



# The ENHANCE Matrix | Background paper

Defining the theoretical and practical criteria, proposed for analysing practices relating to learner's voice and active participation.

**ENH.A.N.CE | ENHancing Adult learNers voiCEs**

Project 101133805 — ENHANCE

Publication Coordinated by SOLIDAR

July 2024



Co-funded by  
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

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## Project Partners



## Introduction

[ENHANCE](#) (Enhancing Adult Learners Voices) is a project running from December 2023 until May 2026 which intends to enhance adult learners' voices by creating learning spaces where the educational process is based on the voice of the learner. This inherently democratizes the educational process, leading to a deeper connection with both society and the learning topic at hand.

The aim of this Background Paper is to provide a theoretical strong basis for the creation of an informed matrix relating to enhancing learners' voices, as well as a glossary of definitions needed to understand the criteria and axes of the ENHANCE Cartesian matrix which will highlight the spectrum of learners' participation and opportunities of representation into the public space.

## Cartesian Matrix Variables

In order to create a Cartesian Matrix that highlights learners' voice and participation, the ENHANCE partners consider elements of:

- Access: meaning who can participate in the process and under which circumstances
- Impact: meaning how communities, societies and policy are affected by the process

In terms of access, the matrix will assess if the showcased practices include and promote the voice of a specific group of people, a diverse group of people with limitations, or that of everyone by providing measures and ways to include groups with multiple marginalisation status. In terms of impact on the community, the matrix will assess if the showcased practices have an impact on either only the learning process itself, the local community or society in which the practice is activated or a larger scale impact on policy and decision making. In order to understand in depth how the different elements of each of the selected practices lead to their classification and placement in the matrix the partnership will agree on a user-friendly visualisation, with fully accessible characteristics, that will highlight the critical point that the research team identified and analysed.



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## Glossary of definitions

### 1. Learner Voice

For us the Learner Voice refers to the process of creating spaces in education where learners, express their opinions, claims and needs, reflect upon their own existing preconceptions and biases, with the aim of making the systems, in which the learners and the rest of the learning community exist, listen to the results of this process.

In this context, we are aware of the emotional process that is coming with the realisation of marginalisation, one's own biases and privilege, and reaching the point of being able to articulate one's own claims. This is the reason why for us the Learner Voice is interlinked with the concept of creating safe spaces and giving time to the learning community to grow and articulate their voice.

### 2. Level of Participation

#### Design (in advance)

- Micro-level: participant(s) are asked about their learning needs and desires at an individual level by the tutor during an intake and the tutor translates these into the training offer/programme (customisation within programmes is possible and actively designed).
- Meso level: the educational institution / local authority (organisation responsible for the educational provision) periodically collects from the target group what - within the policy frameworks - their most important learning wishes and needs are and incorporates this information in the educational provision. This is done, for example, through forum discussions, focus groups or through questionnaires.
- Macro level: regional or national government institution or body ultimately responsible for the creation and funding of the educational programmes, collects structured information from institutions/implementers and/or participants on learning requirements in relation to the policy intentions and objectives of this government and takes this information into account when determining the method of funding or preconditions.

#### Implementation/ Practice/ Implementation (During)

- Micro-level: participants in an educational programme are asked by the teacher or supervisors during the educational process, at interim and regular intervals, about the extent to which the programme (still) matches their learning wishes or needs. Where necessary, these new changed needs are taken into account. These are factors that can be directly influenced by the teacher in the lesson, such as type of assignments, teaching materials, didactic working methods, etc..
- Meso-level: participants in an educational programme are asked by the institution / local authority during the educational process, at interim and regular intervals, about the extent to which the programme (still) matches their learning wishes or needs. Where necessary, these new changed needs are taken into account. These are factors that cannot be influenced by the teacher but do affect the implementation of the programme, such as the number of teaching hours, planning and organisation of the teaching programme, method of delivery (online learning, working in groups).
- Macro level: regional or national government body or body ultimately responsible for the creation and funding of the educational programmes collects structured information from

institutions/implementers and/or participants on the progress of educational programmes and the satisfaction of participants with the way in which this is offered or organised. Translates this information into instructions, legislation or regulations for regional or local authorities/educational institutions, enabling adjustments to be made at implementation level or possible obstacles to be removed. If possible, adjusts available budgets for the implementation of educational programmes in the interim to (better) meet these learning wishes or needs.

### Evaluation (after)

- **Micro-level:** teacher or institution questions individual learners after the educational path to what extent the offer has met expectations. This mainly concerns factors that can be directly influenced by the teacher in the lesson, such as type of assignments, teaching materials, didactic working methods, etc., but also the extent to which individual learning objectives were achieved. It explicitly asks what possible adaptations or changes are desirable from the perspective of the learner(s) or what additional supply is (still) needed to achieve the learning objectives.
- **Meso-level:** participants in educational programmes are surveyed by the institution/local authority during the process at mid-term and on a regular basis whether the programmes (still) match their learning wishes or needs. Where necessary, these new changed needs are taken into account. These are factors that cannot be influenced by the teacher but do affect the implementation of the programme, such as the course content to be chosen, planning, organisation of the course offerings, method of delivery (online learning, working in groups).
- **Macro level:** regional or national government institution or body ultimately responsible for the creation and funding of the educational programmes collects structured information from institutions/implementers and/or participants about the extent to which the educational programmes have met the needs of the learners and the extent to which learners were satisfied with the educational provision and its organisation. Learners are structurally involved in this evaluation in a way that is accessible and appropriate for them. It is clear how this information is weighed and taken into account in the new policy and budget cycle.

### 3. Conditions

**Gatekeeping:** A strategy used by those in positions of power to establish, mobilise, recreate and strengthen structural barriers, like access to education (Oleinik, 2015).

**Bottleneck:** A bottleneck can be defined as “a problem that delays a process or stops it from continuing” ([Cambridge Dictionary](#)). In the case of education and learning, it can refer to a reason why learners are unable to advance in their learning process.

**Access:** Who can participate in the learning process and under which circumstances.

### 4. Form/Type/Methodology

**Formal education:** “education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned through public organizations and recognised private bodies, and – in their totality – constitute the formal education system of a country. Formal education programmes are thus recognised as such by the relevant national education or equivalent authorities, e.g. any other institution in cooperation with the national or subnational education authorities” ([UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012](#)).



**Non-formal education/learning:** “Non-formal education is education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned by an education provider. The defining characteristic of non-formal education is that it is an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education within the process of lifelong learning of individuals” ([UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012](#)).

**Informal education/learning:** “Forms of learning that are intentional or deliberate, but are not institutionalised. It is consequently less organised and less structured than either formal or non-formal education. Like formal and non-formal education, informal learning can be distinguished from incidental or random learning” ([UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012](#)).

## 5. Defining learning

**Level of consciousness:** The extent to which a person considers themselves a learner.

**Space and context:** The space and context in which learning takes place which can be physical and digital, and formal, non-formal or informal (e.g. classroom, outdoors, local communities).

**Tokenism:** “Something that a person or organization does that seems to support or help a group of people who are treated unfairly in society, such as giving a member of that group an important or public position, but which is not meant to make changes that would help that group of people in a lasting way” ([Cambridge Dictionary](#)).



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## Theoretical background

To understand the concept of learner voice, it is pivotal to take a look at how **“voice”** has been described in literature. An early understanding of “voice” is the capacity “to express ideas and opinions with the confidence they will be heard and taken into account” (Stein, 1997, p. 7). The concept is also described as a metaphor for **identity and agency** which can be both individually and socially constructed (Sperling & Appleman, 2011; Hunt et al. 2019). At the basis of finding voice lies “gaining self-confidence, understanding others’ ideas, and taking responsibility” (Hunt et al., 2019:23). Gaining **self-confidence** is central to the process of finding voice as it allows individuals to express opinions and develop their identity, and can be stimulated by settings that enable collaboration and trust (ibid.).

ENHANCE project partner AONTAS defines **learner voice** as fundamentally “the process of including learner experience in education” ([AONTAS, 2023](#)). In this process, the learners are acknowledged as being most suited to share their learning needs and suggestions, and that in doing so, their input is considered to be equally valuable, accessible, and influential as that of other education stakeholders (ibid.). Another relevant definition is the one of David Hargreaves (2004) defining learner voice as: “How students come to play a more active role in their education and schooling as a direct result of their [educators] becoming more attentive, in sustained or routine ways, to what students say about their experience of learning” ([Hargreaves, 2004](#)).

At the basis of learner voice lies **empowerment**, as similarly to theories of democracy and egalitarianism, “sharing one’s voice should not be reduced to the singular act, but should be understood as a process of self-actualisation, realisation and empowerment” ([AONTAS, 2023](#)). According to this understanding, if the process of learner voice is successful, it can be a starting point for broader engagement in education, community and society (ibid.). Literature shows that involving learners in curriculum design, for example, increases confidence that voices are recognized and respected (Florez & Terrill, 2003; Hunt et al., 2019; Schwarzer, 2009; Shiffman, 2018).

Moreover, according to the EAEA’s [policy paper on Life Skills and Participation \(2019\)](#), a **learner-centred** approach, in which the curriculum is designed with an active participation of the learner, increases the relevance of learning for the adult, thus increasing their motivation to enrol in the course. Learner-led approaches are also key in addressing major global crises, such as the digital and green transition. When learners are involved with a meaningful say, they are more likely to be equipped to confidently express themselves and exert greater influence over decisions in their lives and communities (Hunt et al., 2019; Toso, Prins, Drayton, Gnanadass, & Gungor, 2009). In other words, learner voice can have a positive impact on society, as asserted by Lawrence Angus, Barry Golding, Annette Foley and Peter Lavender (2013): “promoting, recognising and acting on learner voice, particularly the voices of disadvantaged and marginalised students, can help to provoke the kind of social, economic and political reform that can result in a more democratic society in which social justice and equality can prevail” ([Angus, L. et al., 2013](#)).

This is in line with the Council of Europe’s [Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education](#) (Council of Europe, 2010), which considers one of the fundamental goals of all education for democratic citizenship and human rights education is not just equipping learners with knowledge, understanding and skills, but also empowering them with the readiness to take action in society in the defense and promotion of human rights and democracy. As described in the [European Commission’s European Democracy Action Plan](#), **active citizenship** is a cornerstone of democratic societies, and it is essential for citizens to be informed, engaged, and empowered to participate in shaping public policies and decisions (European Commission, 2020). Therefore, having a voice as an (adult) learner results in having a voice as an informed and active citizen which is crucial for a thriving democracy on a local, national and global scale.



Despite the benefits and potential positive societal impact, it remains the exception rather than the norm for education programs to involve learners in its design and to truly listen to the learner voice (Toso et al., 2009). Learners but also adult learning organisations and educators are used to perceiving their role as objects (Kastner and Motschilnig, 2022). This entails that systemic changes are needed to transform power relationships and to encourage **truly participatory processes** in adult learning.



Photo by [Ryoji Iwata](#) on [Unsplash](#)



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## Annex

### Good Practices Data Collection Sheet

#### Background and content guidelines

ENHANCE (Enhancing Adult Learners Voices) is a project running from December 2023 until May 2026 which intends to enhance adult learners' voices by creating learning spaces where the educational process is based on the voice of the learner. This inherently democratizes the educational process, leading to a deeper connection with both society and the learning topic at hand.

The second work package (WP2) of the project aims to create a comprehensive mapping process that not only provides a platform for individuals to express their needs and opinions on the public agenda but also activates processes of actual participation in decision-making. This will begin with an extensive desk research concerning existing practices relating to adult learners' involvement in their communities and learning structures.

Using a critical lens, the partnership will identify essential indicators related to the effectiveness and defectiveness of the collected practices. They will then create a Cartesian visual matrix that highlights the spectrum of learners' participation and opportunities for representation in the public space.

The matrix will assess access and impact by considering elements such as who can participate in the process and under what circumstances, and how communities, societies, and policy are affected by the process.

One of the important activities of this work package is collecting and analysing best practices that relate to active citizenship and learner's voice in adult learning. The partners will have as a task to find at least **5 practices each** that can spread along the matrix in a way that provides representative feedback on a variety of processes.

#### Technical guidelines

This is a data collection sheet aimed at capturing best practices related to active citizenship and learner's voice in adult learning. The data collection can happen in the form of interviews with learners, educators and facilitators or be based on the initial research of the team and then cross checked with people from the initiative.

While we encourage participants to utilize this form as a guideline for submitting their best practice examples, we understand that each activity, project, or initiative may have unique characteristics. If certain elements in the form do not perfectly align with the description of your activity, project, or initiative, feel free to adapt as necessary to accurately convey the essence of your work.

Each practice description is expected to be approximately 3-6 pages in length (4 pages max info + annexes e.g. quotes or specific examples + photos), following the template below. We would kindly ask you to complete and send us the form by the end of December

## Template for collection

<b>Context and Details</b>	
Name of the initiative/practice	
Profile of our Contact Eg Learner, Educator, Management, Facilitator	
Provider	
Duration of the initiative	
Goals of the initiative	
<b>Level of Participation</b>	
Design (Before)	
Execution/Practice/Implementation	
Evaluation (After)	
Elements to consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How inherent is the participation?</li> <li>• Ownership of the process</li> <li>• Effectiveness of the learners' voice</li> </ul>	
<b>Conditions</b>	
Size of groups	
Voluntary/compulsory participation	
Paid/ unpaid (autonomy of practice)	
How are the voices considered in the process?	
Gatekeeping/ Bottlenecks	
Flexibility of the structure	
Access	
<b>Form/Type/Methodology</b>	
Formal/informal/non-formal	
Level of freedom	
Theme (Key words)	
Ideology/positioning	
Co-opted wording (Washing/Charity...)	



<b>Encountered challenges</b>	
Lessons learnt	
Critical considerations	
Capitalisation	
Systemic challenges	
Learning from failure	
<b>Who is the learner?</b>	
Defining learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Level of consciousness</li> <li>● Space and context</li> <li>● Public space and access</li> </ul>	
Target group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Geography</li> <li>● Tokenism</li> </ul>	
<b>General considerations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What actions tend to silence learners' voices?</li> <li>● What practices encourage openness of learners' voices?</li> <li>● What settings are more conducive to learners expressing themselves openly?</li> <li>● Should processes require group/collective settings or should individual processes also be considered?</li> <li>● What are the institutional and economic preconditions for enabling the learners active participation/voice?</li> </ul>	

# ENHANCE LEARNER VOICE

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