

CASE STUDY: AN EXAMPLE OF NEWCOMERS IN ADULT EDUCATION

Supporting theme prioritisation and social-emotional learning (SEL) among newcomers in adult education

School type: Adult education

Country: The Netherlands

SIREE partner organisation: Municipality of Middelburg

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

One of the Learning Communities (LCs) in Middelburg was formed together with the TAAT Foundation, which offers language courses to illiterate newcomers. The students, whose backgrounds varied, came to school three times a week for half a day over 30 weeks. In 2019-2020 most of the students came from Syria, Eritrea, and Somalia. The ages vary greatly, between 20 and 50 years old, and the LC consisted of 10 to 20 participants. The methods used by the TAAT foundation are called TPR (Total Physical Response) and TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling). TPR is where the students learn concepts by hearing, looking, feeling, talking, reading and role play. This approach needs a rich learning environment and stimulates active learning, elements we know are conducive to the learning process. TPRS is where students tell stories, and these provide the basis for reading, writing, and speaking a new language. The course meetings are very interactive due to the use of these learning methods.



WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF MIDDELBURG?

At the LCs, it was important to work on integration in education, cultural integration, and parental involvement. The model of social-emotional learning (SEL) (Durlak et al, 2017; Van Overveld, 2017; Goedhart, 2018) is used to give shape to these goals. SEL means there is attention to self-awareness, self-control, social awareness, establishing relationships, and making choices within the setting of the classroom, school, home and neighbourhood. The next elements characterised the design and content of the LCs in Middelburg:

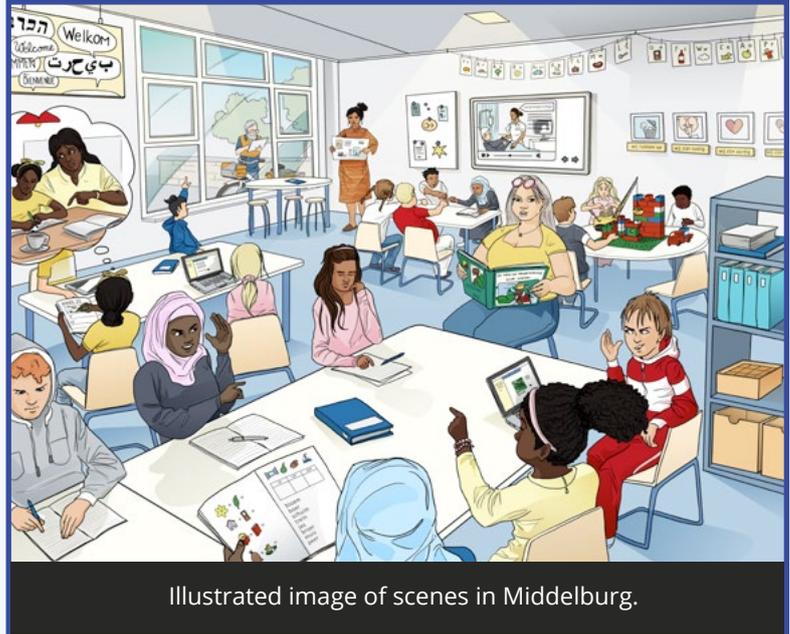
- **Participation:** doing something together with others
- **SEL:** the basis of doing things together
- **Integration:** national government placed a strong emphasis on language and work, the Municipality of Middelburg wanted to put a strong emphasis on culture
- **Cultural sensitivity:** create LCs where participants listen, pay attention to differences in each other's opinions, norms, and values, talk about and work on tolerance and respect, and pay attention to positive aspects of being different
- **Parental involvement:** home and pre-school involvement and parent support
- **Support** to make choices on which subjects will be discussed
- **Using discussion boards and role play** as helpful didactic methods for participants with different cultural backgrounds and native languages

METHOD

During the first meeting of a LC, 80 photos were used that relate to topics of self-awareness, self-control, social awareness, establishing relationships and making choices within the setting of the classroom, school and home and neighbourhood.

The participants were given time to look at the photos and asked to choose two pictures of topics they want to talk, learn, or have questions about. In a circle they explain why they chose the photos/subjects.

The explanation is noted, and the most crucial topics are determined by giving a preferential vote with cards. The photo with the most cards will be discussed at the next meeting, and the teacher and facilitator plan for this. During the meetings, attention is paid to stories, language exercises, values and customs, education, emotions, social contacts, exchange of knowledge and actions. Discussion boards are used for SEL topics and



Illustrated image of scenes in Middelburg.

designed by an illustrator who used Middelburg scenes as a source of inspiration, such as the community centre, living room, market, park, school, and a schoolyard.

HOW DID WE APPROACH THE TAAT FOUNDATION?

- 1) A presentation is made on what, who, why, where, when and how, and colleagues of the Municipality of Middelburg approached schools with the proposal to start a LC. Facilitators had a meeting with the principal and one or two teachers
- 2) There was a second conversation about how the school deals with topics such as participation, SEL, integration, cultural sensitivity and parental involvement, its methods, and materials
- 3) The third meeting was where the model of SEL and the working method was explained and an overview of school materials that could be used during the LC

WHY DID THE TAAT FOUNDATION WANT TO PARTICIPATE?

- Asking participants what they want to talk and learn about is new and attractive
- TAAT wants to integrate aspects other than language acquisition, such as SEL, into its own program
- TAAT wants to contribute to increasing knowledge about integration in education
- The equal cooperation between teachers and the facilitator, such as preparing the meetings to learn from each other
- Developing new materials and lessons they can integrate into their own program

ACTIONS

The students chose the following topics for actions: **living, doing things together, emotions, social contacts with people in the neighbourhood, activities in the neighbourhood, and taking good care of nature.** A group of neighbours were visited, a barbeque held with the families of participants of the foundation, and there is now more

intensive cooperation with the Pennywafelhuis – an initiative with creative workshops and a meeting point in the foundation's neighbourhood. We have talked several times about education and raising children, but not all participants are parents. Two concrete actions include learning Dutch songs with a music teacher at primary school Het Element, and also making a poster about nature with text in the participants' mother tongue for the primary schools in the district.

DESCRIPTION OF MEETINGS ON SUBJECT "DOING GOOD FOR THE EARTH"

During the first LC meeting of the new group of the TAAT Foundation, four participants from last year's group were present together with nine new participants, from Syria, Eritrea, and Somalia. Eighty photos were spread out in the hall of the building and participants chose two photos each which symbolised for them topics they considered crucial. Back in the classroom, the participants said why they chose the photos. For example, a slogan on one photo showed a mother and child and a participant said: "Talking to children is important, how should you talk to children?". Many participants did not have a question, but indicated they considered the subject important. Another example was a slogan of parents helping at the school of their children: "If the school asks for help, do so". A photo was taken of all participants with the images they chose. Participants placed cards on the photo they wanted to discuss next time, and the topic chosen was "Doing Good for the Earth".

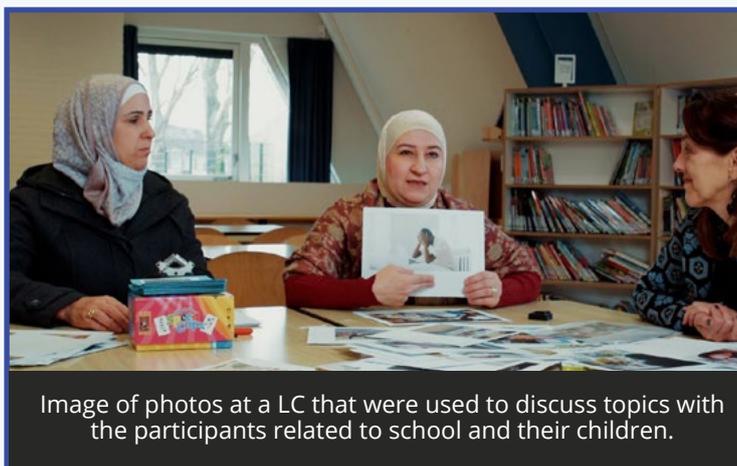


Image of photos at a LC that were used to discuss topics with the participants related to school and their children.

Both facilitator and teachers of the foundation discussed the difference between participants with questions, and those who indicated what was on the photos. It may have been better to give the explanation in the native language for this first lesson, so the facilitator investigated whether this was possible. For the next meeting, the facilitator made a PowerPoint template with pictures, videos, and worksheets. The teachers made language exercises and put the question forward: "What can we do here in the neighbourhood to be good to the Earth?".

The second meeting in October used a discussion board of a park to introduce the topic. We talked about how clean it is in the park and asked how did that happen? A man eats cake from a plastic plate with a plastic fork, what does he do with the plate and fork afterwards? There are people working with papers, what do they do with the papers afterwards? We talked about waste separation and the bins at school, at home and in the neighbourhood. We discussed tips for using less plastic, such as not using soap bottles but bars of soap. We looked at posters, listened to songs and watched videos for children on this topic, and they were asked what they could do in the neighbourhood to work towards a cleaner planet. All participants happily received a bar of Aleppo Soap.

Below: The LC participants with their posters about being good to the Earth.



At a second meeting in October, TAAT Foundation teachers made speaking cards with questions for participants to ask each other about the topic “Being good to the Earth”. At the last meeting it was agreed participants would make posters about the environment for primary schools in the area, but with text on it in their native language (see above). The posters were drawn and pasted with texts in their mother tongue at this meeting, and the facilitator enlarged them to A3 size. Parents brought the posters to the schools where their children attended, and one was also put in the LC room as well as at the Pennywafelhuis.

Across these LCs, actions including those presented below were implemented:

- Regular online and offline talking tables where newcomer students could practice the new language while speaking to someone local
- Visits to houses in the neighbourhood and getting to know the resident(s)
- A visit to the local museum
- Date sessions with employers
- A market where students could meet social service organisations
- A buddy system
- A periodic newsletter
- An access pass for cultural city activities