TIPS FOR ADULT EDUCATORS

MAKE ONLINE TEACHING FUN AND ENGAGING FOR YOUR CHECK IT OUT LAB

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The COVID-19 pandemic has caused most teaching activities, including classes for adults, to be shifted to an **online environment**. This resulted in a considerable challenge for adult educators, faced with making online teaching fun and engaging for adult learners. Considering the fact that, according to most studies, the average adult has a maximum attention span of about 20 minutes, the perfect online class or Check It Out Lab is going to be difficult to arrange – but attainable, nonetheless.

Luckily, teaching about disinformation can prove to be just that: a **fun and engaging activity**, since the subject is interesting and relevant to today's society. Nonetheless, a few useful tips can always come in handy to give an extra boost to learners' motivation and to support educators in improving their teaching strategy, learning new skills, and embracing a brand new approach. Needless to mention, the following principles are valid for teaching a class on any kind of subject, not only disinformation, and some key principles are also applicable in classroom-based learning.

Here are **10 tips** to take your learning environment to the next level and channel the power of digital tools to your advantage.

1 HARNESS THE POWER OF EVENTS

Make the class resemble a real event as much as possible. Be very careful about organizing every detail, such as:

- Identify well in advance the *timing that works best for everyone* (you can do so by setting up a Doodle);

- Choose and test the *most suitable online platform* for your needs, among a variety of video conferencing platforms available for free: e.g. Webex, Zoom, Google Hangouts, Adobe Connect, GoToMeeting. For advanced features, you can also opt for a paid version of these platforms, which provides a more complex array of settings;

- Create a *Facebook and/or LinkedIn event* for your class where you can start a discussion and share videos and other useful resources before, during, and after the class. Use the resources provided in the Handbook. This would be a good starting point for the learners to get to know each other and to build a community of people interested in learning more about the topic of disinformation, even after the class ends;

- Make it more meaningful by creating a *visual identity* for your class: an event image, a virtual background which the students will use during the class; a PowerPoint template with clearly identifiable elements related to disinformation, Check It Out Labs, Open Your Eyes project and even the Erasmus+ programme. Use the Open Your Eyes project logo as a starting point;

- At the start and/or end of the Check It Out Lab, make sure you take a *screenshot with all the learners*, to save as memory and mark the fact that you are making this effort together. This picture can be published on social media by the organiser of the Lab and can be shared by the learners themselves to highlight the fact that they are learning new things. Make sure you have everyone's consent in advance and be mindful of GDPR.

This is all extra effort but it ensures **extra engagement** from your learners even before the class begins, especially when the tips above are adapted to the specific needs of your group of learners (which will change depending on whether they are parents, young professionals, retirees, teachers, ...).

2 RELY ON THE HUMAN FACTOR

Turn on your webcam and ask for the learners to do the same: this way, you will ensure as much **human contact** as possible in an online environment and set the atmosphere to resemble a classroom-based experience.

Make sure you explain to the learners the importance of being present all throughout the meeting with the webcam on, in a common effort to make the most out of your time together: an incentive to be more alert, as well as a sign of courtesy for the teacher and the other learners.

Always be mindful of **online safety** and do not share the link and password for the class with anyone else besides your learners, in order to ensure privacy. You can also use the option of a waiting room for the meeting, which is provided by some platforms such as Webex and Zoom. The option of muting and removing participants from the meeting is also available, in case of need.

3 PRACTICE MICROLEARNING

As mentioned earlier, the average attention span has gotten shorter in the past few years. In addition, most adults tend to be very busy and to value their time. Keep both of these factors in mind when planning a class and try to stick to **15-minute intervals** to deliver a certain topic. This will allow learners to maintain alertness throughout the class and optimize learning.

Ideally, each chapter of the Open Your Eyes Handbook would need at least one hour to be properly covered. Therefore, consider organising a three-day course, with a single hour-long class each day. This way, you can divide the contents of each chapter into three 15 minute micro-sessions and keep your audience with you all the way.

4 CREATE THE PERFECT RHYTHM

The rhythm of your class is given by the types of activity you provide, so try to make your learners follow the rhythm by **alternating them regularly**. For instance, you could start a micro-learning session by introducing a concept, then showing a short clip; ask some questions before launching a breakout group session, collect answers in the chatbox to start a discussion from there; keep the pace by closing the session with a quiz. You can even use the built-in quiz and breakout groups features offered by some online platforms, such as Zoom or Webex.

Image source: blog.zoom.us
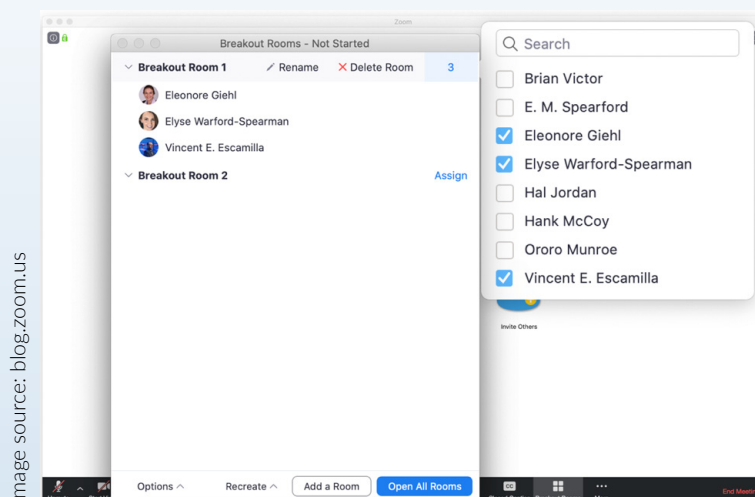
5 RAISE THE STAKES WITH GAMIFICATION

Within every chapter in the Open Your Eyes Handbook and adapted to the contents, you will find suggestions of **dynamic ways to engage your learners**. However, there is never too much dynamism when it comes to learning and especially in an online environment, involving adults and having such an enticing subject as disinformation.

BAD NE WS

From fake news to chaos! How bad are you? Get as many followers as you can.

PLAY THE GAME

Info & other languages

For educators

Challenge your friends

An especially crafted game that can help understand the principles behind the spread of disinformation is Bad News, which you can use to illustrate concepts presented in Modulse 2 and 3 of the Handbook. You can ask learners to try the game before the class or play it online during a specific part of the session.

The Bad News game invites users to put themselves in the shoes of a "fake news" creator in order to help them identify real-world disinformation. Playing this game has an additional bonus: it has been shown to increase **"psychological resistance" to disinformation**, according to a study with 15,000 participants. The website also provides an information sheet for educators interested in using the game as a teaching tool (either for teenagers or adults), complete with details, background, and additional information about the game.

6 KNOW YOUR LEARNERS!

In adult education, as in many other professional areas, **there is no one-size-fits-all solution**. Tools and methodologies that prove to be perfect for some categories of learners may turn out to be not so effective for others. Every class is made up of people with different experiences and backgrounds and getting to know them will definitely increase your chances of providing effective teaching, including in the field of media literacy.

- What is their level of education?
- How much do they already know about disinformation?
- Have they already attended any prior course on media literacy?
- What is their experience with disinformation and "fake news"?
- What is their level of digital competences?
- What are their expectations on the course they are going to attend?

By collecting these valuable details before the course start, your lesson design will be considerably enhanced! In fact, this will enable you to develop contents that are fully targeted to your audience and that will meet their specific needs and requirements.

Image source: Pixabay
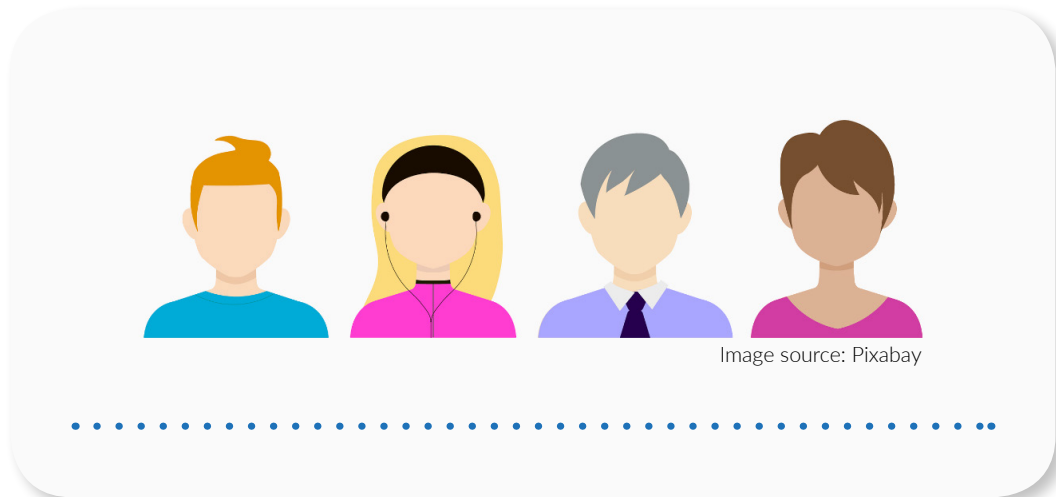
# 7 ENCOURAGE GROUP FEEDBACK THROUGH COLLABORATIVE EXERCISES

Distance and online learning don't have to mean "learning in isolation". In fact, the real challenge when running online classes is to build **high-level interaction** between participants and making the class as engaging as if it was delivered face-to-face.

Group work can not only enhance learning, but also lead to **collective feedback**. While working together on a shared task, learners are pushed to give feedback on every "piece of the puzzle", thus contributing to the collective growth of the group. Furthermore, peer feedback would turn out to be a critical point for the whole process. By seeing that their peer feedback is valued, students will be more engaged and committed to working to complete the task successfully. Peer feedback also gives learners an opportunity to have their voices heard and to listen to each other. This is due to the fact that it is often easier to understand a concept when explained by someone of similar age.

The suggestion for practical activity described in Module 1 of the Open Your Eyes Handbook (p. 15) will give you useful inputs on how to structure a group activity on media literacy with your group of learners, either face-to-face or online.

8 EXPLOIT MOBILE DEVICES

Mobile devices are can nowadays be found literally anywhere, and their contribution to the spread of disinformation has been unfortunately quite remarkable. The tool is not harmful in itself; it all depends on how it is used. So, why not turn it to our advantage?
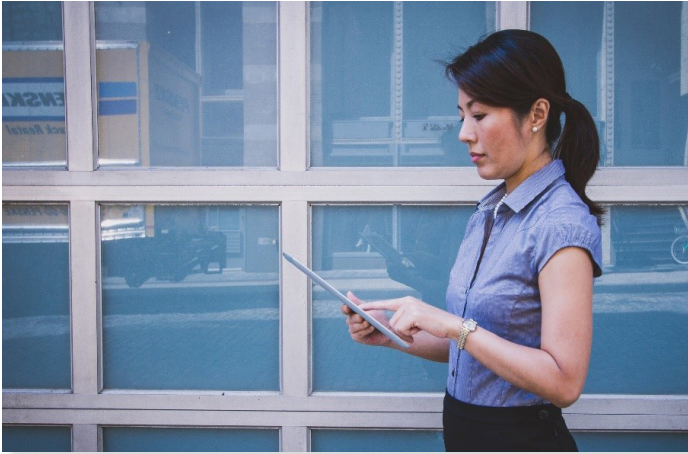
Mobile learning is among the latest, most innovative pedagogical methods, characterised by a high flexibility which allows learners to access resources everywhere and anytime with a "smart approach". This refers to the development, adaptation and transfer of educational contents and resources to mobile applications and software, setting up a complete online educational environment easily accessible by learners through their smartphones and tablets.

This strategy is very much consistent with the needs and expectations of a media literacy course for adult learners, who hold **flexibility** as one of their main concerns. At the same time, the exploitation of mobile applications would significantly contribute to the improvement of adults' digital knowledge and skills, which are an important component of media literacy education.

9 BE RELEVANT AND TRANSPARENT ON LEARNING PRACTICES

Adult learners make deliberate choices on the courses they want to attend. They do it for a reason, bearing specific personal objectives in mind and linking them to their expectations. A good rule of thumb is the following: **don't make your adult learners guess why are you covering some topics with a specific method**. You should rather be open and tell them, keeping them always informed about your strategy. Explain the purpose of every module and lesson, using real-world input related to the learners' goals.

This is particularly important for those who might feel like they are being forced to take classes when they are not entirely sure about their motivations or needs. By unveiling the benefits of the teaching method you are applying, you can foster **enthusiasm and commitment** to the desired learning result, while mitigating any hesitation about the time and effort invested in education.

10

REGULARLY UPDATE COURSE CONTENT

As emphasised throughout the Handbook, media outlets have been evolving at a fast pace over the past few years. News, data and information circulate on the internet at a **very high speed**, and by doing so they contribute significantly to shaping modern societies.

Since media literacy courses are supposed to foster the development of information literacy skills, it's of paramount importance that the contents and resources used in the course are **always relevant and updated**. A module developed with resources and examples from 2018 may already sound outdated in 2020, delivering a wrong message to your learners (i.e. "maybe I am wasting time with an old-fashioned course").

Keeping your content timely and current will demonstrate to the learners the care and attention you have put in your work, while at the same time enhancing your chances to keep them engaged. Always be on the lookout for new articles, videos, podcasts that can be useful for your class. Check for emerging trends and practices. Your extra-effort will pay off by enriching your learners' experience, while at the same time representing a professional reward for your work.

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