



## Telling life stories

### Blog 3 about Erasmus+ KA2 project *How to learn a language? (H2L2)* – September 2023

In the KA2 project *How to Learn a Language (H2L2)*, we are working with adult second language and literacy learners on strategies to strengthen their learning skills. One strategy could be to *feel good* and have *self confidence* in one's learning. That can be the result of things like feeling heard and seen, feeling connected to others, and developing self-confidence. We chose 'Telling life stories' as an activity to establish a learning environment promoting well-being and enabling the use of affective strategies. This blog shares some experiences of one of our pilot groups, running in the Netherlands.

#### *What did we do?*

We invited learners to discuss a number of topics related to their preferences and biographies, including: things that make you happy, things you are good at, the country you were born in, a childhood memory, migration experiences, and dreams for your future. Learners brought objects or photographs to school, related to the topic of the specific class. They shared their stories orally first and then processed their own story by writing and, if they wished, drawing about it. The products they thus created were photographed and collected in a digital portfolio. Subsequently we revisited the stories by looking back at the writings and drawings.

#### *What we learned*

Talking about personal topics proved very stimulating. Learners were eager to talk about their experiences and their often emotional memories; this also got the more silent learners talking. Soraya\* for example, told about dropping out of school out of fear for her teacher, who would treat her badly when she would make a mistake. Elisabeth told about selling oranges after school, to support the family income. Malika, from the age of nine, also had to take care for her family's income by working as a servant in rich people's houses. She shared the memories of the duties she had to fulfil and how badly she was treated.

Learners found out that there were quite some similarities in their stories. This increased group bonding and mutual support. It also led to fundamental discussions, for example about the position of women and girls, about how unfair they now thought it was, that they had not received proper schooling and how eager they were to catch up.

Drawing was received with enthusiasm in this group. For learners who are beginners in a new language and new to writing, drawing enabled them to share a thought or a memory. The phase of processing the story on a work sheet seemed to help processing the memories. Subsequently talking about these memories was facilitated by the drawings.

The 'Telling life stories' activities proved genuinely engaging and empowering, and made learners see themselves as well as their classmates in a new perspective.

\* The names used in this blog are pseudonyms.

Read more about the project and partners at [ITTA UvA](#)