

Transcript of ENHANCE Podcast Episode: Inclusive learning at Zaffie

Recorded by: CINOP and ABC

Intro - Elke van Doorn (CINOP)

You are listening to the Enhance Learner Voice Podcast. In this podcast series, we take you along in the stories of adult learners, education professionals and employers from all over Europe. People who are involved in adult education every day: in classrooms, in the workplace and in policy.

What does it actually mean to truly listen to the voice of the learner? And what changes when that voice is not only heard, but also taken seriously?

This podcast is part of the Enhance project, an initiative that is funded by the European Commission. In this project, partners from different European countries work together on one clear ambition: placing learner voice central in adult education. We develop practical tools and strategies to support teachers, organisations and policymakers in strengthening participation, ownership and inclusion.

Because when learners gain influence over their own learning process, space arises for motivation, engagement and sustainable development.

In these five Dutch episodes, you will discover how learner voice takes shape in practice, which challenges we encounter and which opportunities arise when we truly learn, work and innovate together.

In this third episode, Geert Hoogenboom from Stichting ABC and myself, Elke van Doorn from CINOP, visit development company Zaffier in Alkmaar. Zaffier supports people with a distance to the labour market in developing skills and finding suitable work. The development company works together with municipalities and regular employers in the region. The services focus on guidance, support towards work and sustainable employability.

Geert Hoogenboom (Stichting ABC)

ABC and CINOP have, within the framework of the Enhance project, looked at how the voice of the learner can be strengthened within organisations and structures of adult education. In addition, we focus on the experiences that learners gain with active participation.

We are here at Zaffier, a social development company in Alkmaar and surroundings. One of the language ambassadors of ABC works here and fulfils a special role, both within and outside the company. She actively commits herself to continue developing herself, but also to motivate colleagues to learn. That is a wonderful example.

Paméla Melkert (language ambassador at Zaffier)



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I am Paméla Melkert and I am a language ambassador at Zaffier. I commit myself to low literacy, from paper and website to conversations about the learning square and other facilities. My days are nicely filled.

In addition, I am also allowed during working time to go out for Stichting ABC, and I find that variation very pleasant. In this way I can reach my goal in two ways.

Annabel Grooteman (manager Zaffier)

Zaffier is there for people with a distance to the labour market. We have a work company with approximately 1,200 people, but also an income department. There we look together with people who apply for a benefit which work is suitable.

Our main objective is that residents of Alkmaar and surroundings become as self-reliant as possible. That means that they eventually are no longer dependent on us and can, via education and work, move on to a regular employer.

About seven years ago we were approached by the library to collaborate.

Paméla Melkert

At that time a vacancy was published for a language ambassador, and I responded to that.

Annabel Grooteman

The library wanted to reach a target group that does not naturally come to the library, but is present here. That is why they brought their offering to us. In the meantime, two to three times per week library employees come to our learning square.

At the learning square, people receive tailor-made support in language and calculation. What the strength is: Paméla coordinates this and stands close to the workplace. That makes it really effective.

People often start at the learning square. In addition, we also organise activities around themes, such as elections or health insurance.

Paméla Melkert

We also do outings and practical things. People find that fantastic and learn a lot from it. They may also indicate where they run into things and are really heard.

I see that people not only become better in language and calculating, but also become more cheerful. They start talking more, ask more questions and become more independent. Some people who have been here for five years, now take initiative on the work floor.

That is because they learn in a low-threshold way and get the feeling that they can do something. Because of that they also dare more.

Geert Hoogenboom



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You are an important link in that.

Paméla Melkert

Yes, I am really in between. People like to talk with me, because I recognise what they run into. I also honestly say when I find something difficult. Together we then find a solution, and that gives trust.

People keep coming back and are motivated. Even during holidays they ask when the learning square starts again.

Annabel Grooteman

We actually have everything in house. People do not have to go to another place; the learning comes to them. That lowers the threshold enormously.

In addition, we have a development programme 'Learning and Working', in which people go through a learning line. For example, they can obtain practical certificates via the Talland College, in directions such as logistics or cleaning.

Also informal learning in the workplace plays a large role.

Paméla Melkert

We have also brought school offer into the house, because people indicated that they really wanted to learn Dutch. In this way a beautiful learning line arises: from the learning square to formal education and then possibly secondment to other companies.

Geert Hoogenboom

It remains difficult to reach people who have difficulty with language.

Paméla Melkert

That is correct. Many people think that they can already do it. It is difficult to show them where they can still grow.

Annabel Grooteman

What strikes me is that organisations often find it difficult to connect with this target group. They use, for example, too complicated language.

Paméla Melkert

They have to step out of their own bubble. You do not have to change everything, but look together at difficult words and make it more understandable.

Geert Hoogenboom

You actually have a kind of school in house.



Annabel Grooteman

Yes, and that is a different vision on learning. The threshold is much lower.

Paméla Melkert

We have also noticed that. When I started recruiting, we suddenly had 80 participants. People like it that they can learn at their workplace, in a safe environment.

Elke van Doorn

Can you explain how the learning square works?

Paméla Melkert

We work with programmes such as Oefenen.nl. People go through modules at their own pace and receive a certificate at the end. If they need extra help, they receive guidance.

We also treat themes such as safe internet use or dealing with energy. That makes it practical and relevant.

Geert Hoogenboom

So it is not only about learning, but also about self-confidence and independence.

Paméla Melkert

Exactly. For me personally, learning has also changed a lot. Earlier I had difficulty at school, but when I received suitable guidance, a world opened up for me.

You start to feel different: more self-confident, less shy, and you belong more. That is extremely important.

The system is not always set up for people like me. Because of that you have to fight extra hard. That can make you strong, but also tired.

Now I am in a place where I feel good and where I can be myself. That gives peace.

What I find important: look at what someone *can* do. Ask about interests and talents. That gives people self-confidence and helps them forward.

Geert Hoogenboom

Can you also reach others with your story?

Paméla Melkert

Yes, people recognise themselves in it. They want to be seen and heard. And in the end it is about one thing: independence.

Annabel Grooteman



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We will soon collaborate with organisations such as 113, because also there the communication does not always connect with low-literate people.

Paméla Melkert

If you do not understand information, you also do not know where you can find help. Then you can get stuck.

That is why it is important that young people already learn at school how systems work: what is a payslip, how does an insurance work, where can you get help? That prevents problems later.

Geert Hoogenboom

In other countries that is indeed already done more often in advance.

Paméla Melkert

That should also happen here. It helps young people to stand stronger in society.

Elke van Doorn (closing)

This was the third episode of the Enhance Learner Voice Podcast.

In the next episode we visit furniture producer Vepa in Hoogeveen and we go into conversation with the Alliance for a Literate Drenthe. We discuss how approximately 120 organisations work together to strengthen basic skills in the region.

Do you want to know more about the Enhance Learner Voice Project? Then go to: enhancelearnervoice.com.



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