

## Module 5: Content Materials

### 1: What is motivation and why is it important in lifelong learning?

This text will give you a short overview about the role of motivation in older adult education and introduce you to some strategies that you can apply in your teaching. Rather than a complete guide, this text is meant as an introduction that prepares you for the further course work.

So let us start at the beginning: What is motivation and where does it come from? On a very basic level, ‘motivation’ is what causes us to behave a certain way or do certain things. Learning motivation is the intention or desire to learn certain content and skills. It determines whether and in what form learners engage with tasks. We can distinguish between two main types of motivation: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation means that a person is motivated on a personal level, from ‘within’ so to speak. They are doing something for their own satisfaction and personal gain. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, comes from the outside. This can be a reward such as promotion at work or avoiding punishment such as getting demoted. One example for extrinsic motivation is the proverbial “carrot and stick”. In short, if we are intrinsically motivated, we do something for its own sake; if we are extrinsically motivated, we do something to get something else from it.



In education, both types of motivation play a role. Certainly, school education builds much more on a system of extrinsic motivation, while in adult education intrinsic motivation becomes more important. Especially with older learners, intrinsic motivation is an important factor. Older learners very rarely attend courses because they seek a promotion in their job or because they need a qualification for it.

Rather, they are motivated by the social aspect of a course, personal interest in a topic, or seeking for self-fulfilment. As educators, we need to take this into consideration and find ways to maintain the motivation of our learners and, ideally, enhance it through our learning path.

Effective and successful lifelong learning is dependent on motivation and the learning experiences learners have made throughout their lives. If someone continuously is unsuccessful in reaching their learning goals, they will likely not be motivated to seek out another learning experience. In a group of older adults, you will probably encounter learners who have had very different learning experiences throughout their life that they bring to the table along with their original motivation to take your class. It will be helpful to keep this in mind and to consider different ways of motivating your learners. In the following, we will look at some aspects that influence motivation in adult education as well as signs of lacking motivation and motivation strategies that can be helpful. We then will specifically look at older

learners and how to maintain their motivation. At the end of this document, you will find some further reading suggestions.

After you have finished reading this text, please answer the assessment questions before continuing the work on this module of the course.

### Motivation in adult education

We will now look at different aspects that influence motivation in adult learners. When developing your learning path, you should consider the motives of your learners: Why are they taking your class? If you can address their motives, you will likely be able to provide a motivating learning experience for them and ensure they have success. Considering the different motives and backgrounds an adult learners' group may comprise, you should be able to provide different learning approaches for your learners so they each find motivating learning activities.

Four aspects that are particularly important are the following:

1. **Connectivity:** Connecting the learning contents to already existing knowledge or skills of the learners helps them to stay motivated as they do not start from zero. It also helps to underline the usefulness of the learning contents.
2. **Novelty:** New content is processed more actively than known content. Therefore, challenging your learners with some entirely new content every now and then helps to motivate them.
3. **Relevance:** Learners who recognize the relevance of the learning contents for their own purposes are more likely to stay motivated. Therefore point out how the content contributes, e.g. to their job or everyday life.
4. **Self-control:** As far as possible, learners should have independence in terms of setting and reaching their goals. So do not try to control every aspect of the learning process, instead offer different pathways for different learners who can then structure their own learning experience according to their own ability of self-controlled learning. This enables agency, a feeling of self-efficacy, and thus motivates.

These factors should not be regarded independently but as complementing each other. For example, connecting content with existing knowledge and skills should be balanced out with new material that triggers the curiosity of the learners. On the other hand, the learners will recognize the relevance of the learning content more easily if it is connecting to their previous knowledge. To keep learners motivated, you should enable them to exercise self-control in their learning, i.e. organizing themselves and setting goals but also, for example, suggesting topics and activities. Yet, you will also have to provide structure and goals to your learners so that they can achieve goals and know what they are working towards.



Similar to this, John Keller formulated his ARCS model (1983). The acronym ARCS stands for the four motivational conditions: attention, relevance, confidence, and success. This model points more to the fact that learners need to be confident that they can reach the learning goals, i.e. we need to set appropriate goals but also encourage confidence or sense of self-efficacy. That way, the learners will experience success and thus be

further motivated.

While we cannot control the entire spectrum of factors that motivate, or demotivate, our learners, we can certainly try to influence a motivational learning environment and learning path. Going back to the consideration of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, there are different ways to influence them. If your learners are extrinsically motivated, they will probably respond well to goal setting and structure, as well as a clear prioritizing within the learning content. This will help to provide focus to the learners, make clear what they are working towards and receive the reward that motivates them. Additional incentives like extra credit or rewards might also work as motivators.

As mentioned above, older learners will more likely be intrinsically motivated, so they are probably learning out of interest, because they simply like learning something new, or maybe because they like the social aspect of the class. Here, it is a good strategy to include material that fits the interests of the learners, that is appealing and maybe also humorous or provocative at times. Learners who are intrinsically motivated also respond well to being involved actively in the learning process, i.e. being able to be creative, try things out, discuss and work with each other.

However, only because the majority of your learners' might be primarily motivated intrinsically does not mean that you should not use extrinsically motivating factors. Even if someone learns mostly for pleasure, a useful structure and an occasional 'gold star' will be appreciated. You should also not underestimate the relevance of a pleasant learning environment that meets learners' needs: enough space, fresh air, comfortable chairs, proper lighting and equipment can make a big difference in the motivation of your learners.



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To set appropriate learning goals, ask your students for their motivation to take your class. This will help them to formulate their own goals and set them in context with the course goals. That way, you can show the relevance of your course contents to the learner. Each learner should find a way to set SMART goals, which are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-based. The communication about individual goals will also help you to give according feedback to your learners. Also, open communication will show them how their needs are integrated in the learning process, which will in turn motivate them to participate.

### Maintaining the motivation in older learners

In this next part, we will look specifically at older learners, what motivates them, and what we should keep in mind when we want to maintain their motivation in our classes. At the beginning, we should be aware of our demographic: Who do we mean when we talk about older learners? 'Older' typically refers to people who are in the age group 60+, which often means that they are either close to retirement or already retired. In this time of change, many people want to use their new freedom to experience new things or fulfil wishes they have harboured for a long time. Many also attend courses because they want to meet new people and avoid a feeling of isolation that might accompany the loss of the work-place and the empty nest at home. And while your older learners might come fully motivated to your class, we should keep in mind certain aspects when it comes to this specific target group:

- Older learners bring the experience of a lifetime to the table! Try to harness that!
- Older learners usually have a high degree of intrinsic and personal motivation. Find strategies to maintain this!
- The social aspect as a motivation factor: Use this in the learning path and provide plenty of opportunity for interaction!
- Your learning group will probably be quite heterogeneous when it comes to the background and experiences of your learners.
- Older learners are likely less versed in new media and ICT skills, although this may differ a lot between individual participants. Materials need to remain approachable (e.g. online materials may not be a good idea) but including new media such as VR goggles may also trigger interest! (What do you need to consider when using ICT and which applications lend themselves well to older learners will be covered in Module 6 in this course!)
- There are physical aspects we need to consider such as reduced hearing, seeing, and memory capabilities.
- Consider mobility issues or other impairment when designing the learning environment, not only in developing the materials!