



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIELD OF LITERACY AND BASIC EDUCATION

State of the art in Austria

on behalf of SVEB

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1. Introduction

The following report intends to give an overview of professional development in the field of adult literacy and basic education in Austria. It will hopefully add some useful information to the Grundtvig TRAIN project: *Professionalisation of Literacy and Basic Education – Basic Modules for Teacher Training*, since the structures and strategies in Austria vary from those in place and adopted by other European countries.

This report shall start out by reviewing the background of national policy and strategy for adult basic education in Austria before going on to describe the existing structures which are in place to support development. Finally, it will focus on the professionalisation of adult literacy teachers and the training courses which were initiated in 2003.

The information and data contained in this report have been compiled from several publications within the EQUAL project: *In.Bewegung* (7/2005 to 6/2007), from the government's Magazine No. 1 on literacy issues (4/2007), and from others. The author of this article has been in charge of the development of an overall concept for teacher training courses, their realisation and evaluation (since 2003), as well as for quality standards and a professional profile for teachers of literacy. These activities and experiences are included in this review.

2. Development of literacy and basic education in Austria

2.1 General overview and data

Austria neither participated in the IALS (1995 and 1997) nor in the adult literacy and life-skills survey (ALL) in 2005. The first time that the country joined international surveys was for PISA, in 2000, 2003 and 2006, and the existing data refers back to these surveys. The figures¹ show that Austria faces a major literacy problem, just like other European countries: 18% of the 15- and 16-year-olds only achieved level 1 and below with regard to literacy, language and numeracy skills. 10% of them had greater problems with reading comprehension, and 4% performed at the lowest level. 5% were not included. This equates to a number of about 18,000 young people leaving school each year without the necessary basic skills provision to pursue learning or to find employment. If the figure of 18-20% is applied to the population on the labour market, we arrive at an estimated 600,000 to 1,300,000 people with literacy problems.

Yet the number of persons who attend literacy courses does not exceed 1,000 a year. This does not include those attending special literacy courses for migrants, i.e. with German as foreign language.

Until the year 2000 little attention had been given to literacy in Austria, especially at the level of governmental policy. There were some basic skills tuition providers, spread rather unevenly across the country. Co-operation and coordination in the literacy field was lacking, and quality standards for the provision of literacy classes or qualification standards for practitioners did not exist.

From 2000 onwards the Ministry of Education changed its policy and supported a number of initiatives and projects which were aimed at developing suitable structures for delivering 'skills for life'² for adults. The projects were co-financed, with 50% of the funding supplied by strand 3 of the European Social Fund (ESF) from 2000 to 2006. The change in policy was due to the pressure from the programmes launched by the European Union, interventions by the Austrian UNESCO commission and the results of the first PISA survey in 2000.

¹ Haider, G. & Reiter, C. (Eds.), 2004, PISA 2003 – Internationaler Vergleich von Schülerleistungen. Nationaler Bericht.

² In Austria the terms *Alphabetisierung*, *Basisbildung* and *Grundbildung* are used.

The measures supported by the Ministry of Education from 2000 to 2006 encompassed:

- the *Netzwerk.Alphabetisierung.at* network in 2003, which was founded by the main providers of literacy tuition at that time: the Adult Education Centre of Floridsdorf in Vienna, ISOP Graz, abcSalzburg and the Adult Education Centre of Linz
- the development of a concept for teacher training courses: Adult Education Centre of Floridsdorf in Vienna (Antje Doberer-Bey)
- teacher training courses since 2003: I (2003-04); II (2004-05), and III (2006-08) and IV (2008-10) at university level, in co-operation with the Austrian Institute for Adult Education BlfEB, Strobl³
- research on literacy: Volkshochschule Floridsdorf, Vienna (A. Doberer-Bey) in co-operation with the Department of Applied Linguistics at the University of Vienna (since 2002)
- basic skills provision at the Adult Education Centre Floridsdorf, Vienna (model programme) since 2000, for about 140 participants a year

In 2005 the Ministry of Education approved the **EQUAL project: *In.Bewegung*** (2005 – 2007) which *Netzwerk.Alphabetisierung.at* had applied for. The development partnership *In.Bewegung* focussed upon building the requisite infrastructure to enable an effective qualitative offer of skills for life provision for adults. This project was funded in equal part by the European Community Initiative (ESF) and Austria.

One of the main achievements of this project was the bringing together in a joined-up strategy of different partners that traditionally did not co-operate with each other, such as the trades unions, the Federal Economic Chamber, the Chamber of Labour, the Labour Market Service (AMS), a university, and the main players in the field – the organisations in the network.

In.Bewegung led to the following achievements:

- a central counselling facility via telephone (info hotline – Adult Education Centre / Linz)
- quality standards for literacy and skills for life provision as well as training providers; job profiling for literacy/skills for life teachers and trainers; a definition of “levels of professionalisation” and a curriculum for continued professional development of trainers (Adult Education Centre of Floridsdorf in Vienna)
- tools for raising literacy awareness and creating awareness of skills for life issues among regional stakeholders and at the workplace, and among employees (ISOP Graz)
- a model for ICT-supported literacy activity, aimed at rural women needing skills for life training/support in the Salzburg region (abcSalzburg)
- new approaches to workplace literacy and to raising educational interest among educationally disadvantaged workers (adult education centres in Carinthia and the trade unions in Upper Austria)⁴.

The follow-up project: *In.Bewegung II* (2007 – 2010) was approved in September 2007. The main aims of this partnership are to implement quality standards in the field of literacy, to

³ The courses are entitled *Lehrgänge zur Ausbildung von Alphabetisierungs- und BasisbildungspädagogInnen* and are held at the Bundesinstitut für Erwachsenenbildung BlfEB, Strobl

⁴ Summaries and products can be downloaded from www.alphabetisierung.at.

develop a wide range of single modules for teacher training, to devise a model for skills for life tuition in vocational schools, to further develop ICT-supported literacy activities and to implement literacy at the workplace in Upper Austria. The partners will be the same as in *In.Bewegung I*, but are now joined by three associated partners, the adult education centres of Burgenland, the Tyrol and Vorarlberg.

The targets achieved, the partnerships and the structures created constitute a solid basis for future work. But the financial support and funding for skills for life tuition at a wider extent is still missing.

A look at the provision of skills for life in the Austrian federal states (*Laender*) will help to give a better picture of the general situation in the country.

2.2 A look at the situation in the Austrian Laender

There is no mandatory requirement to foster basic adult education in Austria, so the situation in the states differs according to the structures and funding available.

Those federal states with partners in the development partnership *In.Bewegung* are better equipped and integrated in a broader context, which allows them to develop strategies and programmes with the necessary financial support and within a supportive structure.

Even so, in many regions literacy is still not given the importance it deserves by the responsible authorities. There is a tendency to delegate responsibility to adult education providers, who try to build up their programmes, with almost no subsidies and under very difficult conditions. In some states, providers get meagre subsidies from different bodies such as the municipalities, the AMS or the regional (state) governments, for which they usually have to apply every year – meaning continuity is at risk. And there are still many regions in the country with no provision of literacy courses at all.

In 2006 the umbrella organisation of adult education centres in Austria (VÖV) started to organise bi-annual meetings with representatives of the centres interested in literacy issues. Today, these meetings have an important role as a forum for discussion and for the exchange of experience and information.

2.3 Literacy providers

The market structure of providers in the field of literacy can be characterised as follows:

- There are about 15 providers of skills for life tuition in Austria.
- Many of them, as mentioned above, are partners in the ESF-financed project *In.Bewegung II*. In addition, the main adult education centres in Vorarlberg, Innsbruck and Burgenland are incorporated in this partnership. They all constitute the *Netzwerk Basisbildung*, a network of the main providers in the field.
- There are some smaller providers and non-profit organisations specialised in the tuition of literacy, but their part is very small.
- The private sector does not engage in the provision of skills for life.
- Other providers such as adult education centres or NGOs are specialised in literacy tuition for migrants. They are not the subject of this report. In Austria the tuition of migrants has traditionally been treated separately from that of adults with German as their first language. This segregation goes back to a long prevailing taboo regarding literacy problems within the native population: it led to separate strategies being devised for many years. In future, however, the signs are that there will be enhanced co-operation between both fields.

2.4 Financing and participation

- In two of Austria's nine states the organisation and provision of skills for life is financed by the local Labour Market Service (Styria and Lower Austria). In both cases, the lead coordinator, administrative staff and teachers are all employed. They receive financial support for continued professional development (i.e. € 1,000 a year) which partly takes place during their working time. Learners do not pay for tuition.
- Vienna is the only state where the structure and provision of basic education has been fully financed by the Ministry of Education and the European Social Fund, strand 3, and strand 2 from 2007 onwards (at one institution, the Adult Education Centre of Floridsdorf in Vienna). Tuition has been free since October 2007. In September the Adult Education Centre of Innsbruck (Tyrol) joined the programme and now has a solid financial basis for tuition and teacher training. The teachers, however, work freelance.
- Providers get mixed funding in the other states: partly via projects such as those financed by the European Social Fund, or by the local authorities, the states and the Labour Market Service (this is the case in Salzburg, Vorarlberg, Carinthia and Burgenland). Learners mostly have to pay fees for tuition.
- In most states individuals can obtain a grant for skills for life tuition, for example from the trades unions, the Chamber of Labour or from local services for employees

To summarise: the conditions and structures for the provision of skills for life are very diverse. Tuition is free only for people participating in programmes for the unemployed and from 2007 at one organisation in Vienna. Early 2008 will reveal whether participation can be raised through free access to classes. In other organisations participants have to pay for literacy courses. Most charges are low, varying between € 2 per hour and € 70 (35.5 hours) per semester. In contrast, over € 200 per semester must be paid at one organisation that does not receive any funding.

As mentioned before, the number of learners participating in literacy courses in Austria is about 1,000 a year. This is far too few in relation to the number of adults with literacy problems and to the data available from the surveys. Hence the developing partnership of *In.Bewegung II* will continue to fight for nationwide provision and free access to skills for life courses, as well as for the commitment of policy makers to the issues of literacy.

3. Concept of teaching literacy and basic education

This section intends to outline the efforts undertaken in the field of the professional development of literacy teachers. It begins with a description of the background and rationale behind these efforts, which is followed by a short overview of the present situation of literacy teachers. Finally, it traces the main lines of the modular teacher-training course at university level.

3.1 Background to a national strategy for professionalisation in literacy teacher training

From 2000 onwards, the amended policy of the Austrian Ministry of Education established the basis for the development of structures in the field of literacy. Funds from the European Social Fund were invested in adult education, with some of them ringfenced for literacy programmes. The first PISA surveys were carried out and from 2003 onwards the Austrian UNESCO commission reinforced its call for the Government to pass measures in the field of literacy (UNESCO Literacy Decade).

The measures related to professionalism in teacher training which the Ministry of Education supported until 2006 were:

- the development of a concept for teacher training courses;
- teacher training courses in co-operation with the Austrian Institute for Adult Education BlfEB, Strobl.

The *In.Bewegung* partnership (2005-2007) went even further and developed:

- a modular training scheme for literacy teachers to acquire specific qualifications;
- quality standards for providers, trainers and tuition, as well as a qualification framework for trainers.

With all these achievements, literacy providers have now established a solid basis in the pivotal area of teaching and qualifications.

3.2 Rationale

The rationale behind these activities was to improve the quality of teaching and services provided to learners. Hitherto, no standardised or formal teacher training had been available to deliver the specific skills for teaching adults with literacy problems. The new teachers of literacy were trained by those more experienced in the field or by experts from teacher training colleges (*Pädagogische Akademien*) or from Germany (Peter Hubertus, Monika Tröster).

Some literacy teachers are primary or secondary school teachers, others are language teachers in higher and adult education, and some have backgrounds such as theatre and dramaturgy, psychology, sociology, linguistics or pedagogy. Teachers from these varied backgrounds needed additional training in the specific competencies required in literacy work. At the same time it was also necessary to specify the requirements of literacy teaching, and to develop a framework of qualifications for teachers.

Another aim was to improve the socio-economic situation of the practitioners as a means of assuring quality of provision. As already mentioned, many teachers still work part-time on a freelance basis. Building up teams of employed teachers provides opportunities for joint activities, for reflection and the exchange of experience, for the development of ideas and concepts, and leads to the enhanced coordination of learner support. The quality standards elaborated in this respect draw special attention to these aspects.

3.3 The project: Professionalisation in the literacy field

Due to its widespread activities and experience in the field of literacy, the Adult Education Centre of Floridsdorf in Vienna was commissioned by the Ministry to develop the first concepts for the training of literacy teachers.

In 2003 the first course was launched at and in association with the Austrian Institute for Adult Education. Up to now two one-year courses have been held (2003-04 and 2004-05). 14 students completed the first course and 20 the second one.

Courses III (2006-08) and IV (2008-10) were upgraded to university level in order to improve quality and attach greater importance to professionalism in literacy training, as this constitutes a central element in high quality provision. Additional two-year modules considered essential to the professional profile have been integrated in these courses. Currently, course III is running with 12 participants plus 9 students from the former courses

wishing to upgrade their skillsbase and obtain the academic certificate awarded with this course.⁵

4. Review of literacy teacher competencies

As experience shows, literacy work requires a wide range of special know-how and competencies.⁶ These can be outlined as follows:

General knowledge and understanding

- a deeper understanding about the interrelationships between information, society and literacy issues
- knowledge about the causes of poor literacy and numeracy, their implications for the individuals as well as the social, cultural and economic consequences, and their relevance to learning and teaching
- knowledge about current requirements at the workplace and in daily life
- a deeper understanding of gender mainstreaming and diversity

Professional competencies

- theoretical knowledge about the acquisition of basic skills (reading, writing, mathematics, ICT)
- the ability to teach reading, writing, mathematics and ICT with variety of methods and adequate didactics (i.e. teaching which is appropriate for adults)
- the ability to organise a learning environment suited to the learners' resources and supportive of their needs
- the ability to prepare learner-oriented lesson plans and to initiate learning processes
- the ability to foster acceptance and understanding of diversity
- the ability to foster autonomy and self-orientation of the learners
- knowledge of and the ability to apply learner-oriented counselling models

Personal and social competencies

- the ability to perform critical self-reflection and analysis (moral concepts, strategies and cultural stereotypes)
- the ability to value diversity
- the readiness to engage in continued professional development
- the ability to manage conflict, to be sensitive, flexible and cooperative
- the ability to create an atmosphere based on respect, appreciation and partnership
- the ability to change perspective and to identify and to consider the resources and goals of the learners

5. Good practice in the field of teacher training: a modular training course for literacy teachers at university level (*Alphabetisierungs- und BasisbildungspädagogInnen*)

The concept of the teacher training course at university level is based on the competencies for literacy teachers defined above. It is based on principles considered essential for personal development and the development of a professional profile.

A scientific advisory council of three professors from the University of Klagenfurt and the University of Vienna (Department of Applied Linguistics and Educational Sciences) assures that university standards are maintained. They play an active role as advisers, evaluators and trainers.

⁵ For details of the course programme see www.vhs21.ac.at/2bw/basisbildung/EU-Projekte.

⁶ These competencies are included in the quality standards and the qualification framework for literacy teachers. See also www.vhs21.ac.at/2bw/basisbildung/EU-Projekte/in.bewegung

The first course started in 2006, with 20 participants. They will receive an academic certificate in July 2008.

Course goal

One main goal of the course is to give (future) trainers the opportunity to deepen their knowledge about relevant aspects of literacy work with adults and to develop qualifications not only for teaching *life skills*, but also for the planning and coordination of projects.

Considering that illiteracy is still a taboo in our society, the work with adult learners who did not succeed at school is a delicate matter. It is essential to avoid the repeatedly frustrating experience of learners. Learners must be given a chance of inclusion in learning processes, through professional tuition, support and counselling.

To further the learning processes of the trainers they are offered support (counselling, coaching) and several evaluation methods (*Intervision*⁷, self-evaluation, feedback, group-evaluation). The course fosters unconventional approaches and solutions and provides the basis for further development of competencies for the time after the course.

Modular structure

The course consists of twelve modules and peer work between the modules:

<p>Module 1 Literacy in the context of today's society; causes and background of learners; learning theories, strategies and experiences</p>
<p>Module 2 Counselling and diagnosis; working with beginners I; gender mainstreaming and diversity I (learning context); principles of linguistic sciences</p>
<p>Module 3 Working with beginners II; dyslexia; integrating ICT into basic skills (learning programmes)</p>
<p>Module 4 Philosophical discourse; introduction to adult education; awareness raising and project management</p>
<p>Module 5 Mathematics in <i>skills for life</i>; biographical work in literacy</p>
<p>Module 6 Evaluation of the first year, review and preview; the role of the scientific council</p>
<p>Module 7 Political education in literacy; intercultural competence; conflict resolution</p>
<p>Module 8 Working with advanced learners I; integrating ICT II (the Internet, etc.)</p>

⁷ *Intervision* is a term used to define a system of self-organised and mutual counselling of a group of practitioners; the expression *kollegiale Beratung* is also used.

<p>Module 9 Working with advanced learners II; developing materials, gender mainstreaming and diversity II (concept and analysis)</p>
<p>Module 10 Autonomous learning (<i>Lernwerkstatt</i>)</p>
<p>Module 11 Evaluation</p>
<p>Final presentations Students present their written works</p>

Duration and level

The course takes two years to complete. Two modules last for a week, the others for either two or three days, i.e. a total of 38 days of attendance. The work in the peer groups must be documented. In addition about 30 hours of teaching practice is required. To obtain the final certificate students must deliver a written piece of work consisting of 20 to 40 pages on a topic of their choice.

The course is integrated into the European Credit Transfer system (30 ECTS).

Target group

The target groups of the literacy teacher course comprise:

- adult educators, teachers, counsellors and social workers wishing to specialise in literacy teaching
- practitioners with experience in teaching literacy wishing to deepen their knowledge
- persons from other professions interested in literacy work wishing to professionalise in the field

Lecturers

Most of the training on this course is carried out by experienced practitioners in the form of team-teaching. Some experts work on their own (evaluation, learning, conflict resolution, gender mainstreaming and diversity).

6. Prevailing problems and challenges

The outcomes of the projects and activities carried out by the various players over recent years indicate that we have achieved a solid basis for a professional system. We now have good structures in place, a framework for qualifications, quality standards and several models for tuition as well as a viable teacher training system.

Nevertheless, in Austria several problems and challenges remain to be tackled in the near future. Some of them are listed below:

- A legal framework for *skills for life* delivery is required (for funding and subsidies).
- The demand for *skills for life* courses is too low. A public campaign to raise awareness and help adults to enrol is an urgent priority since this would improve the situation of the professional trainers who have qualified on the training courses.

- There is a need for *skills for life* delivery in many regions and cities: the number of courses must be increased.
- A framework of basic skills and qualifications would be useful as a guideline for teachers and learners.
- Models of family literacy and workplace literacy require further promotion.
- Research in the literacy field needs to be promoted.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

With regard to the prevailing problems and challenges, we recommend focusing on the following priorities for the next years:

- establishment of a legal framework at national, regional and local level to secure long-term financing of demand and delivery.
- planning and implementation of a large-scale campaign to promote demand and thus participation in literacy courses. The campaign should optimally include funding of demand.
- increased delivery of *skills for life* in all regions.
- increased funding.
- development of an integrated framework of basic qualifications.
- promotion and implementation of literacy and numeracy in the home and at the workplace as a top-priority in Austria.
- research and evaluation of concepts, methods, materials and instruments used in today's tuition.

Commitment at national level and at the level of the counties is fundamental if these targets are to be realised. Although the present government in Vienna has included the promotion of basic education in its programme for lifelong learning, prevailing strategies need further development and sufficient funding.

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9. Links

www.alphabetisierung.at

Network and information platform.

www.erwachsenenbildung.at

Information platform run by the Ministry of Education.

This platform has also featured the *Magazin für Erwachsenenbildung* since 2007.

www.bifeb.at

Institute for Adult Education in Austria.

www.vhs21.ac.at/2bw/basisbildug

Adult Education Centre of Floridsdorf in Vienna.

Information on teacher training courses, EU projects and other activities.

www.unesco.at

Austrian UNESCO Commission.