

Ambassadors for literacy: From learners to experts

WHO ARE WE?

The 3 main objectives of Bundesverband Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung e.V. (the German Federal Association for Literacy and Basic Education) are:

- Promoting reading and writing skills for adults, motivating people to make use of training programmes, lobbying, counselling of persons concerned,
- Raising awareness of the public about causes and effects of functional illiteracy,
- Supporting tutors, empowering learners and supporting them in constructing networks and self-help structures.

The association provides a counselling service for people who want to take part in training and work with the training organisations to set up their training programmes.

DESCRIPTION

To carry out its actions, the Bundesverband uses the "ALFA-Mobil" (literacy-mobile), a bus that serves as stand in important public events. With the "ALFA-Mobil", the association tours German speaking countries. The learners do interviews in every kind of media, make speeches and organize workshops at congresses. They are also invited as experts during tutors or social workers' training programmes.

The Bundesverband has realised how interesting it was to work with learners to raise awareness about literacy difficulties. Their speech is authentic and straightforward. When they say that reading, writing and mathematics learning in adulthood is possible, their words are extremely meaningful. It allows everyone to see the abilities that the adults with literacy difficulties can develop (unfortunately not recognized by any qualification) and how basic skills training can improve their quality of life.

The learners are experts in presenting their topic and persuading decision makers, tutors, the media, key persons and other persons concerned to give support to the cause.

LEARNERS-EXPERTS

This project started at the request of learners who wanted to improve their communication skills but also get their abilities as literacy experts recognized.

As part of a project funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the qualification "Learners become Experts", initiated by learners, was developed with the central aim of becoming more professional for public literacy awareness campaigns.

This accredited training course contains 3 different modules:

Module one: media training:

- What are the German media and what kind of public relations do they have?
- What are your personal rights when in contact with the media?
- How to handle media requests?
- Concentration and relaxation exercise.

Module two: communication skills:

- What is the perception of oneself and others?
- What are the basic rules for successful communication and how to practise them?
- How to communicate face to face?
- How to discuss in a group and negotiate?
- Learning how to say “No”,
- Improving rhetoric and elocution,
- Concentration and relaxation exercise.

Module three: presentation in public:

- Awareness of your body language,
- How to present yourself and your story (chronological narration)?
- How to present the topic and get to the point (in interviews),
- How to cope with stage fright and camera shyness?
- And once again, exercises in concentrating and relaxing.

The training was conducted by three professional tutors, supported by a literacy tutor and a researcher.

During the implementation of the modules, positive side-effects could be seen.

For example, the things learned were applied in everyday life immediately. Learners were better able to cope with their fears, felt more confident in their appearance and were more able to stand up for their own position, in both private and professional life. Some learners took a step forward and decided to participate directly after the training course in training programmes at the workplace that they had always avoided before.

This project has been truly successful and this is why it still continues. These modules are continually adjusted and enhanced.

SELF-DETERMINATION IMPACT

The exercises on perception allowed the learners to assess themselves and others better. Not only did the participants learn how to evaluate themselves but also how to evaluate others. The role-playing in which they had to adopt different personalities with different points of view showed them that they can leave their assigned roles as a “loser”.

The intense exchange with the tutors and their feedback as external professionals paved the way to the “outside”. Learning outside the “safe track” became possible.

In fact, this ‘change’ took place outside the “safe” training environment, as if this detachment made it easier to be aware of oneself and others.

The immediate application of activities learned with the “ALFA-Mobil” and participation as experts at congresses and meetings, as well as positive feedback from the public and other experts, also strengthened the learners’ self-confidence, gaining confidence in speaking and enabled them to address their concerns assertively.

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