, relinquishing established study habits in order to adopt more effective strategies that support deep learning.

What we did: At a meeting in Jurbarkas, our project team and representatives of the local adult education sector engaged in a discussion on the nature of the learning process and the central role of reflection within it. The conversation also addressed learners' frequent inclination to remain within their established comfort zones, as well as the pedagogical question of whether meaningful learning can occur without a willingness to move beyond familiar routines and assumptions.



Lifelong learning is not an idea, but a reality. David A. Kolb described how we learn several decades ago: I experience → I reflect → I understand → I try new things, and the cycle repeats itself. An elegantly simple model with personal experience at the center. And reflection here is an art that strengthens the ability to jazz up life, to see everyday life in fresh colors, to learn from every moment.

The better we know how to reflect, the more meaning we find in our everyday life, the more we learn from what is happening around us.

We learn not because we need to, but because we experience and reflect on our experience. We learn because we live. And as we reflect, so we live."

*- Lukas Kulikauskas-Maršantas
communication trainer, team coaching specialist
CEO of "Mostai"*

TOP 4 tips - Approach

ENGAGEMENT

RESILIENCE

- 1 Use regular praise and emphasise humanity in your feedback: no one has to be perfect. This kind of feedback builds trust and supports a learning atmosphere where effort, curiosity, and resilience matter more than getting every thing right.
- 2 Strengthen students' sense of ownership of the learning process by taking their ideas and experiences into account. When students see their voices shaping the work, motivation and engagement grow naturally.
- 3 Make learning meaningful by connecting content to real-life situations, personal values, and future goals. Adults engage more deeply when they recognize the relevance of what they're learning to their own lives and aspirations.
- 4 Connect students with one another by encouraging them to support each other. Peer mentoring and simple "buddy" practices help build trust and belonging – key factors that keep learners engaged even when the motivation dips.

"Learning at an older age is not always easy – it can be a challenge for both the learner and the teacher.

We come with our own experiences, so mutual understanding and teacher's flexibility are very important. The human approach of the teacher is pleasing, when they are not ashamed to admit that they do not know everything, and together we look for answers. Then the fear of not knowing disappears, and learning becomes a shared process of growth.

Learning is also encouraged by the opportunity to meet others who are seeking knowledge and trying to keep up with the changing world.

*- Rima Jurevičiūtė, nursing assistant student
Smalininkų technologijų ir verslo mokykla -STVM*



Conclusions: Our workshops in Lithuania showed that adult learning thrives when teachers and learners meet as equals and share their skills and experiences. This kind of genuine engagement builds confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate. An inclusive environment—where everyone feels seen, respected, and supported—encourages adults to take risks and stretch their abilities. Collaboration strengthens trust and community, reminding us that learning is shaped not only by knowledge but also by connection and shared progress. The diverse experiences adults bring enrich discussions and make learning more relevant and enjoyable.

Across the workshops, adult learners contributed a wide range of life experiences that enriched discussions and activities, strengthening **ENGAGEMENT** and **MEANING**. Working collaboratively with teachers, participants exchanged skills and practical knowledge, fostering a supportive learning climate and reinforcing positive **RELATIONSHIPS**. Many noted that having their expertise acknowledged enhanced their confidence (**ACCOMPLISHMENT**) and sense of being valued (**POSITIVE EMOTIONS**).

The diversity of perspectives deepened trust and community, increased the relevance of activities, and encouraged active participation. Shared practices—such as preparing a Lithuanian dish or experimenting with musical instruments—showed how reciprocal learning environments benefit both teachers and learners. Overall, the varied skills and backgrounds of participants proved a major asset, strengthening motivation, cohesion, and a sense of collective progress, all core elements of positive education.

TOP 3 tips - Practise

ENGAGEMENT

VARIETY & FLEXIBILITY

- 1 Blend alternative methods (hands-on, online, hybrid) to suit different lifestyles and learning skills. Offering flexible pathways helps adults stay engaged despite busy schedules, varied backgrounds, or moments when life gets complicated.
- 2 Invite learners to take shared responsibility for the group's progress, whether by keeping each other informed, or welcoming absent classmates back in. Use small rotating roles or simple routines that encourage students to look after one another. When learners feel part of a supportive community, they're more likely to stay committed and find strength during tougher moments.
- 3 Enrich learning with extracurricular activities that connect naturally to the curriculum. These might include visits to workplaces, community events, cultural outings, or guest speakers. Such experiences help adults see the real-world value of what they're learning, and stay motivated to continue.

6 FOSTERING JOY AND RESILIENCE IN TEACHING

There are multiple factors that may contribute to teachers feeling either satisfied or dissatisfied with their work. When professional collaboration among colleagues is strained, or when teachers feel their work is undervalued, both job satisfaction and overall well-being tend to decline.

The theme that initiated our project – students who are poorly motivated and struggle to commit to their studies – can likewise prompt teachers to question the significance of their work and experience negative emotions in their professional practice.



In our survey of adult education staff, 55% reported that working with adults with low study motivation was moderately strenuous, while 30% found it very or extremely strenuous. In contrast, smooth communication and a culture of trust and transparency among colleagues helped ease work-related strain and support overall well-being.

Another survey showed that learning about positive education strengthened many respondents' sense of pedagogical competence. It also increased collegial discussions about teaching approaches, both within their own organisations and among the project partners.

Furthermore, the pedagogical guidelines in this booklet were once more reviewed by our project's teaching staff and this time through the lens of teacher job satisfaction and well-being. The adult education professionals from three countries identified the following five perspectives as the most significant.

Top 5 viewpoints

- 1 Providing positive feedback – even for small efforts. This is not just a pedagogical technique – it's a protective factor for teacher well-being. It creates a cycle of positivity, strengthens relationships, and helps teachers experience success more frequently and more meaningfully.
- 2 Using humor to boost the group's energy and mood. Humor is a widely recognised coping mechanism. Teachers who can laugh with their group – or even at themselves – are likely to bounce back more quickly from setbacks or unexpected disruptions.
- 3 Looking at the student, smiling, nodding, showing the right signals – letting them know that you are listening. Many stressful teaching moments arise when students feel ignored or misunderstood. Warm, active listening reduces friction in daily communication and prevents tensions from forming.
- 4 Demonstrating that the teacher is also human and makes mistakes. When mistakes are seen as a natural part of learning, students become less anxious, more open, and more likely to respond with warmth and respect. Admitting mistakes also eases the pressure on teachers to appear perfect – that sense of relief can meaningfully support well-being at work.
- 5 Blending alternative methods in teaching to suit learners' different lifestyles and learning skills. This isn't only about meeting students' needs. It helps teachers feel more creative and in control. Trying new approaches can be energizing, keeping teachers curious and growing rather than stagnant.

7 SUMMARY

The world around us is changing more rapidly than we could have anticipated. The environmental crisis compels us to rethink and renew our practises, while Europe's population continues to age. The unity of our continent and our common values are being tested. Addressing these major challenges requires continuous learning, new forms of community, and a genuine appreciation of diversity. Adult education and adult learning institutions carry a significant share of this responsibility.

Professionals working in adult education come across learners of different ages and diverse backgrounds, each of whom may face a wide range of challenges. There are a multitude of reasons for learners to pause and ask *'What's the point?'* and to step away from educational opportunities.

Teachers continually encounter learners whose educational histories have been shaped by negative emotions and experiences to such an extent that their motivation falters and they begin to question the very meaning and value of studying. For them, school has not been a place that fosters joy or a sense of achievement. As a result, the threshold for engaging in further education has become considerably higher.



BARRIERS TO BECOMING ENGAGED in and committed to studying may, of course, also stem from an adult's current life circumstances: the pressures of work or unemployment, the demands of family life, or other personal burdens, which can manifest as anxiety, diminished self-esteem, depression, problematic substance or mobile device use, or an excessive reliance on social media for validation, among other factors. When working with adult learners with a migrant background, the new linguistic environment and the surrounding cultural norms and value – sometimes experienced as unfamiliar – may also create barriers to participation and contribute to slower progress. For this group, identifying the underlying factors behind these challenges can be particularly nuanced. Furthermore, as individuals grow older, learning something new, retaining information, and stepping beyond one's comfort zone may likewise come to feel increasingly challenging.

At the same time, the new forms of communication and interaction enabled by technology – and their effects on attention and learning – should not be overlooked. Today's fast-paced media environment exposes many learners to brief, rapidly shifting content, which can make sustained concentration more demanding. Recognising this context helps educators understand how learners engage with information and design approaches that support focus and commitment. It also helps us maintain our own motivation in the teaching process, creating a more balanced foundation for the positive opportunities that adult education can offer. Teaching adults does indeed provide numerous opportunities also for positive learning experiences, as adult learners contribute perspectives and strengths that can enrich the learning process and support the work of educators.

POSITIVE EDUCATION seeks to foreground learners' positive emotions and to highlight their significance within learning processes and environments. Such emotions include e. g. hope, joy, compassion, pride, gratitude, and, above all, love and respect. The beneficial effects of these emotions are so well-established that they should be intentionally cultivated in teaching through multiple approaches. This is also a matter of strengthening individual resilience: positivity supports one's capacity to navigate life's adversities and transitions.

Positive education is not a technique — it is the spark that keeps both learners and educators moving forward.

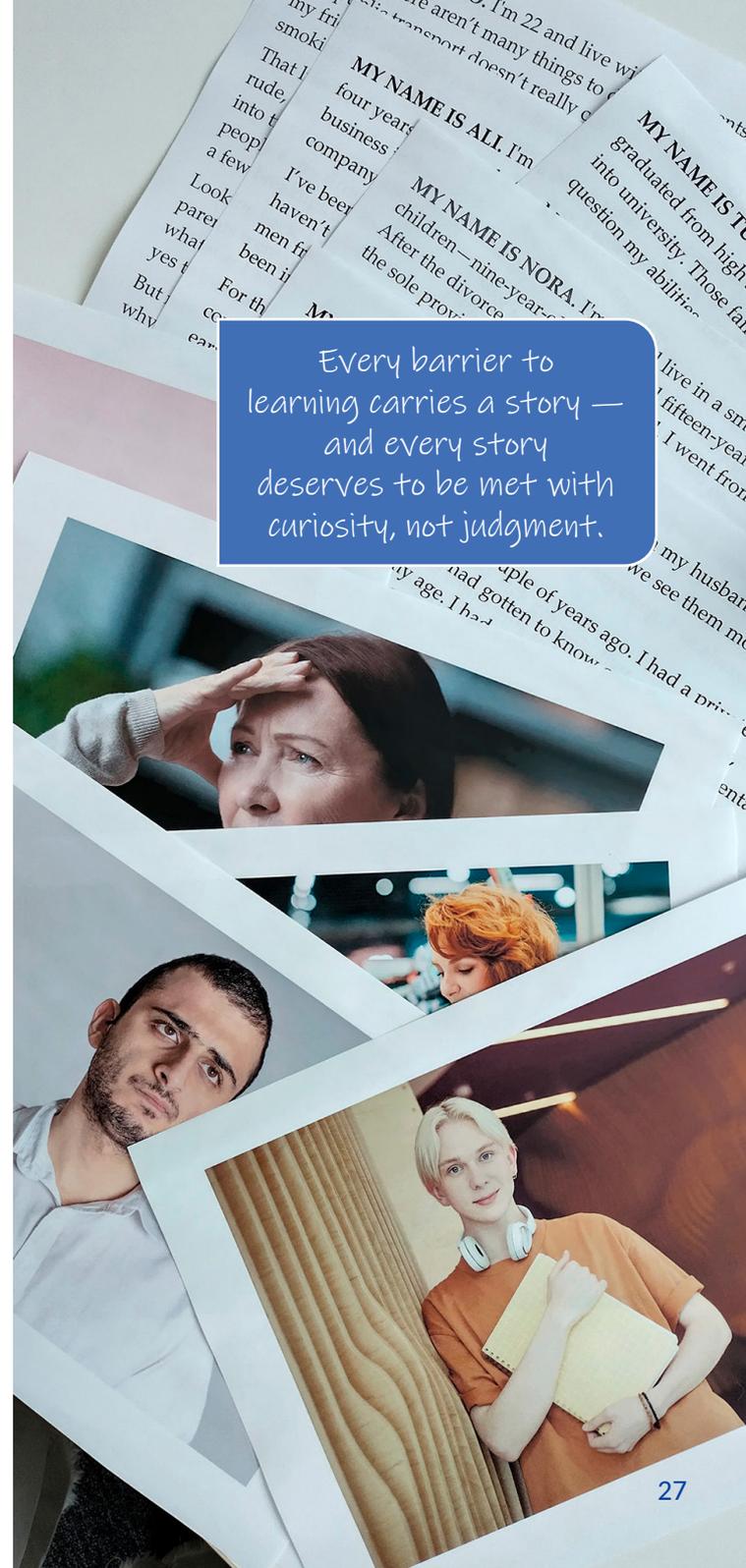
Applying positive education pedagogy is not merely a matter of creating and sustaining a supportive atmosphere. Smiles and laughter can go a long way but for learners to make real progress, they must become genuinely connected to their studies, perceive their meaning, and experience a sense of ownership over their learning process. It is difficult to envision high-quality learning experiences or outcomes emerging without the learner's active participation in the process or, furthermore, without the support and appreciation offered by both teachers and peers. At the heart of educational engagement lie human relationships and the fundamental experience of feeling valued and loved.

Everything we, the authors of this booklet, experienced and learned in our project strengthened our conviction that the principles and practices of positive education can – and meaningfully should – be applied in teaching adult learners of all ages.

Many of the tips and guidelines offered in this booklet are intended to gently support educators in navigating the complexities of the heterogeneous groups so typical in adult education. They aim to honour each learner's uniqueness and capabilities, while softening the sense of difference or inequality that may arise from diverse backgrounds.

GUIDING LEARNERS who are poorly motivated or only weakly committed to their studies can be strenuous and at times discouraging. Curriculum goals may align poorly with learners' own aims and study skills, leaving teachers with fewer experiences of professional success. The responses we received in the project's surveys and workshops with teaching staff confirmed our understanding that applying positive education principles can balance workload and improve teachers' job satisfaction and general well-being at work.

Even small steps toward applying positive education ideas can play a decisive role when supporting a learner along a challenging path. Small successes lay the foundation for greater ones. They nurture the well-being of both learners and teachers, within the classroom and beyond. The most effective and sustainable change emerges when the entire community commits to developing its pedagogical practices. According to teachers in our project, open professional dialogue among colleagues and the sharing of pedagogical expertise are key contributors to job satisfaction.





Core Conclusions to carry forward in adult education

1

Adult learning is strengthened when learners' experiences and competencies are recognized and valued.

2

Collaborative, reciprocal learning environments enhance engagement, meaning, and positive relationships.

3

Confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate grow when adults feel respected and included.

4

Shared activities and diverse perspectives enrich learning and build community cohesion.

5

PERMA-aligned practices support sustained personal development, professional growth, and collective achievement.

Let us know what you think!

Find a feedback form at
www.lahdenkansanopisto.fi/info/projektit/from-pointless-to-purposeful/

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Project Title

From Pointless to Purposeful – Tools for promoting active and constructive participation of adults with low study motivation and lack of horizons

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European identity, citizenship and values



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