

Workshop B Summary – Basic education in rural areas

Speakers: Hans Jørgen Hansen, VUC Sønderjylland, Denmark

Adrienne Rausch, Regional Office for Literacy and Basic Education,
Oldenburg, Schleswig-Holstein

Moderation: Petra Mundt, Regional Association of Adult Education Centres in Schleswig-Holstein

1. Hans Jørgen Hansen presented the work of the VUC in Denmark:

The VUC is an independent institution for adult education that is subsidised by the state. Funding is awarded annually according to the number of course participants. Students do not have to pay tuition fees for any courses. The VUC also runs basic education measures for adults in rural areas throughout Denmark, working in close cooperation with the local authorities and employment agencies. More information can be found here:

<http://vuksyd.dk/visit-us/#>

Over the last few years, the VUC has introduced a comprehensive modernisation scheme. The following questions formed the starting point for this project: What is our track record? How can we improve our record of success? How can we adjust educational goals to fit our participants? Alongside formal educational goals (joining the workforce, taking up a training position, obtaining qualifications, reducing dropout rates), the modernisation process of the VUC has been and continues to be strongly influenced by participant-related factors. The key phrase here is “making learning meaningful, awakening curiosity about the world, learning in groups is fun”. The modernisation process includes rooms, buildings and media. Classrooms are being torn down and replaced with learning and working zones. The participants are given access to iPads, which they have the option to purchase at the end of the scheme. Teachers at the VUC work with iBooks, which they produce themselves – often in collaboration with cooperating partners. Almost all of the teaching staff have stayed on board throughout the modernisation project.

The conclusion so far: “Teachers are interested in their job. Both students and teachers have increased their skills through the use of innovation, cooperation, new technology, a desire and ability to learn.”

2. Adrienne Rausch; VHS Oldenburg, presented the literacy work currently being done in Schleswig-Holstein:

Around 30 adult education centres run courses in which German-speaking adults can learn to read and write. This work aims to make a comprehensive range of courses available, with corresponding points of contact, even in the region’s more rural areas. The courses are usually held once a week. At present, around 500 students enrol at the adult education centres in Schleswig-Holstein every year. The majority of students are aged between 25 and 40 years old and courses are attended by men and women in roughly equal numbers. There are five adult education centres with full-time Regional Offices for Literacy and Basic

Education. These regional offices are predominantly located in more rural areas. They act as a central point of contact and hub for literacy work in the respective districts. They offer lessons, information and advice services. The professional staffing of the regional offices allows them to offer a better response to individual educational needs. The 'Reading and Writing for Adults' programme is coordinated by the Regional Association of Adult Education Centre, funded by the federal state, the European Social Fund (ESF) and the local authorities. Contact: adrienne.rausch@kultour-oldenburg.de

3. Results from the discussion in Workshop B

Structural conditions are very similar in both countries. In both countries, one of the major challenges faced is encouraging adults to go back to school and attain a basic level of education.

In Germany, there is a considerable accumulated demand to increase the opportunities available to adults to repeat their basic education. More permanent drop-in centres are needed with full-time staff, equipped with modern, target group-appropriate facilities and with up-to-date, diverse teaching materials.

In Northern Germany, basic education centres are warmly welcomed. These are places that facilitate teaching and advice services, functioning as centres of excellence and central points of contact with regard to catching up on basic education for adults, conducting information and publicity work and providing advice services, education courses and teaching materials.

Basic education or literacy also includes skills in the basic dimensions of cultural and social participation. In this context, the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Skills programme lists the following skills: basic numeracy, basic IT skills, health education, basic financial and social skills.

The discussion also considered the question of where the education of adults with German as their native language and adults who have learned German as a second language should be conducted together and where the two groups should be separated. Many contributors to the discussion welcomed the idea of teaching the two groups together once a certain language level had been attained. Owing to time considerations, this complex topic could not be concluded with a single, simple statement.

It only remains to reference the position paper from the National Decade for Literacy and Basic Skills, which is primarily aimed at "functional illiterates" and immigrants who have been living in Germany for a long time, as well as recent refugees in the medium term.