

## New trends in raising demand for learning among adults at risk of exclusion

**Project: reach of illiterate native adults for the courses Dutch as mother tongue (NT1)**

### Background

We have in Belgium a serious problem of illiteracy.

	level 1	level 2	Level 3	4/5
Proza	18,4%	28,2%	39,0%	14,3%
Document	15,3%	24,2%	43,2%	17,2%
Kwantitatief	16,7%	23,0%	37,8%	22,5%

15 - 18% means 700 000 - 850 000 adults.

Categories with higher risk are: adults without a diploma secondary school, women, elder people, adults without a job and low schooled working people.

The best way to improve your skills is to participate in training, education. But also on this part, Belgium is not doing well. We have a lower participation than other countries, and people who participate are already high educated...

Since 1990, adult basic education provides education for low skilled adults and adults who are behind in their education. The objective of the educational programme is to teach and to improve basic competencies, which are vital to be able to function and to play an active part in society.

Every year, more adults subscribe for adult basic education. Last year, we had 27 000 subscriptions. So the last 10 years, there was an evolution in participation of 0,22 to 0,65%. Which obviously is not enough to solve the problem of illiteracy.

And an even bigger problem is the participation of adults to NT 1 and arithmetic. The adult basic education courses on offer cover various topics: Dutch as a mother-tongue (NT1), Dutch as a second language (NT2), literacy in mothertongue: (Turkish and Arabic (Alfa ET), social knowledge and skills (SKV) and arithmetic (Rek), ICT and French or English (basic level). For some courses (ICT and NT2) we have waiting lists. For these courses, participation is always increasing. Even without any way of promotion. For NT1 and Arithmetic, there is for the last years a status quo. Regarding to the emphasis of the illiteracy problem, this is rather strange.

## Project

The 29 adult basic education centres are trying, each in his own way, to stimulate participation on NT1/ arithmetic: local promotion, contacts with referring organisations, information on local television... In 2000, we started the project with two objectives:

- 1) to put all the knowledge on this matter together
- 2) to choose experimental actions

## Results of the first year

Why do people not participate in adult basic education or why do they drop out? What do we learn from this? Which new insights can we use in actions or campaigns.

### - **Need**

They don't participate because they don't experience for example being unable to read as a shortcoming. (only the society feels it as a need).

If they are forced to follow a course, they are not motivated.

They have very clear expectations.

Not: reading a book or writing a letter

But: reading advertising leaflets, writing e-mails...

Native speakers do not have high expectations (in comparison with allochthonous)

### **Motivations**

Motivation answers the question: "What do we want to achieve through adult basic education?"

For example, to find work.

Motivation points to the social objective of basic education. Basic education seeks to increase people's ability to find their own way forward. It is in terms of motivation that you can talk to people. It is the sales/buying argument.

*Motivation might be the most relevant distinguishing feature of any target group. It is this that we need to map out first when we work, think and speak about target groups.*

### *What motives?*

People can have varying motives for taking part in adult basic education. These motives were found by analysing data on existing course participants, by study of literature and by testing in practice. We arrived at the following summary list:

- People with individual motivation (who are looking for personal development)
- People with a social motivation -in a narrow definition – (who wish to learn to function better in their immediate social environment as parents, as partners, in associations)
- People with a social motivation -in a broader definition -, who wish to function better in society as consumers, as voters, as users of services.

- People with an economic motivation (who wish to improve their economic position: find better work, stay in their jobs, prepare for promotions)
- People with an educational motivation (who wish to prepare for various forms of further education and teaching)
- At times people also come for inappropriate motives. We distinguish two inappropriate motives:  
people who come primarily for the social contact  
persons directed to basic education by the employment or social security services (VDAB, OCMV) and who therefore take part because they are required to.

## Barriers

In summary we can say that the most important barriers are:

- ✓ the *information barrier* (people have incomplete or inappropriate information about basic education – by in-depth interviews, we know this is a serious problem for adult basic education)
- ✓ the *situational barrier* (one's own situation forms a hindrance in the form of lack of time or resources)
- ✓ the *institutional barrier* (the existing provision is inappropriate in terms of form or content)
- ✓ the *psychological barrier* (there are psychological hindrances such as fear of being in a group, and fear of failure or stigmatisation). This barrier, as we explored by in-depth interviews, is very important for the people who should come to adult basic education. When people decide to participate in an educational program, they risk their social image (fear). Furthermore, they admit their feelings of incompetence (fear of failure). This barrier decreases when they experience themselves as a learning individual.

It is important to realise that there are *biographical key moments* in a person's life that "force" people to participate:

personal critical moments (death of a partner, children with homework...)  
being laughed at too much  
being forced to participate

## Capabilities

People may well over- or underestimate themselves. In any case it is difficult for them to estimate in advance what taking part in a basic education course will really demand. Providing good information on this to potential and new course participants can help prevent failure and dropping out.

They must have a certain level of learning competence :

- *physical* (sight, hearing, mobility, etc.)
- *emotional* (ability to accept help, contact skills, self-control, assertiveness)
- *mental* (staying power, concentration)
- *cognitive* (ability to retain and process information)

## Segmentation

Whether we are talking about needs, motivations, barriers... it must be clear that those words have a different content or import for each illiterate person.

But you can find subgroups of people with equal needs and motivations. For example:

Younger students participate because of the family, because of work.

Older students participate because of personal development

If we want to reach new students, we have to make a segmentation first.

Maybe we need to develop two different networks, ways of approach: one for people looking after work and one for working people (and retired ones).

### **Activation /to refer / cooperation**

An analysis of the recruitment channels, learned us that most of the students are referred by organisations.

#### *Activation:*

People are approached by educational workers to becoming aware of latent educational needs. For this, you need intensive contacts. In the mean time, the activation course you want to give must be related to the specific questions, needs of the segment you want to reach.

#### *To refer*

Organisations or individuals refer illiterate people to the normal courses.

#### *Cooperation*

Centers cooperate with companies, prisons, organisations... and offer for them special courses.

## Results of the second year

We organised a brainstorm to choose two local actions. If they were a success, other education centers should try them out. After that, we should make a manual for all centers.

Action 1: an activation program: selfbanking (cooperation with the university of Leuven)

Course of 3 x 3 hours: practical knowledge, trying out in a bank, talking about reading and writing and trying to motivate students to participate to the normal course  
Promoting: special leaflets, presentation in the existing groups, contacts with banks, advertising in local papers (was the most successful)  
Result: 11 students, of which two went afterwards to the course NT1

### Evaluation

Difficult for the teacher to combine in nine hours information on selfbanking and on reading and writing.

Difficult to persuade people to go from 9 hours to a trajectory of one or more years. We must make a trajectory of several activation programs

Segmentation !!

When is a program successful?: when people participate immediately to another course, or when they have a positive learning experience?

Other programs

Euro

Mobile phone: SMS

Action 2: computer and language training for the job

Segmentation: working people

Start: we asked companies and institutions to think about contents for illiterate working adults. They suggested immediately that language learning should be combined with ICT.

Course: a combination of language tools and computer skills.

Promotion: direct contacts with companies, leaflets, phone calls... The second year: open advertising

Result:

companies were only enthusiastic when they obviously saw the surplus value for the company.

The course is a success. Since then, there is a yearly increasing number of students for Dutch as a mother tongue.

The adult basic education centre has a more positive profile

## Results

There are no general strategies to increase the reach of students NT1.

The success of initiatives is various:

Positive effects of other initiatives:

A testimony of students (there is f.e. a new book, there was a collaboration with a newspaper last year, a collaboration with artists)

A campaign on television

Restrict information on leaflets, in advertising, in contacts with organisations to NT1

## Recommendations

More efficient collaboration. For that , we need

Research

Promotion by the government

Experiments: learning on the job...

Incentives for organisations

An assessment centre

Campaign on television with positive testimonies

Financial support for promotion on NT1

Research on segmentation

More financial support for the centres for recruitment, promotion, activation, networking,

More possibilities to give activation programs a non formal content

More investments in programs for learning with educational or job perspective

Research on programs that combine ICT and languagelearning