

Work-oriented basic education – What are we talking about?

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1. Primary illiteracy...

...applies if a person does not have any reading or writing competences, because he or she never had the opportunity to gain such competences due to a lack of access to an education system.²

2. Secondary illiteracy...

...applies if a person has not been using or her reading or writing competences gained in school for a longer time period and therefore gradually loses these competences.³

3. Functional illiteracy...

...applies if a person does have basic reading and writing competences which do however not suffice to meet the social and employment-related requirements. Social and employment-related requirements in Western industrial societies are higher than in most of the developing countries. Similar reading and writing competences can thus lead to the classification of a person as 'literate' or 'functional illiterate', depending on the social requirements. For our SESAM project we suggest a definition produced by ANLCI (AGENCE NATIONALE DE LUTTE CONTRE L'ILLETTRISME) in France:

»Illiteracy describes the situation of people who are older than 16 and who, despite their school education, cannot read and understand a text about daily situations, and/or who cannot write in order to communicate simple information. In spite of these deficits, illiterate people have turned their experiences into competences and into a culture in which they do not or do rarely have to read and write. Some of them were able to blend into social and vocational life, but their balance stays instable and the risk to be excluded is permanently there. Others are getting excluded, especially when illiteracy meets other factors. « (Jeantheau, 2007, 44)

4. Alphabetisation for functional illiterates...

... forms a pedagogic field of action providing reading, writing and calculating competences that suffice to meet writing and calculating requirements in daily life and in simple working situations.⁴

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² cf. http://www.alphabund.de/media/Daten_und_Fakten_Alphabetisierung_barrierefrei.pdf.

³ cf. *ibid.*

⁴ cf. *ibid.*

5. Basic education

Schroeder (2012) uses the following distinction between basic education and alphabetisation:

Alphabetisation refers to the impartation of cultural techniques, especially those of reading and writing (and also increasingly calculating) and therefore to a narrowly described pedagogic field of action. Alphabetisation is thus a pedagogic field of action.

Basic education evolves from a rather education-theoretical tradition and represents a pedagogic concept which includes such broad educational goals like reflective faculty, autonomy or identity. Basic education therefore belongs to the concept of life-long learning and is hence – like education in general – as a matter of principle an un-concluded educational process. Basic education is education in the sense of enlightenment. Basic education taken to mean education has got a character of enlightenment and emancipation and asks for the conditions for the opportunity of self-education and self-determination of the adult learners.

Basic education includes those bodies of knowledge that are vital for an orientation in society and labour market, and those that promote inclusion and decrease the danger of exclusion. Basic education is therefore to be understood as an open, as a context-specific and process-oriented educational process. General basic education which is not concreted to the working world unites much more areas than reading, writing and calculating. It also includes areas such as dealing with technical devices or with money, health-conscious behaviour or nutrition.⁵

6. Literacy

The Anglo-Saxon terminology has influenced the German discourse significantly, since alphabetisation and basic education were on the political agenda in the Anglo-Saxon countries earlier than in Germany. Initially, 'literacy' meant the ability to read printed information. The current definition has left this narrow area of pure reading ability far behind. It does no longer only describe a level of reading ability, but a competence in and mode of behaviour for understanding printed information in the daily use at home, in work and in the community, and using it in order to reach self-set goals and to enhance one's own knowledge and own ability of action. The ability to read, write and calculate is not the only requirement for taking part in social life; communicative competences, critical thinking and reflective faculty also play a role. This shows how close the term 'literacy' is to 'basic education'.

A connection to the extensions made to the term of literacy can be fruitful for the development of a suitable literacy discourse. Herein, literacy is not just understood as a separate cultural technique but as 'an ability to use the written word in order to take part in social life, meet one's goals and develop one's knowledge and potential' (Notter et al. 2006, 11). The New Literacy Studies with their understanding of literacy as a social and context-dependent practice particularly set an additional impulse (cf. Linde 2008). If education is analogously characterised as social practise, it makes sense to not only use the plural 'literacies' respectively 'literacy practises' but also use the plural 'basic educations' and 'basic education practises'. Basic education can then not be defined as a canon of (key) competences, abilities or bodies of knowledge. It can also not refer to an individual achievement and/or duty only, but has to consider the lived-in world, the system and the environment. The comprehension of basic education can only be developed in a contextualised way. Only then will the - sometimes wilful – concerns and requirements of the individuals that are to receive basic educa-

⁵ cf. ibid.

tion be met adequately. Basic education in economy and work has to be able to bear the tension between taking the context of work and employability seriously and at the same time not limiting itself to this context.

The concept of literacy has encountered a nearly inflationary expansion for a few years. Food literacy, health literacy or computer literacy are examples.⁶ However, the discourse about 'workplace literacy' is surely compatible in the context of work-oriented basic education.

7. Work-oriented basic education

Just like basic education as defined above, work-oriented basic education stands in an education-theoretical tradition and is a pedagogic concept which includes broad educational goals like reflexion faculty, autonomy and identity. Work-oriented basic education is hence more than just imparting cultural techniques like reading, writing, and calculating and - not only in the case of migrants - also speaking.

We inherently advocate viewing the understanding of work-oriented basic education from three perspectives (cf. Klein 2012):

- **from a programmatic perspective**
- **from a pedagogic-didactic perspective**
- **from the perspective of compatible communication with businesses**

7.1 Programmatic perspective

• **Workplace-oriented or work-oriented basic education?**

Workplace-oriented basic education refers to the workplace and the improvement of acting at a workplace. The leading idea is that employees or work-seekers learn to master the requirements regarding a specific workplace.

Work-oriented basic education refers to work itself and an improvement of acting in the core competences of work. The leading idea here is that work-oriented basic education does not prepare employees and work-seekers for a specific company or workplace, but rather that the workplace is used as a place and opportunity to preserve or develop employability and to enhance the flexibility of workforce in the labour market. Work-oriented basic education thus contributes to the preservation or enhancement of employability and flexibility in the labour market. The term 'orientation' seeks to underline that work-oriented basic education implies the handling of learning objectives also in order to strengthen personalities and social behaviour – according to the concept of education (cf. Mertens 1977). We advocate using the term 'work-oriented basic education'.

• **Learning subject**

There is no finalised canon of learning content for work-oriented basic education. The subjects concerned have to be developed specifically for the context. It is nevertheless possible to identify general learning content which can be subsumed under basic education in regard to work.

⁶ cf. *ibid.*

Work-oriented basic education encloses:

- work/context-related reading and writing which is of special importance after the establishment of QM systems
- work/context-related calculating
- work/context-related communication (especially understanding and passing information)
- work/context-related communication while using of new media and additional languages, particularly English
- faculty of speech regarding oneself. This means the ability to express oneself regarding one's own competences, motives, and concerns in manifold situations in life, but particularly within public communication
- (self-) reflective faculty; this means to be able to question oneself regarding behaviour, attitude, opinions and roles. This competence is necessary for the ability to speak for oneself and one's own matters and to be understood by others
- competence to change; this means to be competent in dealing with changes in complex and challenging situations in life and to be willing to actively shape changes of the personal situation

- **Work-oriented basic education has a compensatory function**

Work-oriented basic education aims at balancing milieu-specifically caused deficits in education and the different ways and chances of access to education that come with them (cf. Klein 2013).

Within this broad understanding, work-oriented basic education is based on the knowledge about **inter-generative educational deficits** (c.f. Mertens 1988). This means that it enables certain people to close educational gaps which evolve from the changes in school curricula between generations. In this context, work-oriented basic education has a compensatory function.

- **Reference points of work-related basic education**

Work-related basic education refers to the very different positions which individuals carry in our society towards economy and labour⁷. This relates particularly to the following practices:

- within the system of 'economy and labour': work-related – learning on the job (HR development and vocational-operational training for formally low-qualified employees)
- out of the system of 'economy and labour' and back into the system: learning out of the job into the job (context: e.g. interim employment societies)
- out of unemployment into the system of 'economy and labour' – learning into the job (long-term unemployed people, migrants without access to the employment system)
- to develop meaningful perspectives on life beyond employment – without job in the regular labour market (non-governmental or publicly funded labour market)

⁷ The following differentiation evolved in the joint project GIWA and was conceptually adjusted to the objectives of the first funding priority 'Basic education in economy and (www.giwa-grundbildung.de).

- **Target groups of work-related basic education**

The target groups of work-related basic education are employees and individuals without employment whose basic education as described above is not or not anymore distinct enough to locate themselves and move in the labour market.

A particular focus is on employees and work-seekers that belong to the groups of unskilled, semiskilled and formally low-qualified people. These groups have often worked in so-called simple jobs where communicative, information-technological and economic competences did not play an important role and where these competences accordingly went to waste or could not be built. These quite heterogeneous groups of people are usually not in the focus of HR and competence development in companies (c.f. Käßlinger 2009). Work-oriented basic education specifically aims at the target groups whose participation in training is rather low due to habits and a lack of opportunities.

The goals of work-related basic education are to develop vocational competence, to strengthen employability, to promote flexibility, to enhance satisfaction in work as well as participation in working processes.

Empirical evidence shows that the major demand for basic education in companies / of employees is on level 1 or 2, but rather in the area 3 and 4. The areas 3 and 4 are not (any-more) sufficient for mastering the risen requirements in the defined areas.

7.2 Pedagogic-didactic perspective

- **Work-related basic education is education**

Basic education comes – as stated initially – from an education-theoretical tradition and is a pedagogic concept which includes such broad educational goals like reflective faculty, autonomy and identity. Basic education is education; namely in the sense of enlightenment. Basic education as education has a character of enlightenment and emancipation and asks for the conditions for the opportunity of self-education and self-determination of adult learners.

- **Work-oriented basic education is more than reading, writing, and calculating**

This aspect has already been stressed under the programmatic perspective:

Basic education is more than imparting cultural techniques like reading, writing, and calculating – and, not only in the case of migrants, also speaking. What basic education actually means develops from each particular contextual analysis of demands and concerns of employees and companies, unemployed people and education providers resp. interim employment agencies. The subjects derive from the fields of work.

- **Work-oriented basic education is not a set curriculum**

There is no closed curriculum. Learning demands emerge contextually and learning subjects are always developed context-specifically (c.f. Klein / Stanik 2009). The subjects identified above concretise in real requirement situations. Real, authentic learning subjects are not examples for the subject-systematic development of higher competence in reading, writing and speaking, but specific reference points for optimising the competent handling with and in specific requirement situations.

- **Work-oriented basic education focuses on the individuals**

The primary addressee of basic education is, following the educational tradition, the participant; in the company it is the employee; outside the company it is the work-seeker. His or her demands and concerns are the central starting and reference point of basic education – this does not necessarily contradict the consideration of operational basic educational concerns, but it is not mandatorily in accordance with it either. A special focus is on employees and work-seekers that belong to the target groups of unskilled, semiskilled and formally low-qualified people and therefore to the groups that are usually not in the focus of HR and competence development and are being labelled as ‘uneducated’.

Working requirements, and not the social attribution as ‘functional illiterates’ with their stigma, are the starting point.

Work-related basic education does not focus on the individual deficits but uses existing, often hidden competences as a starting point for learning. It respectively develops with the learner reasons for learning, learning targets and ways of learning that evolve from critical requirement situations. Work-related basic education targets a type of learning which proves itself useful in real living and working situations.

- **Work-related basic education is work-oriented but not reduced to work**

The term ‘work-orientation’ does not exclude other life environments from learning in work-oriented basic education. The reference to the working and living environment marks the demands and concerns of the learners and is being balanced didactic-methodically.

- **Work-oriented basic education uses and develops the learnability of working environments**

Work-oriented basic education uses the knowledge of the special effectiveness of learning in the process of work. Learning in the process of work particularly enables an ability of affiliation to specific challenges, a learning interest and learning motives of employees, and individual learning strategies and preferences. Basic education uses manifold learning settings (individual coaching, tandem learning, group learning, learning through sitting in and feedback / training on the job).

Work-oriented basic education follows specific considerations of usefulness – for employees and companies

Work-related basic education at learning areas in companies has two addressees: the employee and the organisation – the company resp. the people in charge. Management and workers’ representatives will only hold work-related basic education to be a useful option if they can see not only an individual benefit, but also a benefit for the company. This benefit has to be clearly describable and noticeable. Acceptance for basic education in economy and labour from companies and employees requires ‘anchors’ and ‘affiliation’. The yield has to be right – for the company / the authorising institution as well as for the learners.

The following applies to work-oriented basic education as well: the primary addressee of basic education is, following the educational tradition, the participant; in the company, it is the employee. His or her demands and concerns are the central starting and reference point of basic education – this does not necessarily contradict the consideration of operational basic educational concerns, but it is not mandatorily in accordance with it either.

The working requirements that exemplarily show in work places are the starting point for the development of adequate curricula. This includes the ability to transfer what has been learned into the real working action.

- **Work-oriented basic education provides the transfer of what has been learned into competent action**

Learning itself is not sufficient when it comes to work-oriented basic education. The obligation extending beyond this is to transfer what has been learned into working action and thus into a competence. We can partly rely on this happening on the go. Based on the empirically gathered knowledge, it is at the same time advisable ‘to promote to accompany these processes, because for some people it means courage to apply newly gained knowledge to the reality of daily work; for some people it is overcoming habits in the sense of “my colleague always did this for me”; and for groups that are labelled with the self-perception of deficits it means breaking traditional role patterns’ (Klein 2012, 8).

In the company, learning transfer requires a feedback culture, ‘that welcomes changing behaviour and changing old role patterns and that makes room for changing behaviour of employees. And you will not find this feedback culture to be inflationary, and it cannot be developed everywhere.’ (Klein 2012, 9). Learning transfer also has to consider ‘that growing competences in the sense of “more abilities” also need growing competences in the sense of “being allowed more”. This can threaten traditional hierarchic patterns, and matching counter-reactions have to be considered beforehand.’ (c.f. Rossmann 2012, 107)

7.3 perspective of compatible communication with businesses

Work-oriented basic education is the adequate form of training for low-qualified workers and employees, whose communicative abilities do not or not anymore suffice to perform a task. This can show in both oral and written communication.

Work-oriented basic education aims to reach those who are not in the focus of the operational HR practice, even though they form an important resource for the competitiveness of businesses. They are low-qualified workers and employees who need vocational training to maintain and broaden their employability.

Work-oriented basic education is more than just a seminar; it is rather a project that includes the development, preparation, implementation and evaluation of further training which refers to work-oriented basic education. It is particularly about identifying employees with a demand for basic education, about approaching employees, about developing a suitable teaching-learning format, about choosing a suitable teacher, about evaluating and ensuring the benefit and the effects of the training in the daily working routine.

Work-oriented basic education is an individual seminar concept developed and realised to match the particular company.

a) Content-wise, the seminars focus on the objectives of the particular company and the particular industry and use terms that the employees encounter in their daily work.

b) Organisationally, work-oriented basic education is adjusted to the demands and resources of the particular company and of the employees. This refers to the learning area (e.g. in the company, near the company or spatially divided from the company), the amount of learners (classes should not have more than 10 learners), the time and duration of the seminars (depending on the working hours and shift schedules and on whether it is working time or free time of the learners).

Based on the example of the project SESAM, the following trainings of work-oriented basic education belong to the seminar catalogue, each one being designed and carried out demand-oriented⁸:

Communication with clients – mastering new and old requirements confidently.

Oral and written communication requirements of dealing with clients will be trained according to the working requirements.

Documentation of working processes and results – changing requirements due to QM systems

The central requirements will be practised and stabilised in a work-oriented way.

Job change: being prepared for new communication situations

Restructurings and new product lines lead to changing communication requirements. This training prepares for these situations.

Mastering internal communication with colleagues.

Typical conflicts due to a lack of communication will be identified and communicative alternatives will be practised.

Job change: mastering the new role as a superior.

If simple workers attain a superior position, this training helps to master the role change and to stay relaxed in critical situations.

Understanding spread sheets.

How do spread sheet programmes (Excel, Lotus 1-2-3, Quattro Pro etc.) work? What are their advantages, where can they be used efficiently?

Information technology – gaining basic competence for digital media.

Basic knowledge will be imparted in short seminars and with examples based on real working tasks.

Certifying competences, or: I can do more than I or others know.

Recognised procedures of balancing competences are HR tools of a modern management. After this training, employees know how are they are positioned professionally, socially and personally.

⁸ c.f. SESAM business brochure April 2014

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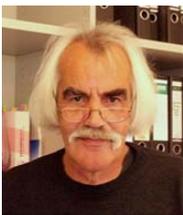
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