

Eur-Alpha

European network for adult literacy and numeracy



Listening to Learners' Voices in Literacy Practice

Research on impact of the learners' workshop

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One of the many opportunities presented by the EUR-ALPHA Network has been the opportunity to bring together learners from many different countries to share their experiences as literacy learners, to give voice to their ideas and views and to empower learners to make changes to their own lives and the lives of others.

Adult Learners from various countries represented in the project met at 3 workshops each lasting one week - in Namur, Barcelona and in Brussels. The underlying approaches at these meetings were strongly influenced by the philosophy and ideas of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Through presentations and discussions learners began to think about themselves and their situation and a dialogue was created to deepen their understanding. The need to enhance justice and human rights through developing new ways of learning was also discussed. In each of the workshops the learners exchanged experiences (through interpreters) about their learning experiences at home and their shared views and experiences attending the seminars. Evidence was gathered through group interviews with learners carried out in 5 different language groups. Learners were asked a series of questions about their expectations, experiences meeting others and their involvement in developing a learner manifesto.

A summary of findings is as follows:

- Learners appreciated the experience to meet with other learners from all over Europe.
- They were able to exchange experiences and expressed the view that they had benefited immensely from the educational and cultural experience of being part of EUR-ALPHA.
- They said they had greatly increased their self-confidence through meeting and talking with other adult learners, volunteer workers, teachers and others.
- They had a much better understanding of what it meant to be European as a result participating in the project.

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- The meetings reinforced their views that a need for help with literacy skills should not be seen as a problem created by individuals themselves, but rather a problem for the whole of society, the causes of which h needs to be fully understood by everyone.
- Learners mentioned that discrimination was experienced by literacy learners in many countries and included an inability to access employment, educational opportunities and a quality of life enjoyed by most other people.
- By focusing on the development of a Learner Charter many became aware of the potential for education to empower individuals to make changes to their lives and assisting communities to meet the challenges of a lack of literacy skills.
- The need for the European Union and National Governments to acknowledge access to basic education a basic human right was strongly expressed.
- The power of learning through adult education and other literacy projects to engage citizens was acknowledged as was the need to provide a high quality service.
- The promotion of learning networks (whether local, national and international level) which bring teachers, learners and others together to provide high quality provision was recognised as an important step forward in reaching others in the future.
- Researching and reflecting on good practices was seen as central to the network and to improving services.