

**Booklet Series
Volume 3**

Creating Outspoken Learning Spaces for Action in the Community

SPACE

ENHANCE
LEARNER VOICE

**The ENHANCE
Mini Booklets**

Publication coordinated by ABC and CINOP



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Enhancing Learners' Voices

Creating Outspoken Learning Spaces

Introduction

The ENHANCE project is grounded in the belief that learners' voices are not only valuable but vital to shaping just, inclusive, and responsive adult education systems. This series of three mini-booklets was created to give space to those voices—voices that are too often ignored, undervalued, or actively silenced.

Each booklet focuses on a different theme related to how adult learners experience exclusion and how they reclaim space, visibility, and influence through education and community involvement:

- Breaking the Silence of Marginalised Groups, by NHE (Hungary),
- Reclaiming the Voice of the Systemically Excluded, by das kollektiv (Austria), and
- Creating Outspoken Learning Spaces for Action in the Community, by ABC Foundation (Netherlands).

Together, these booklets pursue five shared objectives:

- Addressing systemic barriers that prevent learners from being heard,
- Amplifying learner voices in ways that are authentic and accessible,
- Supporting inclusive adult education that adapts to learners' lives, not the other way around,
- Making lived experiences visible and political, and
- Fostering solidarity among learners and between learners and educators.

To achieve these aims, the booklets were co-created with learners through participatory workshops, using a range of creative, reflective, and experiential methods. These included sociodrama and art therapy (NHE) which enabled learners to process their experiences

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symbolically and collectively, and personal narrative and learner-led interviews (ABC Foundation), which captured individual journeys of learning and empowerment. The third booklet (das kollektiv) used the photovoice method, which created space for learners to visually document and share and reflect on their learning experiences through photography and captions.

Each booklet highlights not only what learners experience, but how they make sense of, resist, and reshape their worlds. Through storytelling, creative expression, and critical reflection, these booklets demonstrate the power of participatory adult education as a space of possibility and transformation. They are primarily intended for other learners—to offer inspiration, reflection, and a sense of solidarity, as well as practical insight into how adult learners can shape their own learning journeys and, in doing so,

influence the communities and systems around them. A list of resources and contact points at the end of each booklet provides ideas and tools for getting involved, taking action, or connecting with others on a similar path.

This booklet—**Creating Outspoken Learning Spaces for Action in the Community**—shares the approach of the ABC Foundation in the Netherlands, an organisation committed to learner participation in shaping policy and practice. The stories in this booklet are drawn from learners who have become language ambassadors, peer supporters, and active community members. Through one-on-one interviews and learner-led storytelling, the booklet reflects a vision of education rooted in dialogue, personal development, and collective action. It shows how learning spaces can evolve into sites of empowerment, visibility, and voice.

Outspoken Learning Spaces

The Interviews

Geert Hoogeboom is a board member of Stichting ABC (ABC Foundation), a volunteer organization by and for people with low literacy skills in the Netherlands. He interviewed three "Language Ambassadors": Hans, Geran and André. A Language Ambassador uses their own experience to make low literacy a topic of discussion and motivates others to take the step toward education.

Experts by Experience

Hans' Experience

"I had everything in my head, but I also wanted to be able to write it down" - Hans' story

Hans van Dijk, 65, is active and involved. Today, he taught a hundred children how to plant leeks at a local school. "For Father's Day," he says proudly. "And I also told them why leeks and chicory are white. Hardly anyone knew!"

Hans worked as a truck driver for over 35 years. "I was good at loading and unloading, knew exactly where I had to be. I had it all in my head and wrote it down in my own language... My own navigation."

But things changed. "There were more and more computers, digital systems... Everything was done via your mobile. And... I couldn't handle it."

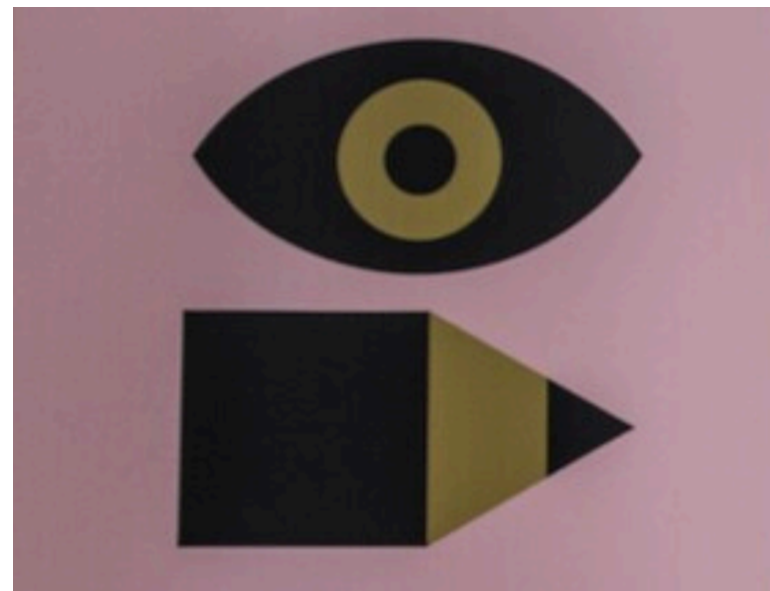
Nobody knew Hans struggled with reading and writing. "I got angry about it. As if I was stupid." Eventually, stress forced him to stop working. At 58, he entered the ROC, a vocational education

and training college in Hoorn.

"That was scary... But I was in the evening class, with only adults. Then the tension was quickly gone."

"I gave my form to the teacher. She gave it back and said, 'What do you want to learn?'" Hans wanted to write. "Now I write postcards myself - with whole stories!"

For years, he avoided computers. "The computer will never be my friend, but I dare to ask questions now."



Experts by Experience

Hans' Experience

The lessons were tailored: "Everyone worked on something different... If I got stuck at a dictation... the teacher reassured me."

"The teacher kept asking: 'What is your goal?'... That gave me the feeling that I was taken seriously."

Now retired, Hans volunteers at schools and shares his journey as a language ambassador.

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"You can achieve a lot, if you want to. You have to dare to start on your own."

"I had my life in order... But being able to read and write really makes your life bigger."

"I had my life in order... But being able to read and write really makes your life bigger."



Experts by Experience

Geran's Experience

"Don't wait too long. Your world is getting bigger." – Geran's story

"I'm Geran, just turned 60," she says with a smile. She lives in Deurne with her husband and adult son. Though she no longer works, she remains active. "I recently joined the board of Reuma Actief (a rheumatism patients' association). And at the ABC Foundation I took a step back. I wanted to be more active locally, because it takes a lot of energy."

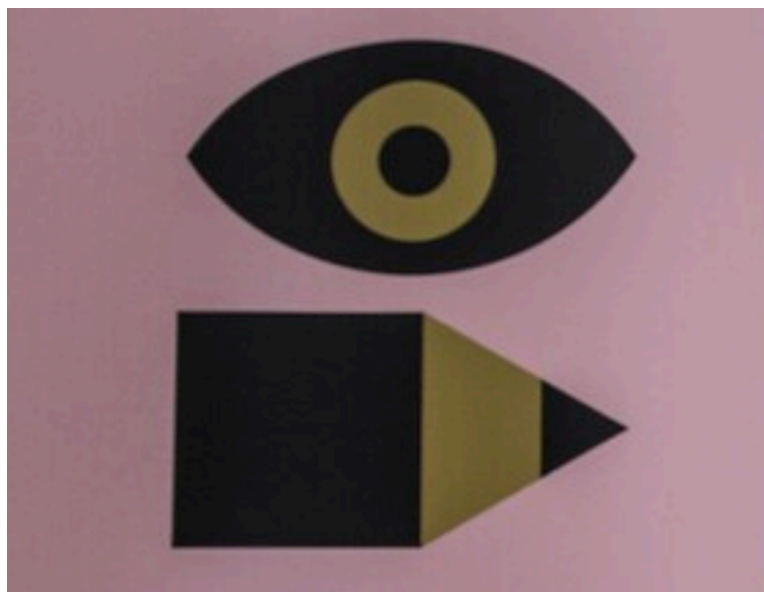
Geran struggled with reading and writing for years. "When my son was little, I read to him every day. But when I became a reading mother at his school, I got stuck... Then I knew: I have to do something with this."

A doctor referred her to social work, and eventually she joined the VET College. "At the intake I was given a dictation. That was exciting, but I also felt taken seriously." What began as Dutch lessons grew into much more. "At a sewing class, I

didn't know what to do at first... but that teacher had also been a nanny, and she knew exactly how to handle it."

"When I understood what I was doing in these lessons, I got an 8 for trading knowledge! I was so proud of that."

The lessons were tailored. "We started with the newspaper in class, but after that everyone worked at their own level." She felt safe. "I ended up sitting next to someone my age, who was exactly on the same level as me. That reassured me."



Experts by Experience

Geran's Experience

"They really looked at me as a person... they adjusted the program if necessary."

"The first lessons were in a community center. That's not a school and made it much easier for me to go there."

What did it bring her? "If only I had done it sooner". She gained self-confidence, joined a test panel, read stories, and practiced meditation. "I had said then that I had trouble reading... 'How daring you are that you dare to share that.' Yes, that made me stronger."

Now as an ambassador, she shares her story even at a large group. "I had a microphone in my hand... I thought: I'll just do it."

"Many people are ashamed. But I say: don't wait too long... I mainly want to show that it is possible. And that it changes your life."



Experts by Experience

André's Experience

"I enjoyed it" – André's Story

André Roelvink, 59, lives in Amsterdam and works in a cocoa factory. He's also a proud language ambassador. That wasn't always the case. "Reading comprehension, that was a real problem," he says. "I always had to go to a good friend... It was also she who said: 'Why don't you go back to school?'"

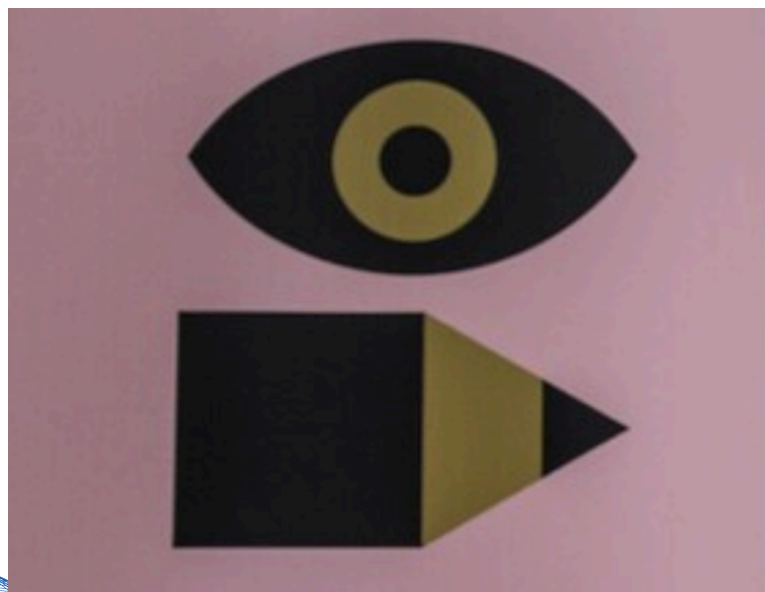
She signed him up, and André ended up at Sipi, a language school in an old school building. "That's nice, because then I don't have to travel half of Amsterdam... You're sitting there with people like you. That makes all the difference."

What did he want? "I just wanted to learn to read well... I wanted to read the book Beekman and Beekman. That used to be read aloud in primary school. I thought: I want to be able to read that book myself." That goal has been achieved. He's now a library member and reads for fun. "That's the key word: fun...Now that I can do

better, it has become fun."

His training was personal. "They look at your level, your goals... You have conversations in between, and if something doesn't go well, they adjust it. That works."

"They asked: what do you want to learn? What are you up against?" That gave André the feeling that he mattered – not just as a student.



Experts by Experience

André's Experience

"I used to be a problem child... So if someone is strict with me, it doesn't work." When something felt off, like short breaks, "I did say something about that." He feels heard. "There is a confidential advisor... and at the end of the year there is an evaluation."

Though he paused training due to busyness, he gained a lot. "My reading level has gone up... I even participated in a television program in which I read to my grandchild."

André now shares his story. "Many people have trouble reading, but don't dare to say so."

His message? "Education should be fun and enjoyable... Start with things you like. Then you automatically move forward."

"Everyone deserves to be able to learn – in a place where you can be yourself."



The Learner Voice Model

Learner Voice Model

Introduction

Adult learners provide unique insights into their prior knowledge, experience, motivations, and the quality of programmes. This makes them invaluable partners in shaping education programmes and improving the design and quality of courses. This model highlights how stakeholders on multiple levels can contribute to amplifying the voice of the learner. Examples described on the following pages serve for inspiration in realizing the Learner Voice in your own educational context. Learners' needs should be at the centre of education, for a democratic and inclusive learning culture!

Preconditions for Learner Voice

- Social justice
- Inclusivity
- Confidentiality
- Trust
- Support
- Clarity
- Competence and suitability



Scan QR-code for more background information about learner voice and the digital version of the model.



Role or action

Information:

Hover over a stakeholder's circle in the interactive PDF to reveal their role and actions.

Reflection

A Voice for All - The Voice of the Learner in Practice'

Marlies Elderenbosch and Annemarie Groot are experts on adult learning and literacy and numeracy skills. They reflect on the stories of Hans, Geran and André.

The stories of André, Geran and Hans illustrate the value of participation in adult education, at any age or life stage. Their experiences show how seriously their learning needs were taken. By adapting the curriculum to fit individual learning questions, learners felt heard and could grow in a safe environment. These are essential conditions for quality provision. Not a 'learning factory', but a personal journey

Adult education is not about mass instruction.

Den Hollander (2020) described four key characteristics of quality in adult education:

- The participant (co-)determines the content of the offer
- Form and content support personal development
- Everything is tailor-made
- Central role for intake

These stories confirm that these principles were met. Each learner received space to define and pursue personal goals—whether reading a book, writing postcards, or gaining digital confidence.

Doing, daring and sharing: the power of active citizenship

While the learning question was central, the broader voice of the learner—as a partner in shaping education—still needs more attention. It's not just about tailoring content, but about recognising learners as equals, bringing their lived experience into the process of co-creating meaningful, democratic learning environments.

Reflection

A Voice for All - The Voice of the Learner in Practice'

A call to providers

Adult learners know what works for them. Their input is vital—not only before but also during and after their learning. In adult education, this means ongoing dialogue and openness to change. That step is still growing in the Netherlands. Seeing learners as equal partners can strengthen adult education, lower participation thresholds, and make learning accessible to more adults.



**Call to
Action**

ENHANCE LEARNER VOICE

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