Supporters of Adult Low Performers in Literacy

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Content

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A short glimpse on recent quantitative research on adult literacy

European countries:
20 percent of adults in Europe lack the literacy skills they need to function fully in a modern society (EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy)

OECD countries:
different proportions of adults with low basic skills in OECD countries (PIAAC)

Germany:
7.5 million low literate adults (leo.)
20.000 participants each year
Shift in perspective

Research with a focus on functionally illiterate adults

Research on support networks with a focus on types of social capital of confidantes
Research questions

- **Proportion of knowledge and Fields of knowledge** (Do adults in Germany know other adults who have severe problems in reading and writing? Where does this knowledge occur)

- **Communication about the situation** (does knowledge lead to communication?)

- **Support** (Does knowledge lead to personal support in reading and writing?)

- **Interface to system of adult basic education** (Do supporters bridge the gap between low skilled readers/writers and ABE?)

- **Informal learning** (Are there informal settings of learning to be observed?)

- **Types of relationship** (Are there different types of supporting partnerships?)
Making of

Qualitative study

n=30 personal interviews

Field phase from February 2013 to October 2014

Quantitative study

n=1.511 interviews (telephone interviews CATI) in Hamburg

Development of the questionnaire highly inspired by qualitative interviews

Field phase: August and September 2014
Results: Proportion of knowledge

Proportion of adults in Hamburg who knows other adults with apparent difficulties in reading and/or writing in percent

- Confidants: 40%
- Non-Confidants: 60%

Source: Hamburg University, Umfeldstudie
n=1,511 adults in Hamburg
Results: Communication between the partners

Kind of communication between the confidante and the low performing reader/writer about the fact of the literacy problems:

- 37% We speak openly about the situation
- 12% We speak about it more indirectly
- 4% We do not speak about it
- 4% no answers

Source: Hamburg University, Umfeldstudie, n=562 adults in Hamburg
Results: Support

Percentage of confidantes who offer some kind of support for the low performing reader/writer

- 58% providing support
- 42% not providing support

Source: Hamburg University, Umfeldstudie, n=562 adults in Hamburg
Results: Interface between individual and adult basic education

- 20% knows about ABE-classes and mentioned them to the low skilled reader/writer
- 78% knows about ABE-classes without mentioning them
- 2% no knowledge about ABE-classes

Source: Hamburg University, Umfeldstudie, n=562 adults in Hamburg
Results: informal learning processes within the partnership

Example 1: Small music label
„Well, actually it was all misspelled, all higgledy-piggledy. You always had to double-check it. Sometimes it was really scary (...) but he was very engaged and if somebody said something or corrected him, this turned to be normal. (...) And I guess just by doing so every day, step by step it improved. One day I realized that and I told him: ‘You now for the first time are writing some text and we do not have to double-check it anymore’”

Example 2: Assistant in communication department
Similar structure of support by constantly correcting written texts. Improvement of proficiency after several months.
### Results: Types of confidantes of low performers in literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatic confidanteship</td>
<td>Support through learning together, very positive image of person affected, “capable of learning”, no burden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taboo</td>
<td>In particular family, emotional burden, substantial tasks are often taken on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsettled confidanteship</td>
<td>“How should I react to the situation?”, image of person affected is unclear, no support, no referral to further education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring confidanteship</td>
<td>A lot of tasks are taken on, image of person affected as “in need of help”, very emotionally involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting confidanteship</td>
<td>Image of person affected “they get by”, no burden, little support, “nothing more is required”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resigned confidanteship</td>
<td>Affected person has multiple problems, attempts to refer them to further education have often failed, tasks taken on their behalf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distanced confidanteship</td>
<td>No support, as not close enough to person affected, no burden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hamburg University, Umfeldstudie, n=30 interviews
Conclusions

1. High proportion of knowledge in society (40%): Providers of ABE or information campaigns should address not only prospective learners themselves but also the society as a whole.

2. The common notion of functional illiteracy as a strong taboo should be revised.

3. Third: Non-formal learning is one way of improving literacy skills. But it seems quite likely that in partnerships of support we can find a range of informal learning structures.
Thank you very much for your attention!

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Blog
http://blogs.epb.uni-hamburg.de/umfeldstudie/
References


References


PIAAC-Results - Proficiency Levels in Literacy (selected countries)

Data from: Rammstedt 2013, p. 42

- OECD average
- Japan
- Finland
- Czech Republic
- Germany
- Austria

Level 1 or below
Level 2
Level 3
Level 4/5
Results: Fields of knowledge

- Family: 15%
- Workplace: 28%
- Circle of friends: 38%
- Neighborhood: 10%
- Others: 9%

Source: Hamburg University, Umfeldstudie, n=562 adults in Hamburg
Results: Support

Proportion of confidantes offering support (once or several times)

- **All confidantes**
  - Not supporting: 42%
  - Supporting: 58%

- **Speaking confidantes**
  - Not supporting: 19%
  - Supporting: 81%

- **Silent confidantes**
  - Not supporting: 42%
  - Supporting: 58%

Source: Hamburg University, Umfeldstudie, n=562 adults in Hamburg
## Research Results vs. Stereotypes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>PARTICIPANTS (AlphaPanel n=542)</th>
<th>LOW LITERATE ADULTS (leo. n= 8,436)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Without regular formal education at school</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living alone (without partner)</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk for exclusion</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>???</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AlphaPanel: Rosenbladt & Bilger 2011, Leo.: Grotlüschen & Riekmann 2012