

'Re-thinking Literacy in Slovenia'

A couple of articles in daily newspapers citing the Unesco statistics on millions of illiterate people around the world and the roundtable about the reading habits of library visitors organised by the Slovenian reading society, local TV contribution on educational opportunities for people with low literacy skills in the area pointing out programmes targeted to most vulnerable groups of adults, were literary all public events organised on the International Literacy Day in Slovenia. It was also mentioned that the Statistical office collected census data on literacy and at that time 0,45 % of population 15+ were illiterate. And also that Slovenia undertook a survey in 1998 on adult literacy in which 77% of population 16-64 performed on the lowest scale, and that new research would be necessary on this topic..

This short overview indicates quite well the present state of adult literacy in Slovenia. It has been considered a minor phenomenon and as such neglected. Despite devastating results of the national literacy survey in the end of nineties, Slovenia decided not to take part in the PIAAC survey and so miss the possibility to make a comparison of the developments in the last decade. All the surveys are located to young people and children (such as PISA, TIMMS and PIRLS) which confirmed backlog of Slovenia in reading skills of school age children in compare to other developed countries. Now all of the sources and professional endeavours are concentrated on improvement of reading skills of children and youth. There have been no attempts recently to find out how reading skills are maintained and developed throughout the adulthood.

Adult literacy in Slovenia has been positioned on the wrong end of the telescope. Minor problem deserves marginal position within education even within adult education. But it would be wrong to conclude that there is no adult literacy education in the country, on the contrary, there is a national literacy scheme supported by the Ministry of Education and Sport, the problem is that it consists of less than 100 active part time teachers and just over a thousand of participants per year (instead of at least 25.000 planned in the National Adult Literacy Strategy from 2003). Just as 'One Swallow does not make a Summer', the small number of people taking part in the adult literacy programs do not change the Slovenian national literacy portrait. However, despite small numbers, there are some valuable practices implemented in the scheme, such as special training for adult literacy teachers, programs targeted to groups of adult such as low educated people in rural areas, low skilled employed, adult returning to formal education, family literacy, elderly and adults with special needs. Tandem teachings in small groups, embedded learning, individualized programs, creating literacy environments, are some of the practices which worked well over the years. The national evaluation of the literacy scheme (in 2010) confirmed the effectiveness of the programs. The evaluation also brought about some challenges for the future development such as the need for validation of non formal learning, ongoing development of competences of adult literacy teachers, development of methodologies to assess local adult literacy needs, more effective approaches in working with special needs, quality control, assessment of the scale of the literacy problem, etc.

The White paper on adult education (2011) gives a considerable attention and proposes measures to raising basic skills and key competences of vulnerable groups. But the policy paper National Adult Education Master Plan for the period 2011 – 2015 has not been adopted yet it seems that the consensus about its priorities is hard to reach. It is feared that economic recession will affect also the tiny funds which enabled a few hundreds of adults a very positive and qualitative educational opportunity free of charge.

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