Principles and guidelines for basic education programmes

For learning opportunities within the framework of the Adult Education Initiative

The document "Principles and Guidelines for Basic Education Programmes" provides the basis for learning opportunities within the framework of the Adult Education

Initiative (cf. Adult Education Initiative programming document 2015-2017; www.initiative-erwachsenenbildung.at). It is aimed at experienced basic educators and programme managers who are entrusted with this planning.

The listed "Principles of Basic Education" describe a fundamental attitude towards learning and teaching. They are based on approaches of critical pedagogy (in the tradition of Paulo Freire), migration pedagogy (e.g. Paul Mecheril) and postcolonial theories (e.g. Gayatri C. Spivak, Edward W. Said, Castro Varela). In the description of the opportunities, the application of the principles must be presented in a comprehensible way.

The dimensions of action described in the individual learning fields of languages, mathematics and ICT represent a content-oriented framework for learning objectives. It is important to plan a learning environment oriented to the needs of the learners. The selection of learning topics is done together with the learners and the learning objectives are formulated individually.

Basic education in today's social context reflects and takes into account the causes of the emergence of basic educational needs.

Basic education thus moves away from an authoritarian understanding of literacy in the sense of learning to read, write or calculate and focuses on the social, democratic, participatory, self-critical and action-oriented dimensions of life.

Basic education is the task of ongoing socio-political development that enables people to receive education in order to achieve the active and self-determined shaping of their own future. Therefore, the need for basic education does not refer to individual deficits.

The need for basic education is a result of the challenges arising from social developments and changes for individuals and their daily activities. Restricted and limited opportunities for participation in the social environment, difficult access or lack of adaptation to new technologies, reduced opportunities for participation in the labour market and limited (or prevented) access to education and training lead to exclusion, promote precarious living conditions and fragile possibilities to shape your own life. They make it more difficult to orient yourself and adapt to a constantly changing environment. This applies both to people whose first language is the language from the host country[1] and to migrants with different languages, backgrounds, experiences, knowledge, skills and abilities.

Basic education provides a framework in which learners make their existing competences visible and consciously use and expand them. Individual strengths and life experiences determine pupils' learning processes from the outset. Both in terms of subject-specific content and cross-curricular themes, as well as in terms of framework conditions, learning processes, methods and didactics, learning opportunities must be action-oriented and application-oriented.

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[1] In the original, they mention German-speaking people, however this was changed to facilitate easier understanding in non-German contexts.

The work in basic education enables openness to the world and awareness of transculturality and allows to recognise and critically reflect on the mechanisms of social exclusion and discrimination. It promotes the active participation in society and it encourages individuals to help shape and change the world rather than "just" living in it.

Principles of basic education work

The principles of basic education work form are the basis of the concepts offered. The application of the principles must be presented in a comprehensible form in the concepts of the offer.


Basic education
- **puts the focus on the learner.** The individual's learning needs and desires are the basis for learning opportunities and individual learning plans. However, learning opportunities in basic education do not only take into account individual needs, but also the social, economic and cultural framework conditions and the social context.
- **is oriented towards existing competencies and competencies to be developed.** In this case, competence refers to the skills and abilities that people need in order to be able to be educated and decide on processes in specific societies. In order for the potentials and interests of the learners to determine the learning opportunities, the existing competences of each learner have to be identified and made visible in the initial phase. The learner himself/herself decides which competences he/she wants to develop and to what extent. He/she makes decisions and is supported in the implementation in many ways;
- **is dialogical and reciprocal.** An equitable dialogical exchange between teachers and students is an indispensable part of the learning opportunities. All students are also teachers, and they have always been students themselves;
- **interweaves action and reflection and thus enables guidance and transparency in the teaching-learning process.** Systematic reflection on the learning process as a whole and on its components applies to learners and teachers. It creates clarity about the desired action and effect, about learning successes and necessary adjustments;
- **is critical of established knowledge.** Existing potentials are evaluated and hegemonically accepted knowledge is critically reflected upon. The learning provision discusses which knowledge is recognised by whom in a society and which is excluded;
- **supports participation in social and democratic coexistence.** Learning content and topics are appropriate to identify and broaden opportunities for people's engagement;
- **is oriented towards content and topics relevant to the learner or towards learning needs and requirements.** The identification of topics and planning of learning opportunities takes place in agreement with the participants and on an ongoing basis during the training:
- **is based on learning environments and materials that reflect this orientation.** Learning environments and materials are continuously adapted to the students' learning intentions and topics. Different learning formats allow for individual, cooperative and collaborative learning;

- **counteracts all forms of discrimination and racism through awareness-raising interventions and a diversity and gender-sensitive approach to content and topics;**
- **promotes the learners' autonomy and self-efficacy as actors in their learning processes.** Self-efficacy belief is the conviction that you can successfully carry out desired actions on the basis of your own competences. It is a prerequisite for autonomous/self-directed learning;
- **considers learning, media, and political action competences as cross-cutting content and issues** that permeate all areas of learning;
- **requires basic educators to reflect systematically on their own educational practice.**

Guidelines for the design of basic education programmes

The following diagram illustrates the approach to planning basic education programmes. The learners' ability to act is at the centre of all learning activities: the learning domains of languages, mathematics and ICT should always be described under the approach of action orientation and application for learners. Providers of basic education programmes, regardless of which learning fields they want to focus on, plan learning opportunities in such a way that they can create different filters (contexts, pedagogical conditions, political conditions, learning processes) to ensure exactly this action and application orientation.
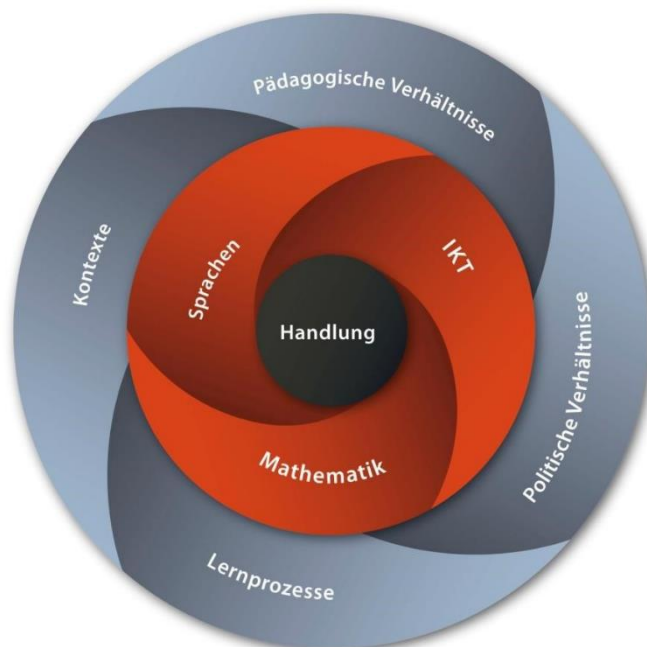
1. Filter

In order to apply the principles to learning opportunities, they must be viewed through different filters during planning.

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Just as in pictures, where something is emphasised and made visible by means of optical filters, these filters are intended to highlight specific aspects of basic education. They bring together the principles of basic education work described above.

➢ Pedagogic conditions

Mutual relationships and understanding of roles are reflected in the learning process, taking into account hierarchical relationships in learning processes, in societies and in groups.

In this context, processes of disruption (disruption means the attribution from outside/demarcation between "us" and "others"; thus, the learner becomes the teacher's construct in the learning process) are also critically reconsidered.

The didactic and methodological concepts and their application are oriented towards autonomy, authenticity, multilingualism, reciprocity and dialogue. Multilingualism here means dealing with the values of languages.

➢ Contexts

The learning contents are oriented to the learners' respective contexts (in the social, situational and biographical sense), experiences, knowledge, wishes and needs. The contents are agreed on with the learners and reflected upon together.

➢ Political conditions

Political action competence here means the understanding of yourself as a shaping and changing social actor. The focus is not on "institutional studies" and learning about democracy, but on learning content, topics and learning activities that promote a comprehensive understanding of contexts and discourses, as well as the development of the ability to speak and act for yourself.

➢ Learning processes

The development of competences or learning takes place in a process of continuous understanding, dialogue. This process is accompanied by the inclusion of the learners' context, the demands of work and everyday life as well as their experiences and interests. It serves to increase awareness of contexts and involves a broadening of perspectives in the sense of the cross-cutting themes of political action competence, media competence and learning competence, and supports goal-oriented action.

Systematic reflection and awareness of your own learning are part of this process and "learning to learn" itself. They must be understood as cross-cutting issues which are taken into account in all learning opportunities in all fields of learning.

The learning processes are accompanied in the opportunities by basic educators such as teachers and learning counsellors. In this context, learning guidance is understood as a consultative support for the learners, in particular with regard to the identification

of needs, the formulation of objectives, the determination of resources, the choice and implementation of strategies and the evaluation of learning outcomes. Guidance of learning in this sense is an intrinsic part of basic education provision.

2. Learning fields and their dimensions of action

The description of the learning fields is addressed to basic educators who have knowledge of the reference systems and background knowledge of the respective learning fields and who are able to develop offers for specific groups of learners in the broad learning field of basic education.

The description of the learning fields provides a framework in which different opportunities are developed. Planning these opportunities takes into account that learning and teaching take place in dialogue with the learners and thus in the process. This means that the topics are not prescribed, but are geared to the interests and objectives of the learners. The individual learning fields cannot be isolated from each other, they are always processed through the learning fields and are developed reciprocally (every change in one learning field also leads to changes in other learning fields). The areas of competence/dimensions of action described in the individual learning fields are interrelated: written sources to be read can be found on the Internet, for example, digital media are used for written exercises, basic mathematical skills relevant to everyday life are linked to linguistic and written competence, and the learning fields are interrelated.

The description of the learning fields is oriented towards the goal of participation in society, the labour market and further education.

For each learning field, there are dimensions of action in which the individual must be able to acquire competences in the described complexity without time restrictions in a basic education learning opportunity. The dimensions of action form the overall framework of action in which the different learning opportunities operate.

Learning opportunities in basic education take into account the fact that learners' skills and abilities in the different competence areas/dimensions of action develop to different extents or at different rates, also depending on the respective current needs and interests.

a) Languages

Like all other fields, the field of language learning in basic education aims at learners' ability to perform. This includes their performance in different contexts and under different conditions in which communicative language competences are developed. In the field of language learning, it is particularly important to bear in mind that language processes play a role in all areas of learners' lives and work and are also relevant to other areas of learning. The extension of language performance skills and the examination of languages in basic education includes, in particular, the examination of multilingualism and language norms in order to counteract the hierarchisation of languages and norms. It focuses on the diversity of expressions and the value of linguistic richness.

The following dimensions of action are often intertwined and, in each case, serve communication, i.e., speaking to be heard; writing to be read; being able to use language to communicate; to establish social recognition; to perceive, reflect and shape society; as artistic expression; and to learn.

- Listening and understanding
- Reading and understanding
- Speaking and being heard
- Writing
- Reflection on language
- Learning strategies and use of language

The field of language learning must be considered through the filters described above and is always linked to the other fields of learning. In addition to learning the linguistic elements of mathematics and ICT, this also means, above all, naming political realities, relations and disproportions, the presentation of your own position and the linguistic understanding of the position of others.

b) ICT

ICT competence in basic education includes media literacy, media use and media criticism.

Like the cross-cutting themes of learning competence and civic education, ICT can never be separated from other fields of learning. ICT in basic education is as much a content and cross-cutting subject as it is a means of learning.

In the field of ICT learning, the following interrelated dimensions of action have to be taken into account:

- Technologies/devices/applications for communication and cooperation
- information gathering, administration and content preparation
- critical use of technologies/devices/applications
- critical use of the media

Media competence is always closely linked to the other areas of learning in basic education.

c) Mathematics

The learning process is based on a critical examination of the different approaches (of both students and teachers) to mathematical knowledge and of the possibilities and experiences regarding the use of mathematical processes in real-life situations.

An important aspect of the process is the recognition and incorporation of the learners' knowledge and experiences in the learning process and the relativisation of conventional mathematical operations as universally valid. In addition, learners gain an understanding of the role of mathematics in the social, cultural and technical world. When working with given problem-solving approaches, but also with different forms of notation and approaches to calculation, a comparison is made with the situation in other countries/regions.

Mathematics in basic education provides an understanding of the importance of numbers in problem solving and considers the following action dimensions:

- Mathematics as a language for describing, processing and understanding facts and objects
- Recognition of mathematical relationships in concrete situations
- Solution-oriented representation of mathematical facts
- Interpretation of mathematical representations in specific contexts

Mathematical tasks are part of the texts and work together with topics from other learning areas.

Example of the application of a cross-learning field:

The following example lists - without claiming to be complete or to take the assumed knowledge and interests of a group of participants into account - possible fields of action in the field of "house hunting". This makes it clear to what extent the learning fields are intertwined with each other, but also with the filters described above and the cross-cutting materials (e.g. political action competence, etc.).

Accommodation search topic

Compilation of existing experience; critical examination/analysis of the real estate market, language of advertisements; price ranges and rental categories; legal status (rental contracts), clauses, deposits, terms; tenant protection; counselling options; calculation of individual rental limits in relation with the available income; search for and comparison of offers on the internet; weighing of advantages and disadvantages; formulation of questions, development of (argumentative) search strategies; dealing with discriminatory/racist situations.