

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIELD OF LITERACY AND BASIC EDUCATION

## State of the art in Slovenia

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Project Background

The following report has been compiled as part of the TRAIN “Professionalization of Literacy and Basic Education – Basic Modules for Teacher Training”, an EU Socrates Grundtvig funded project, in collaboration with partners from Germany, Cyprus, France and Ireland.

The report details the background of adult literacy policy and national strategy in Slovenia and the current structures in place for the professionalization of adult literacy teachers and the national strategy for teacher education and education of other professionals within the adult literacy and other parts of educational system. The stress is however put on training adult literacy’ teachers, not only because is the main subject of this project, but also because in Slovenia common literacy examination and teaching practice have started to develop in the field of adult education.

The information contained in the report has been compiled from archive of SIAE (research, studies, program development) and from government publications, publications from stakeholders in the adult literacy and basic skills sector and readings and texts from academic researchers and writers in the field.

Information gathering for this report took place over a several-month period from January 2007 to the end of May 2007 and involved research of several different materials and discussions with expert practitioners in the adult literacy and broader adult education sector.

### 1.2 Overview of Literacy and Basic Skills in Slovenia

In Slovenian present context the term literacy has to be explained separately from the notion of basic education but at the same time in the historical context of basic and general education and adult education in one hand and political and economical changes on the other hand.

Even the decade ago there had been broadly assumed that those who successfully pass basic education i.e. eight (now nine) years of compulsory schooling have to be literate. Traditionally the term literacy has been reduced to the alphabetic literacy. The level of alphabetic literacy in Slovenian population has been adequate due to the long tradition of compulsory initial schooling that was introduced at 18th century and was constantly prolonged for whole population. Due to such understanding of literacy and basic (compulsory) education there had been assumed literacy problems are not relevant for Slovenia i.e. literacy of population is realised within the basic education.

At the same time basic education has always represented only the starting point for the further vocational and other education. The knowledge and skills needed at work should be oriented mainly around vocational skills and knowledge.

Approximately twenty years ago there had been widely spread debate about the national curriculum among experts from different fields whether or not and to what extent the general education shall be included in the vocational education or/and training. The term general education in that time was reserved for the languages learning, and for the school subjects that derived from the field of humanism (e.g. history, philosophy, psychology) or science (e.g. chemistry, physic, biology...) or social science (e.g. sociology). All those school subjects were traditionally academically based. Within the national debate there had been in one hand humanistic oriented experts that claimed that general education (i.e. languages, math, history, sociology, etc.) is needed for the reason of understanding and collaborating within society, for the need of personal growth and further education that one person might decided to

take further in her life. On the other hand there were very pragmatically oriented experts who claimed that general education is ballast in vocational education. Thus the general education has to be reduced on minimum on behalf of vocational training. They claimed that learners at vocational education and training are less motivated and less successful in general education and is not something that one would need at workplace. The vocational education and training should basically qualify people for workplace that is defined mainly through vocational qualifications that one shall be able to express to fulfil the quality of production or service that is employed in. Further on there had been assumed that quality of products and activities less depends on the general knowledge but highly on the practical skilfulness of the employee. The school system as such shall be able to select learners to those who are more vocational (i.e. practical) oriented and those who tend or are able to study at the university (academically oriented).

In real general education was less popular among learners at vocational education and training, but at the same time the general education – i.e. the final mark of particular school subjects (i.e. Slovenian language, math and foreign language) had represented the main criteria to be registered even at vocational colleague. The ambiguities like that stayed unexplained for a long time and even today it is excluded as main selective criteria for further educational career.

We may draw important conclusions from the unpopularity of general education at the field of vocational education and training. First, relation of general education with the vocational orientation or workplace or even with everyday life was not clear enough. Consequently the sense of learning these subjects was not evident neither from demands at workplace neither from demands of every day life. At the same time we may conclude that society were probably organised in the way where people rely on others, i.e. institutions that had organised their life in the way where active participation of individual was not demanded nor has no significant effect on the person's life quality. People might stay passive without consequences that would affect their life significantly. This seemed to feel well with the long period of political socialism in Slovenia. Further on the last explains well the sudden growth of interest, development and recognition of literacy and literacy needs at the beginning of political and economical changes (i.e. political democracy and to market economy) in Slovenia at early nineties. Thousands of people at that time lost their jobs over the night and stay out of any help or even rights, out of relevant knowledge and competency that they would need to keep the quality of their life at the same level as before. The national statistics has shown up that majority of unemployed at that time were poorly educated. Adult education policy and especially adult education providers and societies at the field (i.e. Slovenian Association of Adult Education) were among first that were prepared to react efficiently in the new social, economical and political context.

Even almost nobody before that time had spoken about literacy or basic skills or key competences as a phenomenon by which the need for basic or general education of adults and its nature at the context of vocational training, work and every day life could be explained and realised, the concept of permanent education (or life long education by Paul Lengrand) had been very alive and discussed among adult educators in the context of changing society and developing technology at workplace. And even almost nobody at that time has arguing for literacy or basic education as something that demand continuing practice and learning by using different sorts of literacy practices at different sorts of job, social or life's contexts, the concepts of life long education (now life long learning) was crucial for literacy subject too.

The term literacy and basic skills has been widely introduced latter on, i.e. in the last decade. Both of them have to be explained separately from the modern terms key competences and

key skills<sup>1</sup>. The term ‘basic skills’ has been associated with the basic literacy skills for adults therefore the term ‘adult literacy or functional literacy’<sup>2</sup> were widely used in the literature on adult education and in practice. This understanding of basic skills or adult literacy is close to the concept of “new basic skills” as were defined in Memorandum of lifelong learning (2000), where new basic skills for all were defined as those skills necessary for active participation in knowledge economy and labour market (besides solid reading, writing, communication and numeracy skills, also skills for lifelong learning, social skills, computer skills and citizenship skills). This concept was incorporated in adult literacy provision in Slovenia<sup>3</sup>.

At this point it is worthwhile to mention a definition of literacy adopted by an Expert group for Literacy Development, appointed by Slovenian Minister of Education in 2004, which created a National strategy for literacy development for children, youth and adults (to be adopted by a government in 2007). The working definition of literacy is as follows: “Literacy is continuously developing ability of individual to use agreed systems of symbols for creating, understanding and using texts in the context of family, school, work and society.” In this definition literacy is understood as a social activity which is not acquired once for ever but it is developing through lifespan for different purposes.

### 1.3 Slovenian interests, concerns, aims in the case of Literacy

Literacy of the population in Slovenia could be marked as a big issue. It has been measured directly and indirectly. Slovenia took part in the International Adult Literacy Survey in 1998, where the sample of population was tested. This was also the first national survey on adult literacy ever. The survey revealed devastating results of literacy levels of adult population: 77% of adults performed below international average on the literacy test used in the survey.

Indirect estimations are based on the presumption that adults with certain levels of education have expected levels of literacy. The census data (1991, 2002) are used in this sense, and the borderline of literacy or illiteracy is considered 3 years of primary school completed; 0, 4% of population above 15 years old is considered illiterate according to this definition.

We understand that the problem in Slovenia is the quality of knowledge and skills in the sense of sustainability and transferability of skills gained in school. Adults in Slovenia with at least 12 years of schooling (completed upper secondary school e.g. 16 years of schooling) have solid and comparable skills and they tend to maintain and develop skills after formal schooling. There is a great gap in literacy performance between this group and those with less than 12 years of schooling.

Therefore, among this very large group of people, with less than 12 years of schooling there are groups more at risk / or are more vulnerable:

<sup>1</sup> The term generic skills for work have been also evolving though there is no common understanding of what generic skill should cover. Skills or areas included most often are: reading, writing, numeracy, team work, active listening, negotiating, communication with clients, intercultural competencies, planning, foreign language, etc.

<sup>2</sup> There are several popular understandings of literacy / adult literacy in Slovenia. In public the term ‘functional literacy’ or ‘functional illiteracy’ has been widely used in this relation: functional literacy is narrowly interpreted in the continuum ‘have or have not’. The term literacy is also associated with different scientific or occupational fields, so terms such as scientific literacy, computer literacy has been used.

<sup>3</sup> The development of adult literacy education in this sense has started at Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE) which is the central Slovenian institution for development and research of adult literacy in Slovenia since 1991.

- young drop-outs from 16 to 25,
- low educated parents of school age children,
- people living in the rural areas,
- employees with no education or low educated
- low educated unemployed,
- elderly,
- ethnic groups (Roma population),
- immigrant population,
- low income groups.

Marginality of some of those groups is compounded; low initial education – low chances for work-less, income-less chances for further education and acquisition of skills-low literacy.

Due to the data above seems to be logic that our great interest and concern is to improve the profile of national literacy to become the equal partner within the concurrent, dynamic knowledge based and coherent European society as it is stated in Lisbon declaration. There are several national documents mentioned below that express this concern at a declarative level , e.g. National Master Plan for Adult Education. At the same time we have to be critical enough to say that there is not always enough efforts put in the concrete realization of the states that are declared in those documents. The obstacles are many. In this light the concrete aim that might be derived from this reflection does include the efforts to support literacy learning that help adults, especially those at the risk to improve their literacy skills up to the level that is compared with the groups that have completed at least twelve years of schooling. We think this can not be achieved only by prolongation of initial schooling but more ever through the concept of life long learning where the main accent is put at the people's need to be included in society in several different ways and several different contexts of learning that may occurred any time in the people's life – i.e. when is needed. It means literacy needs to be learning all the time in different life contexts and for different purposes in human life. We think the national vision of life long learning can not be realized without important part of learning and teaching literacy. Our aim, particularly within this project is therefore to contribute as we can in the national and international treasury of good learning and teaching practices in the field of adult literacy to be granted to use all it's treasures that might be needed for the particular learning needs within national literacy context.

## **2 Development of Literacy and Basic Education in Slovenia**

### **2.1 Overview on development literacy and basic education**

The concept of key competences has been widely discussed in Slovenia in recent years not only in field of non-formal adult education, but also within the formal school field on all levels although there is no common framework accepted on a national level which would regulate the implementation of the key competences in the educational system. However, similarly as within Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on key Competences for lifelong learning (December 2006), key competences are understood as a knowledge, skills and attitudes towards learning and work, which are interrelated. Furthermore, there were a couple of pilot projects dealing with the implementation of the key competences in the curriculum mostly in the vocational education and training in which also adult are taking part. So the most tangible results are visible in VET, though more expert work and efforts are needed to make a more decisive breakthrough. Both - vocational qualifications as well as personal competencies and competencies needed for further learning are included; the competencies to be developed in the training programme leading to a vocational qualification are

as follows:

- Communication (in the mother tongue, in a foreign language and in mathematical language)
- Awareness of the importance of the mother tongue,
- preserving and protecting natural and cultural heritage,
- respecting life,
- respecting individual and cultural diversity,
- assuring quality life and work.
- Creativeness (innovative thinking, include also aesthetic dimensions into professional, individual and social environment )
- Critical thinking (to judge and presume events and processes in nature and society and to speak up to participate in society)
- Intercultural competences(to understand oneself and others; to understand the complexity and inconsistency of societies and cultures; to interact creatively with people of different culture)
- Sociability – social skills (team work, active citizenship and conflict resolving )
- Competences and strategies to use modern technologies, different sources, information and materials (the ability to efficiently search, collect, process, interpret, exchange, present and assess them).
- A healthy life-style and responsibility for the environment
- Entrepreneurship and career orientation
- Learning for economic efficiency and competitiveness of an individual, a business or a society as a whole.

## 2.2 National policy, strategies and action plans

The government commitment to literacy of adults in Slovenia has risen considerably after the results of the IALS survey that were released in 2004<sup>4</sup>. The need to raise the literacy levels was included among priorities in the National Adult Education Master Plan adopted in 2004, which is the most important policy document for development of adult education in Slovenia. Furthermore, the need to raise the literacy levels of population has been incorporated into other strategic documents such as Strategy of the development of Slovenia 20013 and State development plan up to 2013.

Literacy and basic education is centrally financed in Slovenia; all finances for development and implementation of the programmes come from Ministry of Education and Sport (in the period 2004-2006 these funds are complemented with funds from European Social Fund). Under the measure Lifelong learning, reducing the Educational Shortage, Raising Literacy Levels of Adults a considerable attention was paid to development and implementation of measures to raise literacy levels of vulnerable groups (drop-outs, low educated unemployed and employed, people living in rural areas and special needs literacy provision). However despite the fact that the Strategy for Raising literacy levels of adults has never been officially accepted it was considered a sufficient basis for Action plan, accepted by the government which allocated almost 4 million EURO to this measure in this period. Now this action plan is integral part of Annual Adult Education Plan. Raising literacy has been a priority also in the next period 2007-2013 and at the moment a new action plan for this period is being negotiated by different partners.

Within the National strategy for literacy development there is a great emphasis on informa-

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<sup>4</sup> In 2002 Ministry of Education and Sport gave a commission to Slovenian Institute for Adult Education to create a **Strategy for raising literacy levels of adults**. The Strategy was completed in March 2003 but has not been adopted by the government as planned.

tion and motivation, when the document is accepted we believe that a sort of national campaign for literacy will be implemented.

The Development Strategy of Slovenia has defined further most important challenges within the educational system that are directly or indirectly related to the literacy subject:

increase the percentage of population having completed a four-year secondary education programme;

increase the percentage of young people willing to enter vocational education programmes;

increase the percentage of population having completed a tertiary level of education;

increase the rate of functional literacy (in particular in adults);

promote co-operation between higher education and employers in designing study programmes;

decrease drop-out rates in the field of secondary education;

increase enrolment in adult-education programmes.

A new act introducing a certification system was passed in 2000. It enables the assessment and verification of vocation-related knowledge, skills and experience acquired out of school. It thus makes it possible for individuals to obtain a vocational qualification in ways other than through formal schooling. Candidates undergo a knowledge assessment procedure by a special commission to obtain a state-approved certificate attesting their competence in performing certain vocational tasks. Vocational qualifications obtained in this way can be used by their holders to find a job or, in further training, demonstrating that part of an education programme has already been mastered. Within this context the question of key competences: identification, validation, verification, accreditation become more and more relevant.

The main objective, however, is to achieve a high level of education for the highest percentage of the population. Even those challenges are presented separately it is obviously that rate of literacy can not be increased in vacuum but only in relation with learning for different purposes – i.e. through life-long and life-wide learning.

## 2.3 Structure of Literacy and Basic Education in Slovenia

The Slovenian education system<sup>5</sup> consists of:

pre-school education,

basic education (single structure of primary and lower secondary education),

(upper) secondary education:

vocational and technical education,

secondary general education,

higher vocational education,

higher education.

Specific parts of the system:

adult education

music and dance education

special needs education

modified programmes and programmes in ethnically and linguistically mixed areas

### Basic education

Basic education was extended from eight years to nine. This was done gradually. The implementation of the nine-year basic education began in the 1999/2000 school year. Children that reach the age of 6 in a particular calendar year enter the first class in that year.

Nine-year basic education is divided into 3 three-year cycles. Elementary schools provide the compulsory and extended curriculum. The compulsory curriculum must be provided by school and studied by all pupils. It consists of compulsory subjects, electives, home-room periods and activity days (culture, science, sports, technology). The optional elementary

<sup>5</sup> Basic information about education System of Slovenia from the portal of Ministry for education

school curriculum must be provided by school but pupils are free to decide whether they will participate in it or not. It includes educational assistance for children with special needs, remedial classes, additional classes, after-school care and other forms of care for pupils, interest activities and out-of-school classes.

Successful completion of basic education enables learners to proceed to education in their choice of secondary school. Learners who fulfill the legal compulsory education requirement and successfully complete at least seven classes in the nine-year elementary school can continue their education in a short-term vocational education program. Success at that level opens doors to other more demanding secondary school programs. Basic education is organized and free also for adults.

### Adult and Literacy Education

Adult education is characterized by programmed diversity. Most of it is offered within the network of adult education organisations. Schools and higher education institutions, basically providing youth education, also offer formal education courses for adults, trying to adapt the organization and programs to their needs.

Literacy education is part of non-formal education programmes within adult education.

Literacy programmes are designed for various purposes at various social contexts and for various target groups, for example, employed people seeking to improve their employment opportunities or gain promotion, individuals wishing to enhance the quality of their life by further education, parents that wish to help children at school, farmers that has capacity to improve the family income, people with special needs to improve the quality of their every day life and others. Access to most non-formal education courses is unrestricted.

There are two main focuses of literacy provision in Slovenia:

The first is raising literacy level to undertake further education and to raise the level of education of population (which leads to higher levels of literacy itself).

The second is raising literacy levels for a better position in the market (this objective is enhanced in the first focus too).

Based on the IALS survey and a few more in-depth researches, Slovenian Institute for Adult Education (SIAE) created 5 different literacy programmes at five different social contexts for different target groups which were implemented nationwide in the past 4 years. What all groups have in common, is less than 10 years of schooling which results in poor literacy skills (levels 1 or 2 based on the IALS survey). They won't to learn basic skills for several different purposes.

The programmes that would incorporate different aspects of literacy (reading, writing, calculating, communication, ICT, social skills...) and combine them with participants' life context. For example: we created a family literacy programme (titled Reading and Writing Together) for people whose present life context is parenthood and trying to help their children with their school work but at the same time they themselves meet literacy problems. We created another literacy programme for people whose present life context is trying to return to formal education (titled The Bridge to Education) and needing skills to successfully start and finish their education.<sup>6</sup> We felt this was important for motivating potential participants to join in the programmes. Adults learn in order to solve a certain problem – e.g. to keep or get a job, for professional development, to follow a personal ambition, to develop as a person... They do not enrol in an educational programme because someone tells them their literacy skills are insufficient and they should improve on it. Matching learning with the needs of learners' life context – a situation in participants' life they want to resolve or change, is crucial for learner to join in the literacy programme. This kind of approach would not only help them to deal with a certain narrow aspect of their current situation but it would ensure to take into account a whole range of problems that derive from his or her present social position and reflect upon his or her strength points, abilities, motives and opportunities to empower him/herself through learning basic skills.

<sup>6</sup> All 5 literacy programmes are described on following pages

All programmes are aimed to help participants to increase basic skills (literacy, numeracy, ICT), social skills, promoting lifelong learning and developing skills to becoming an active citizen. In addition, every programme has specific topics which reflect the needs of the target group as a basis for their motivation to take part in the programme.

#### FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMME – Reading and Writing Together

Family literacy programme is a programme for parents who would like to help their children with their schoolwork but don't know how. The programme is 50 hours long and both, parents and their children, are attending the programme.

#### LITERACY PROGRAMME FOR ADULTS RETURNING TO FORMAL EDUCATION – The Bridge to Education

This 120 hours long programme is aimed at adults who want to continue their formal education. The main goal is to equip participants with adequate learning techniques to help them cope with educational demands, and as a result, be more successful at schooling.

#### RURAL LITERACY – The Challenges of the Countryside

In rural literacy programme teachers help people living in rural areas find and take advantage of opportunities provided by the environment they live in. Through the programme they are also trying to help participants improve their social position and economic living status. The programme is 120 hours long.

#### LITERACY PROGRAMME TO INCREASE AUTONOMY IN EVERYDAY LIFE – I Have my own Steps

The main goal of this programme is to show the participants how to be more independent and resourceful in everyday life. Participants that attending the 120 hour long programme are adults with special needs who want to improve the quality of their life.

#### WORKPLACE LITERACY – Me at My Workplace

Workplace literacy is aimed to adults that work at low skilled jobs, who have difficulties dealing with the fast changes in industry. The teachers in the programme should help participants to gain knowledge and skills that will help them to keep up with the demands of the workplace. It lasts 300 hours.

## 2.4 Relevant bodies and providers

One of the positive and promising commitments of the government is also the appointment of the Expert group in 2004 which created a Strategy for literacy development of children, youth and adults in 2006 (The strategy for raising literacy of adults will be incorporated in the single Strategy). The Strategy will be adopted by the government (hopefully in 2007) and will be a basis for further more coordinated and more comprehensive governmental actions in this direction.

At the moment there is an absence of special national coordinating body which will oversee literacy work. The monitoring is carried out through existing institutions and procedures. There is an absence of involvement of social partners in the literacy field. National Adult Education Master Plan (as well as Strategy for literacy development) anticipates the involvement of different sectors of government and social partners. At SIAE we are convinced that the problem of literacy of adults in Slovenia on such a scale cannot be solely a responsibility of Ministry of Education and partly Ministry of Labor, family and social affairs. We understand it as a cross-ministries problem that needs to be discussed in broad arena of several different interests that probably exist in the field and within the broader concept of life long and life wide learning in Slovenia.

Literacy education is part of non-formal education programmes within adult education. It can be stated that there was no nation wide campaign in this respect in Slovenia up to now though there are a lot of activities on a local level which are carried out by adult literacy pro-

gramme providers. There are 46 providers of literacy education all over in Slovenia and 140 trained literacy teachers

### **3 Concept of Teaching Literacy and Basic Education**

The curriculum of literacy programmes is defined upon the purpose, learning aims and learning standards that are articulated nationally. There is no (pre)set curriculum for none of the literacy programmes mentioned above in the sense of predicted contents or school subjects. The curriculum is widely opened in the sense of learning contents and learning methods. One of the most important principles of teaching literacy is based on learner i.e. organised upon the learners' needs and interests that they reflect upon within the context of open dialog with the teachers. There is recommended to teach through learning projects. However those learning projects are not prescribed in advanced. It shall be discussed and defined together with the learners every time when new learning has occurred. It is initial and formative part of learning process. There are standards prescribed that shall be achieved by the learners. Teachers should be able to create (together with their learners) the atmosphere and learning environment where learners' needs and interests can be expressed and realised.

By teaching through project work we try to activate and motivate the participants for learning from the very start and set the learning in the context of their every day life. At the same time we would like them to stay active throughout the programme as a whole and thus learn successfully. The approach tends to stimulates students responsibility and autonomy in learning process and thus helps them on improving their self-image and self-esteem. The teacher acts as mentor by helping learner to identify the learning problems, steering and discussing with learner her progress, guiding and supporting her when searching for the problem solution.

The quality of teacher's work differs from traditional teaching. It is based on the theory of constructivism that is based upon the Piaget's statement by which is claimed the learner is an architect of her knowledge and even more upon the theory of social constructivism and Vigotsky's "zone of proximal development". The social constructivism explains learning as a socially based activity in which through social interaction the learner could learn even better (i.e. develop her competences and abilities optimally). Social interaction in learning group is culturally determined and thus knowledge that is in fact construction of every single learner is culturally determined too. In this way we could say that people learn faster when they learn in interaction with other people (e.g. teachers) who have been already experienced or have knowledge and competences in resolving particular learning problems.

All those are arguments that literacy learning/teaching shall be organised within and for several different social contexts. Further on the processes that support literacy learning there shall be included different professionals. Learning environment shall be organised around the major life problems of particular learner – learner centred approach. Literacy learning and teaching can not take place in vacuum – out of every day life. The concept of learning like this demands reflection upon the teaching. There is great demand to reflect upon competences that literacy teacher shall develop to meet the needs of new learning contexts of literacy.

#### **3.1 Literacy teacher training as a part of Strategy for literacy development of children, youth and adults**

The national Strategy for literacy development of children, youth and adults that was proposed by an Expert group in 2006, recommended that quality assurance processes to be introduced across all organizations involved in the provision of literacy teaching, tuition and support. It contains proposals for the development of programmes for literacy development of teachers on under and post graduate level as well as within continuous education of teach-

ers. SIAE are aware that the target groups of literacy learning are the most hard to reach and motivate to take part in organised forms of education and learning.

SIAE have started to prepare a strategic plan and some important elements of motivation have been already incorporated in the national literacy scheme:

in the basic training of teachers in adult literacy (teachers are asked to prepare a small action research in the local area on target groups, they also receive a training on how to motivate target groups);

special programmes were prepared in this respect for other professionals and practitioners that deal with literacy target groups (counselling and guidance workers in adult education, human resource workers, counsellors in agriculture, social workers, counsellors in employment agencies ... depending of the needs of the target groups).

There is a plan to create local networks of institutions and professionals which would work as partners within a recruitment plan for different target groups.

Adult literacy teacher's training, their professional development and quality control are part of SIAE's responsibilities. Quality is guaranteed through several mechanisms:

- initial teacher training;
- registration at Ministry for education and sport;
- workshops aimed at teacher's professional development;
- supporting teachers and providers of literacy programmes;
- programme evaluation;
- recognition of good practice.

Initial teacher training is a 112 to 132 hour long programme (depending on the literacy programme the teacher wants to work on). Candidates that wish to become literacy teachers have to have a University degree, have to complete adult education training and should pass the professional exam.<sup>7</sup> Before the training candidate for literacy teacher has to approach to an initial interview at the SIAE. At the interview we search for people that are experienced in teaching, counseling or in other socio-cultural work with less educated adults. We look for open-minded people, people without prejudice, those who support the philosophy and the concept of lifelong learning and most of all for those who have considered their own learning process as a joyful experience.

Before the provider organizations can start with the realization, they need to register at the Ministry for education and sport as a provider of literacy programmes. In order to register they have to have qualified teachers and fulfil other requirements set by the Ministry (e.g. appropriately equipped classrooms etc.).

Twice a year we organise workshops on topics related to learning and teaching in literacy programmes. We choose topics out of teachers' suggestions and accordingly to the proposal of SIAE supervisor who attend the teaching session and talk with teacher during her visit within teacher's literacy teaching premiere in the concrete literacy programme.

Once a year we organise a workshop which is dedicated to organisational issues and evaluation. This is an opportunity for teachers to share examples of good practises, talk about difficulties they experience with realisation of the programmes, and anything else they feel is important to share and discuss with other teachers and literacy experts. Both types of workshops are aimed at teacher's professional development. During the one day session

Throughout the training and realisations of the programmes teachers and providers are offered counselling support when they search for solutions of problems, dilemmas, questions related to literacy.

<sup>7</sup> The professional exam is a national exam which a person takes after one year of working. It is made up from three different topics: Slovenian language, Slovenian constitution and Slovenian law regarding adult education

Programme monitoring is carried out through supervision of teacher's work, attendance at realisations of the programmes, reporting... SIAE's experts visit realisations of the programmes and through that gather information about the level of participant's content and the quality of teacher's work. Teachers also have to send reports to the SIAE about every realisation of the programme that they carry out.

All that is needed for further development of literacy learning and teaching that have been already developed and to be able to recognize the needs for new ones.

Accreditation of good practice is an important motivational factor for teachers. We award teachers credits<sup>8</sup> for extra activities they carry out in connection to literacy programmes. There is a plan to organise study visits in different countries with strong commitments in this field (Great Britain, Ireland and others) for literacy teachers as a part of their professional development. SIAE experts also cooperate in different European projects in which we get a confirmation of our practises and/or get new ideas to implement in literacy programmes and teacher training.

#### 4 Review of Literacy Teachers Competences

- The competences that are required for adult literacy teachers in Slovenia are as follow:
- An understanding of adult literacy subject in Slovenia (theoretical, conceptual understandings, development, structure, statistics, policy and strategies)
- An ability to demonstrate a broad understanding of good practice in adult literacies provision
- An ability to demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of a range of teaching strategies for reading, writing, numeracy, social participation,
- An appreciation of the community education approach to adult literacy
- An ability to make initial investigation within the local environment to find out the potential opportunities, networks, obstructions, weaknesses and strengths for the literacy learning
- An ability to adopt a learner-centered approach with adult learners
- Understanding how adults learn and what motivates adults to learn
- An ability to demonstrate an understanding of project learning and team working processes and approaches
- To be able to understand the role and responsibilities of the adult literacies teacher
- To possess excellent inter-personal skills and the ability to be able to relate to wide range of adult learners who might belong to different culture, or learn with different learning style
- An understanding of critical learning, reflective learning and evaluation
- An ability to build relationships with adult literacy learners
- The aptitude to be able to develop and use a wide variety of materials when working with adult literacy's learners
- An ability to use a range of learning activities with adult literacies learners
- To be able to demonstrate an understanding of ICT and its role in learning activities for adults
- To be able to guide learner through his personal learning plan and help him to prepare and present his portfolio,
- To be able to understand and to act properly according the learning group dynamic,
- To be able to organise and moderate learning projects/other projects

<sup>8</sup> Points are part of the system of carrier development and job promotion in Slovenia.

- To be able to support the concept of the reflective learner
- To be able to manage stress and chaotic situations.

## 5 Good practice in the field of teachers' training

There are three things that we might present as the case of good practice in the field of teacher's training.

First is the way the development of each of new literacy programme starts. Usually the group of SIAE experts works together with the professionals from the field and group of literacy teachers. Through investigation that includes a research of the literacy needs at the concrete context, potential network of stakeholders we have got the profile of specific literacy needs. In next step there is prepared a basic curriculum for the literacy learning and teaching that is piloted by the literacy teachers who cooperate within the project. Pilot takes place with group of adult who are invited by teachers or literacy courses providers. The pilot is monitored by experts of SIAE, providers and teachers themselves. Learners evaluate the pilot too. During the piloting the groups communicate all the time around the main questions that shall serve as indicators of expected quality. There is made final evaluation and report where recommendations for curriculum and teaching are prepared too.

Professional development of literacy teachers seems to be second example of good practice. After the teachers complete the initial training they can start with literacy teaching. Twice a year we organise workshops on topics related to working in literacy programmes. We choose topics out of teachers' suggestions. This motivates teachers to come and at the same time it stimulates their identification with the field of literacy learning.

Once a year we organise a workshop which is dedicated to organisational issues and evaluation. This is an opportunity for teachers to share examples of good practises, e.g. present the good learning projects, explain about the difficulties they experience with realization of the programmes, and anything else they feel is important to share and discuss with other teachers and literacy experts. Teachers present examples of good practice. They find very efficient to learn in this way. At the same time the workshop is always alive and there is place and time for qualitative group reflections and new initiatives.

## 6 Prevailing problems and challenges

Despite the considerable commitment to raise literacy of adults in the recent years there still a great need to involve more afford on a national level to make a difference; literacy provision in Slovenia is still under development and existing growing provision is not capable to cover the estimated needs. The literacy provision is centrally planned (there is no local financing of adult education in Slovenia) and it is at the moment under the responsibility of Ministry of Education and Sport. At the moment all the existing literacy provision is free of charge for participants. In case participants are unemployed the Ministry of Labour also guarantees certain benefits for those who participate in literacy programmes (this is a novelty in 2005) and literacy programmes became integral part of Active Employment Policy. All the needed money for literacy courses come from the European Social Fond (ESF) via public tender. It is believed that public tender is not appropriate mechanism for distribution of resources for education of vulnerable groups. Due to the fact that providers are market oriented and majority of needed money for development of educational activities are realized at the market, they are not able to stand the financial gap that is caused by investment in literacy courses for long periods. They are not motivated to train more literacy teachers and organise learning for additional learning groups. Funding does affect the present and the future not only of providers, but also teachers in literacy. Since most of them have part-time positions are dependent on annual funding streams and it may prove difficult to retain experienced teachers in a field.

There is great need to economise and simplify the whole procedure from the announcement of public tender, selection of the providers and especially repayment process at the end.

Second group of problems in the field of teacher's training derives from the shape of literacy teacher's employment. Most of literacy teacher's are employed part-time. These cause problems how to organize the initial training. It last 130 hours and to fulfil the conditions that are set by the public tender for ESF money the training shall be completed in the period of three months. Teachers come from all parts of Slovenia and for some of them is needed to stay overnight during the training sessions. We usually organise the training in the mode of two days workshops (8 hours per day) every two weeks. This is very demanding for the learners – they need a great concentration. People gets tired and the efficiency is probably lower that might be if the programme will pass more easily.

We try to individualise the programme for the teachers by recognising them knowledge and expertise that they might get elsewhere i.e. in other programmes or with their work in similar fields. But at the moment we are quite at the beginning with this process, because we would need to established common standards and predict the procedures of validation and accreditation of prior learning. Teachers on the other side would need to prepare portfolio, part of which is also individual (personal) learning plan. These are two most challenges for the future. At the moment we start to work on the e-portfolio for adult educators among whom literacy teachers represent one of the most frequent profiles.

On the other hand we are tending to economise the programme to offer part of the programme as an e-learning. That is also on of the challenges of future development at the field. The major challenges is however to set and recognise teacher's training within the national scheme teacher's education.

The challenges facing teacher training within the adult literacy sector in Slovenia include the lack of experts (e.g. who deal with leaning difficulties) with academic degree who would be at the same time experienced in adult literacy education. In evaluation of initial training for literacy teachers we usually find out that teachers find difficult to incorporate the lectures in the teaching literacy context. Sometimes teachers expect more practical and concrete work during the sessions of initial training. One of the approaches we can see at the moment is that experts and experienced teachers work together in the context of teacher's training workshops.

On the other hand we would like to stimulate the common project of adult education where several different experts and literacy teachers and literacy learning could collaborate in practice i.e. in common developmental project in the field of literacy.

In this way we thought we may overcome some weaknesses of literacy education that are teachers and other professionals often mentioned about i.e. that they would need some common tools to help them to identify learners knowledge before they enter, during and at the end of the literacy learning.

## **7 Conclusions and recommendations**

Slovenia has made a substantial breakthrough in the field of research and development of adult literacy consequently on the field of literacy teachers training in the last 15 years. A national strategy for adult literacy in place since 2003 and this has been supported by significant increases in funding to increase opportunities for adult literacy learners, to ensure a high quality service is delivered to learners and to provide for professional development for those working in the sector.

Slovenia had a high number of adults identified in the IALS survey in 2000 with low literacy skills (77 percent of population at levels 1 and 2) and responded to this by developing both national policy and strategies to address the issue.

In the sector of adult learning there have been developed five literacy programs for adults to improve literacy in different social context. In parallel there have been developed initial literacy training for adult literacy teachers and partial workshops for literacy support workers.

Additional development of literacy courses for several other contexts and target groups is under developed and expected during 2007 and development of literacy teacher's training too.

The Slovenian adult literacy strategy is based on a social practice model of literacies (i.e. contextual literacy) with special respect of the needs and social position of concrete target groups that are aimed for. This would need a support from different state sectors and community driven approach, which adopts a partnership mode of working with stakeholders in national level and local regions. At the moment the prevailing understanding of rising literacy seems to be under the roof of Ministry of Education within its Sector of adult education. We see further educational policy development shall go in the direction of searching for cross-sectors initiative that will bring together the stakeholders (i.e. employers, municipalities, that are needed to find the optimal discourse of literacy learning in several different social contexts and within the life long learning strategy.

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