



AMIF

AMIF-2016-AG-INTE-01 (AMIF)
Migrant Women Empowerment and Integration
WEMIN – No 776211



WEMIN

Migrant Women
Empowerment and Integration

D6.1: Peer Learning Methodology and Tools

Work package: 6

Type: Pdf

Dissemination level: Public

Version: 1.0

Delivery date: 30.03.2018

Keywords: Peer learning methodology, tools, online platform, MRW integration

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This project was funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund under grant agreement No 776211.

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Abstract

As part of the WP that aims to develop the **technological infrastructure** that will support the realization of activities in the rest of the WP, the present document aims to present the field of knowledge that is associated with the process of peer learning and its application in the field of MRW integration and inclusion. Furthermore, the present document intends to set the scene and introduce the specific online tools to be used in the online platform to be developed, in order to materialise and enhance the suggested peer learning methodology.

2 Introduction

The WEMIN project aims to promote the social inclusion of Migrant and Refugee women (MRW) of all ages and social strata through comprehensive interventions addressing social, cultural, educational and professional aspects. This will be achieved by working directly with women, sharing experience and the creation of an online community.

The online-platform will play a central role in empowering the WEMIN community (MRW and the host communities) in general, while also being a focal point for networking and synergy and supporting peer learning. Apart from providing relevant material on issues related to integration, the online-platform also aims to enable the creation of a repository of learning objects and artefacts of reflection that will be fed into by the learners themselves by publishing their experiences and allowing them to comment and tag the experience of their peers.

To this end the project intends to combine the modern pedagogical approaches of e-learning and peer learning which are suitable for adult learners too. The developed online structure will allow and enhance peer learning, as learners will be able to learn from each other and, crucially, to continue to do so well beyond the limited lifetime of the project itself will be created.

3 The Peer Learning Methodology

3.1 What is peer learning

Peer learning is possibly one of the oldest forms of collaborative and connective learning in human society, affording people the chance to learn from the knowledge and experience of those similar to themselves. At its broadest peer learning can be defined as individuals of equal or comparable status helping each other to learn and learning themselves in both formal and informal ways. Peer learning should be mutually beneficial and involve the sharing of knowledge, ideas and experience between the participants.

A peer helping interaction, where one peer helps or informs another is significantly different from that between a qualified teacher and a student, in that both members involved in the interaction find some cognitive benefit. For instance, while one individual learns from the ‘helper’, the helper is intended to be “learning by teaching”, while also mutually constituting a trustworthy relationship. In addition, a peer learning situation is free of hierarchies which may exist between “teachers” on one side and “learners” on the other side. A peer learning situation generally is experienced as more relaxed, more motivating, less stressful and more attractive to the learners.

Boud et al (2001) state that peer learning is not a single type of educational strategy; rather it covers a broad range of activities. Ten different models of peer learning have been identified (Griffiths, Houston and Lazenbatt, 1995). These are:

- 1) The Proctor Model - Senior learners tutoring junior learners
- 2) Learning Cells – Learners at the same level form partnerships to assist each other with course content and personal issues.
- 3) Discussion seminars
- 4) Private study groups
- 5) Parrainage - a buddy system or counselling
- 6) Peer-assessment schemes
- 7) Collaborative project or laboratory work
- 8) Projects in different sized (cascading) groups
- 9) Workplace mentoring
- 10) Community activities

Co-operative learning and collaborative learning are terms often used in conjunction with peer learning. However, while they appear similar, they draw from differing educational perspectives, have different focuses and stress different outcomes. Co-operative learning focuses on the group interaction, individual skill development, social learning and management of the educational environment. This takes place within an established body of knowledge and authority for knowledge is vested in the teacher (Johnson, et al, 1991).

Collaborative learning, however, places emphasis on participation where learning is the key concept, not education or teaching. The lecturer is a facilitator, negotiating the learning and evaluation and sharing control. Critical thinking, problem solving, personal transformation and the social construction of knowledge are all features of collaborative knowledge (Sampson, et al, 1999).

Peer learning can possibly therefore be described as a sub-set of collaborative learning (Boud et al, 2001) in that learning for all is the key, focusing on students' learning with and from each other in both formal and informal ways. It involves notions of interdependence and mutual benefit, where students take responsibility for each other's learning and with its primary focus being on students acting interdependently. It acknowledges the input which the current knowledge and skills of students can make to the learning of peers and places, and how the conveying of that knowledge and skills can in itself be a learning opportunity. Furthermore, it places a strong emphasis on critical thinking, problem solving and the construction of knowledge. The power and status of the students are similar and the emphasis is on learning together.

Within the context of the WEMIN project, connected learning, an approach to teaching and learning found in adult education, is also a relevant concept. It comprises of two elements: first, connected learning is perceived as a form of learning, which integrates peer relationships, personal interests, academic and career achievements. Second, as of the year 2000 connected learning refers to learning within electronic networks and digital media (social media) and is often referred to as "information-age-learning". Here learners are technically connected, do not need to be at the same place of learning, but connect as peers based on shared learning interests (Cornwell and Cornwell, 2006; Ito, et al, 2013).

3.2 Advantages of Peer Learning

As discussed above, the great advantage of peer learning is that it offers the opportunity for learners to teach and learn from each other, providing a learning

experience that is significantly different from the usual teacher-student interactions and which offers differing, and more shared, benefits.

Peer learning also has great potential to foster a deep approach to learning. 'Deep learning', is retained by your long term memory, rather than 'surface learning', where information can dissipate from your memory shortly after class. It has been observed that peer learners gained confidence in giving presentations, developed more independence and creativity, learned more about society etc., and performed with greater accuracy and with more commitment to the course (Assinder, 1991; Spratt, M. & Leung, B. 2000)

In addition within the context of peer learning:

- Students receive more time for individualized learning.
- Students feel more comfortable and open when interacting with a peer.
- Peers and students share a similar discourse, allowing for greater understanding.
- Students are more likely to be motivated, when that motivation to learn is coming from themselves, their own needs and interests.
- Direct interaction between students promotes active learning. Students take an active rather than passive role in peer learning. This is likely to be more meaningful for the students and lead to deeper learning taking place.
- Peer teachers reinforce their own learning by instructing others.
- Peer learning has the ability to foster a culture of collaboration. Peer centred critiques provide students with an opportunity to give and receive feedback, negotiate and structure meaning.

Research also indicates that peer learning activities typically yield the following results for both tutor and tutee: team-building spirit and more supportive relationships; greater psychological well-being, social competence, communication skills and self-esteem; and higher achievement and greater productivity in terms of enhanced learning outcomes (Briggs 2013).

4 Peer Learning and Its Implications on the Integration of MRW

The integration of migrants and refugees in local communities should be tackled by applying a strengthened, coherent and integrated approach to migration across different policy areas and government levels. It is true, that the financial crisis and recent increased refugee and migrant arrival influxes pose additional integration challenges to the hosting cities/areas. However, it remains a truism that the effective integration of migrants and refugees contributes to building inclusive, cohesive and prosperous societies. Whenever they are offered opportunities to actively participate in the economic, social, civic and cultural life of hosting societies, it is shown that they contribute positively and support prosperity and social cohesion.

The WEMIN project recognizes that migrants' and refugees' integration requires a series of fluid and organic approaches to help, educate, exchange, inform and intervene. The WEMIN project builds therefore on the following premises:

- peer learning has proven to support learners' active social participation
- peer learning prepares pathways for MRW towards social integration through introducing them to the principles of participatory democracy
- the integration approach evolves in response to interrelated policies and may exploit technology as a means for training, exchange and sharing, so as to guarantee effectiveness of empowering, intervening and integrating for the benefit of Migrant and Refugee Women (MRW).
- It has often been the case that during the integration process of MRW, in the perceived absence of a central repository of information and tools, local stakeholders involved respond to the problem through a variety of methods. All too often these methods (sometimes innovative and novel) and their efficacy (or lack thereof) are very rarely shared with others and valuable information is lost.
- Furthermore, it is a fact, that tutors, public servants, NGOs, civil society representatives, associations and related stakeholders (at local and regional level) and other members of both the host community and the target groups

themselves, need to possess the fundamental knowledge in regard to the integration process (e.g. *What it is, How it links with other policies, Who it involves, Which tools it can exploit, What works and what doesn't work*). While there are recommendations stemming from varying programmes and strategies to deal with integration, it is often the case that those most closely involved in the process, i.e. the MRW themselves as well as their tutors, representatives of host community and local/regional stakeholders, need to:

- ✓ Check their own understanding
 - ✓ Share their experiences
 - ✓ See alternative/innovative approaches and approaches that deal with specific areas/types/actions of integration and intervention
 - ✓ Identify new sources of inspiration
 - ✓ Learn from others' experiences ("mistakes" included)
 - ✓ Act as a sounding board for ideas
 - ✓ Provide support based on their knowledge
 - ✓ Offer time and space for self-reflection (and supervision when needed)
- If the main actors of integration process are innovative in their actions, then a more interactive, "out of the box" and collaborative approach to the teaching and the sharing of information can be achieved, so as to combat stereotyping (within hosting communities) and to encourage co-creation between the actors involved and the target groups themselves.
 - Often those who wish to learn about the integration of migrants only look to the 'experts' for feedback and fail to recognise how valuable peer feedback can be. Peer learning can help the representatives of the communities (both host and migrants/refugees) to develop good 'interpersonal communication skills, to be prepared to value innovation and be analytically critical of personal ideas in the light of experienced collective opinion' (Wilson, cited in Boud, Cohen, Sampson, 2001, p.102).

As a result, the current project aspires to promote the effective integration of MRW of all ages and social strata, through comprehensive interventions addressing social, cultural, training and professional aspects and to enhance solidarity through experience-sharing among the partners and their affiliated networks

5 The Methodology of Peer Learning in the WEMIN project

5.1 Who are the Peers

As discussed previously, peers in general are people in similar situations to each other, who do not have a role of expert. They share status as fellow learners and are accepted as such. Most importantly, they do not have power over each other by virtue of their position or responsibilities. In this project, peers would all be core/end users. In addition user groups may be formed, during the training, allowing for the emergence of some sub- peer groups.

More specifically, the peers of the WEMIN project are **the MRW themselves within the same and different countries, the trainers, the tutors of mentoring/empowerment actions, the representatives of local communities and stakeholders**. Furthermore, **peer learning in the context of the WEMIN project will involve different kind of stakeholders at various levels (local, national european) who can also function as multipliers**.

Allowing for the fact that the WEMIN project online platform (to be developed within WP6) aims to empower the WEMIN community, support peer learning, and to be a focal point for networking and synergy and intends to be sustainable beyond the lifetime of the creation of the project, it is clearly evident that the forms of **peer learning applied by the platform must be capable of being self-perpetuated by the online learners themselves**.

5.2 Suggested Peer Learning Practices for the project

Given the models of peer learning outlined above we would suggest that the most feasible activities for this project would be:

- **Peer Assessment Schemes** –Where the learners put up their pieces of work to be reviewed and critiqued by other learners and feedback/discussion is requested and encouraged.
- **Discussion Seminars** – Where the learners create forums in which peer learners pose and take part in questions/discussions for the peer community on topics like stereotyping, empowerment, integration and inclusion policy etc.
- **Collaborative project work** – Where the peer learners create wikis which can be viewed and edited by other peers.
- **Community Activities** – Where peer learners may wish to collaborate on their pieces of work to create a wider overview from community to community/country to country. This directly leads towards a wider and active social and cultural participation of MRW which will offers opportunities for a better social, cultural and eventually economic integration of MRW in our societies. This possibility is envisaged for example within “WP 5: Common activities with members of the local society in crafts and culture” where social participation and personal empowerment of MRW is facilitated during workshops building on the spontaneity of art and exchange of cultures. It also offers MRW the opportunity to express themselves in their own way, fostering their self-esteem and social involvement.

6 The Peer Learning Tools in the WEMIN project

The implementation of the peer learning methodology in the WEMIN project will be facilitated through the existing platform <http://www.culturalmediators.eu/> and its tools which will be further developed and enriched.

Currently the type of material that can be uploaded consists of:

- Forum topics, discussions
- Wiki pages
- Blog entries
- Groups/Chats
- Articles
- Case Studies/Best practices
- Multimedia content (videos, images)

In order to implement the peer learning methodology on the WEMIN project, users (MRW themselves within the same and different countries, the trainers, the tutors of mentoring/empowerment actions, the representatives of local communities and stakeholders) will be trained in methods of how to share how to share their experiences of integration with other colleagues, who may be looking for inspiration and learning on this issue. Peers will find out how to participate in forum discussions, create blogposts, upload episodes, search for relevant documentation, create announcements related to issues of integration etc. This will be achieved through their active participation in the platform via specific activities.

Based on the peer learning methodology outlined above, and the suggested learning practices (*Peer Assessment Schemes* , *Discussion Seminars*, *Collaborative project work*, *Community activities*) a list of 5 learning objects (L.O.) is proposed which incorporate and implement the notion of collaborative and connected learning. These learning **objects can take different forms and can be used in a variety of ways depending on the learning practice context used**. All L.Os. aim to be mutually beneficial and involve the sharing of knowledge, ideas and experience between the participants.

Case study /Episode on Integration

Case studies/Episodes on Integration are typical examples of the kind of knowledge/learning/sharing that the project is addressing. It is important for every user of the platform to know how to report a case/present an episode (it can be for example a story related to MRW' s personal experiences of issues related to integration and inclusion in the host country) and how to narrate the story behind a case study/episode in a meaningful way to others.

The reporter of the case/episode may be one of the actors involved (i.e. trainer, tutor, MRW, representative of the host community and/or stakeholder involved). The reporting of cases should abide by the ethics of reporting without revealing crucial personal data. Peers can pose questions to future readers/commentors. This “questions” field implements the peer learning methodology and can result in a forum discussion related to the case/episode. In this L.O. we have at least 2 actors: one who gathers and presents the data to the audience and other(s) who can make comments or answer the author’s questions.

Case studies/episodes promote a more holistic understanding of integration issues, as they can present at once the various challenges (and allow for their discussion) the integration process can pose to a series of actors, i.e. MRW, members of the host society, government stakeholders etc. Here various ways of presenting case studies can be employed, based on themes, actors, etc (i.e case studies related to bureaucratic issues, education etc, samples of Integration policy or case studies related to a sub group of MRW etc.)

Moreover, the case studies/episodes will allow us to work with MRW’s biography and shared biographical experience of MRW. This facilitates prepares for an exchange between MRW on real life stories. Before introducing biography-based episodes, learners need to agree upon the risk of sharing biographical data and either need to agree on confidentiality or need to be aware that an episode shared with the public will not be able to be traced back to an individual person by third parties (if this is needed to protect a MRW).

This LO will be implemented through the usage of a form with predefined fields. This form will be found in a devoted section of the platform entitled “Case Studies/Episodes”. The author/ user will have the opportunity to create his/her own case study by filling the predefined fields.

- *type of narrator/report* (trainer, tutor, MRW, representative of the hosting community and/or stakeholder involved)

- View point (bureaucratic, experiential, etc.)
- Factual Description of the case study/episode
- Topics for Discussion
- Keywords

Discussion - Forum

One of the forms of peer learning is the creation of Discussion Seminars. In those the learners themselves form forums where they pose and take part in questions/discussions for the peer community on topics like inclusion/integration strategies, related policy, initiatives, empowering ideas, etc.. The dialogue itself is a type of peer learning method in everyday life.

With this type of Learning Object users, either in groups or individually, can explore thoughts or concerns about issues related to the integration process. The creator of the discussions could be a tutors, the National Moderator of the Platform or any user of the platform (i.e. MRW) . The user in any forum may create new topics and polls. Then users comment/ answers to the question. The creator may also pose a discussion with questions that refer to the training material and reflects various learning outcomes, for example “Which integration strategy applies to you best?”, “Which is the most common type of stereotyping you encounter during the integration process?”, “What is the role of women in your country?” etc.

A Forum gives the opportunity to users to learn by choosing a specific Learners’ Group to which to pose the question. Through Forum discussion users can put into practice the knowledge gained at various phases of the project, i.e. the training, both in regards to the theoretical background and via peer learning.

This LO will be implemented by the usage of a Forum tool. This tool will be found in a devoted section of the platform entitled “Forum”.

Repository

The repository would consist of documents, presentations (created and/or gathered), audio -visual material (photos included), etc. that reflects theoretical or

practical perspectives on the integration process. Training material can be hosted here too.

This LO will serve as an online File Viewer and Manager. All the Uploaded Files will be clustered in one page named “Repository”. **Each file will have its corresponding tags and will belong in certain categories.**

Educational activity

Educational activities refer mostly to users who may be tutors, trainers, or members of the MRW community with a “leading role” in developing initiatives. Such an activity gives the opportunity to anyone who wants to schedule and implement an educational and/or an awareness activity (targeting sensitizing) that benefits integration, and assess its results.

The activity must aim at educating but not only through using the traditional method of learning. This activity aims to increase peers’ creativity and explore the teaching/informing/ awareness raising methods through various materials (such as movies, promotional materials, role playing etc.).

At the end of the activity, the peers coordinating it should assess their findings and should present the results to the others peers, after which other users have to assess and give feedback to the “author”.

This LO will be implemented through the usage of a form with the following predefined fields.

- Title of Activity
- Main Description of Activity (High level description of the activity by the involved teacher/coach)
- Status of activity (*completed or in progress*)
- About the activity

Setting up the Activity (In a number of steps)

Educational Tools (Visits /Images/Maps/Tips/Clues)

Suggested ICT tools (i.e. skype)

Recommended references (i.e. related sites)

Aims and objectives (educational goals and teaching methods)

- Results

Who can be involved? (Teachers/Coaches, Locals and experts, etc)

The author/user will have the option to upload an educational activity that:

a) is already implemented: in this case the status of the activity will be “completed” and the field “results” will be filled

b) is planned to be implemented. In this case the status of the activity will be “in progress” and the field “results” will be empty. Upon the implementation of the activity, the user will return and update the “status” and he/she will fill the field “results”

The discussion among the involved actors can be conducted in the Discussion/Forum section of the platform.

Collaborative project activity

This L.O. gives the opportunity to all users to collaborate and produce a project that reflects a specific part of knowledge or practice related to migrants’ integration issues. The peer learners create wikis which can be viewed and edited by other peers.

Such activities can consist of users’ contribution *“on terminologies or vocabulary on integration”, or “presentation of best practices”, “List of available Laws about integration issues” etc.* Users can contribute to more than one wikis.

As this is developed through the wiki application the collaborative activity can be an ideal tool to be used during the training of MRW.

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