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Monika Tröster

GERMANY STRENGTHENS LITERACY THROUGH RESEARCH

Monika Tröster’s contribution moves us along the literacy continuum to the issue of functional literacy. A nationwide study has just confirmed that seven and a half million Germans of working age are functionally illiterate. Yet no public outcry has ensued. Is illiteracy a taboo? The article describes current developments in the area of literacy and basic education in Germany, considering also literacy education for immigrants. Literacy advocates hope for widespread implementation of good practices in literacy education and a cross-stakeholder alliance to tackle functional illiteracy. Politicians acknowledge the gravity of the situation, but it is early to say what will be done to alleviate the problem.

Hannu-Pekka Lappalainen

YOUNG FINNS’ WRITING SKILLS AS THE FOCUS OF ASSESSMENT

Success in PISA school evaluations has furthered the reputation of Finland as an education powerhouse. National assessments of learning outcomes, however, repeatedly reveal major problems in the writing skills of young Finnish males. Most recent results have revealed such deterioration of skills that a new type of developmental approach for the National Curriculum and for teacher training is required. Hannu-Pekka Lappalainen, assessor of learning outcomes at the Finnish National Board of Education, discusses the reasons behind and solutions to this worrying trend.

John Potter

NEW LITERACIES, NEW PRACTICES AND LEARNER RESEARCH: ACROSS THE SEMI-PERMEABLE MEMBRANE BETWEEN HOME AND SCHOOL

Arriving at the “new literacy” end of the literacy continuum, John Potter discusses digital literacy in the context of home and school. The author argues that there is a lack of understanding among researchers of the social practices and wider culture surrounding new media. Younger generations may however be fluent in these cultures. Hence Potter engages the informants of his research, school children and youngsters, as active participants in the research process, through new media use.

Impact of Lifelong Learning

Bjarne Wahlgren and Tinne Geiger

INTEGRATION THROUGH ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION: INTEGRATING IMMIGRANTS INTO NORDIC LABOUR MARKETS

In the Nordic countries immigrants are overrepresented among the unemployed. In 2009, Danish researchers conducted a comparative study in the Nordic countries, analyzing the use of adult education in helping the integration of immigrants into the labour market. This article outlines the findings of that study, relates them to international experience and lists good practices, while also providing an overview of immigrant adult education practices in the Nordic countries.

Special Feature

Kirs Heikälä-Tammi, Sanna Nuutinen, Marja-Liisa Manka and Marjut Mäenpää

SUPPORTING LEARNING IN CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERTISE TRANSFER – A CASE OF INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION TRANSFER FROM FINLAND INTO ESTONIA

This special feature article discusses learning in the context of the workplace. Transferring business expertise across cultures requires carefully planned human resource training. The authors of this research article document the start up of a new Estonian factory of a Finnish convenience foods company. Good practices of expertise transfer relating to management, group work and cultural training are discovered through this case study.

Lline Review

Brian Groombridge

“EDUCATORS CANNOT REMAIN NEUTRAL: PERSPECTIVES FROM FOUR CONTINENTS


*Double-blind peer reviewed

Monika Tröster

Germany strengthens literacy through research. A nationwide study has just confirmed that seven and a half million Germans of working age are functionally illiterate. Yet no public outcry has ensued. Is illiteracy a taboo? The article describes current developments in the area of literacy and basic education in Germany, considering also literacy education for immigrants. Literacy advocates hope for widespread implementation of good practices in literacy education and a cross-stakeholder alliance to tackle functional illiteracy. Politicians acknowledge the gravity of the situation, but it is early to say what will be done to alleviate the problem.

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New literacies, new practices and learner research: across the semi-permeable membrane between home and school. Arriving at the “new literacy” end of the literacy continuum, John Potter discusses digital literacy in the context of home and school. The author argues that there is a lack of understanding among researchers of the social practices and wider culture surrounding new media. Younger generations may however be fluent in these cultures. Hence Potter engages the informants of his research, school children and youngsters, as active participants in the research process, through new media use.

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Lline Review

Brian Groombridge

Literacy has played an important role in the lives of individuals and societies ever since from its emergence as part of cultural evolution. Recent accounts of literacy have not only extended the meaning of literacy but also its conceptualization. Today, literacy is no longer viewed as a set of competencies and skills related to reading and writing but rather as a pivotal part of social practice.

Learners learning to read and write are also being inducted into specific kinds of social practice and acquiring particular beliefs about relationships between people, communities and languages. What it is to be a person, to be moral and to be human in specific cultural contexts is seen as being embedded in the kind of literacy practices within which a person is engaged as part of a community. Literacy is, thus, very much seen as a tool for identity construction, social action and for empowerment.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines literacy as the “ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.” In addition to stressing the skills and competences related to literacy, this definition brings forth the diverse contexts, tools and purposes for which literacy is produced and practiced during present times.

Although the significance of literacy is widely recognized, there are individuals, cultural groups and even nations that are struggling to be literate in the 21st century. This is easily reflected in inequality and marginalization, leading to serious negative multiplicative effects, the economic, social and human costs of which are considerable, both for the individual and the whole of society. It is clear that lifelong learning policies and practices have much to contribute to overcome these challenges.

We have devoted our present issue of LLinE on issues and approaches surrounding literacy in the 21st century. We extend our focus from not only viewing literacy as a skill to be mastered but also as an important element of social practice, identity and power.
From 5 July to 8 July 2011, 70 adult educators, experts and researchers from 15 nations met to discuss and exchange their experiences as part of the Future Forum on Adult Education, organized by the Verband Österreichischer Volkshochschulen [Association of Austrian Adult Education Centres] in cooperation with dvv international and other European Adult Education Associations. The event, which was organized for the third time, took place at the Wiener Urania adult education centre.

The Future Forum on Adult Education is accompanied and advised by an international network with a focus on Central Europe. Its representatives are adult educators from Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, and South Tyrol as well as the European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA).

The topic of this year’s forum was “Alone or Together? Networks and Co-operations in Adult Education.” Already in her opening speech, Barbara Prammer, President of the Austrian National Council, emphasized the fact that educational opportunities are directly linked to the right relationships and networks and that one simply cannot learn well on one’s own. This is why adult education centers and other educational institutions rely on regional and international networks.

NETWORKS AND ADULT EDUCATION?
The importance of and the interest in networks in adult education continue to increase. The important role that networks play in the field is especially apparent from their promotion in different EU projects and their growing scientification through network analysis. Exchanging in networks and entering into cooperations are gaining in importance. Often this is also linked to the hope that adult education as a whole can be given a stronger voice and that at the same time the interests of one’s own institution can be better represented. The 2011 Future Forum asked the following questions:

- Who gains which (additional) benefit from networks on different levels? What is the additional benefit of international networks?
- Where can one find best practice examples and what constitutes a best practice example?
- Does networking, as a moment of modernization, threaten traditional structures of adult education?
- What competences are required for networking – both for networking locally and for working in international cooperations and networks?

THE TENSION BETWEEN LOCAL AND GLOBAL.
The opening speech by John Field of the University of Stirling, Scotland, served as a starting point for a critical examination and discussion of networks as well as of their links to society, the embeddedness of one’s own adult education centre or institution in...
the local context and the tension between local integration and global demands.

The introductory speech was immediately followed by an afternoon packed with different best-practice contributions from Finland, Germany, Norway and many other countries on a variety of topics and networks. The Nordic Network, i.e. the networking of adult education in Scandinavian countries, and the European Association for the Education of Adults are just two of the many examples that were presented. Also discussed were a large number of practical examples from Austria or in which Austrians participated, such as a network for apprentice trainers in Carinthia or the sports network PA-SEO.

On the second day of the Future Forum, Franja Centrih from Slovenia painted a portrait of the Lifelong Learning Centre Savinjska in her keynote speech as well as the regional networks into which the Centre is integrated.

The topics “Learning Regions”, “web 2.0” and specific examples of networking were thoroughly discussed in small workshop groups.

A book presentation featuring the authors of the book Sozialkapital und Erwachsenenbildung [Social Capital and Adult Education] helped sharpen the academic view of networks and their measurability.

Harald Katzmair (FAS Research) delivered the final presentation of the Future Forum. In a lively contribution, Katzmair talked about the currencies of networking, i.e. what is of value to the network partners. He also discussed the basic competences required for successful networking.

CONCLUSIONS

The Future Forum is a room of thought, questions and exchange, and it is not easy to conclude the richness of thoughts and ideas in a few words. One crystallized theme to take home is the exhortation to be careful with one’s own resources within networks and network activity. On the other hand — drawing from the keynote of Harald Katzmair — networks need generosity, which means you should not just wait for the others to contribute their knowledge, resources and experience. Lively networks function and produce added value out of this exchange.

Another important aspect in working in networks is to be clear about the values of every partner in the network and about what each partner needs from the cooperation, all the while remembering what each partner can contribute. A lot can be learned through analysing successful projects but this is equally true for failed networks.

There will be a publication on the Future Forum 2011 presenting examples of networking and summarizing the discussions.

It is planned that the Future Forum will take place at different locations every year. In 2012, Bavaria will be the venue for the next event. Further information can be found at http://www.vhs.or.at/375.

ENDNOTES

1 Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, Hungarian Folk High School Society (HFHSS), Verband der Volkshochschulen Südtirols, Danish Adult Education Association, Learn For Life — Dutch Platform for International Adult Education, European Association for the Education of Adults (EAEA)

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STEFAN VATER

Stefan Vater is working at the office of the Association of Austrian Adult Education Centres (Verband Österreichischer Volkshochschulen), Vienna responsible for statistics, educational research, political education. He also teaches Gender Studies at the University of Vienna.

CONTACT

Email: stefan.vater@vhs.or.at

PETER ZWIELEHNER

Peter Zwielehner is employed at the office of the Association of Austrian Adult Education Centres (Verband Österreichischer Volkshochschulen), Vienna responsible for statistics and the Database Knowledge-base Erwachsenenbildung (www.adulteducation.at)

CONTACT

Email: peter.zwielehner@vhs.or.at
Financial literacy: a challenge for change

In a moment when we live in an economic and financial crisis, the FinLiCo Project intends to provide a set of adequate knowledge and competences, in order to prepare citizens for the challenges and temptations of the consumption society. The Project foresees, as a first step, the launch of an official financial literacy educational website where “contents and hints” will be available, targeted at trainers and the general public. Its contents include topics and simple hints as well as material for trainees and a complete curriculum. These materials are intended to be used as a complement to other training courses as well as in the daily life of the consumer. An overarching aim is to improve the quality of life of citizens and improve cooperation among adult education organizations throughout Europe.

THE PROJECT
“FinLiCo – Financial Literacy Competences for Adult Learners” is a multilateral European project under the Lifelong Learning Programme (External reference: 510140-LLP-1-2010-1-PT-GRUNDTVIG-GMP). The project is managed by the Portuguese School of Accounting and Administration of Oporto (ISCAP) and benefits from a wide partnership of public and private educational providers from several countries, namely: INTEGRA (SL), QUALED (SK), ECC (AT), Learning4Life (CZ), CARDET (CY), ESCOT Veneto (IT) and the London South Bank University (GB). The project also benefits from the intervention of the Swiss Federation for Continuing Education in Zurich, as a silent partner. Although the partners come from only some European countries, the final target group is the European citizen in general since the problem studied in this project is salient in all European countries.

THE NEED BEHIND FINLICO
2010 has been one of the years when the indebtedness volume has been highest in Europe in the last decades. On the website http://www.usdebtclock.org/world-debt-clock.html one can see the situation of public debt of selected countries, including European countries. This is a nonstop clock, namely for Greece and Portugal. However, if one looks at Germany or China, the speed of the clock is completely different.

Taking this into consideration, it is urgent that citizens are given the appropriate instruments to manage their budgets and to become more aware of the several products and financial mechanisms that financial institutions are making available. Although there are some efforts of some entities to alleviate indebtedness, these don’t seem to be enough or completely efficient.

In fact, on one hand financial institutions are more and more aware of their social responsibility and try to educate individuals so they can be conscious and appreciate that they cannot spend more than they earn. But on the other hand these are the same institutions that develop and sell financial products and services, surviving on the interest gained from them. How is it possible to mediate these conflicting roles? Furthermore, recent changes in higher education (universities and polytechnic schools) introduced by the Bologna declaration forced the readjustment of a 5 year curriculum into a 3 year one. Some topics and subjects had to be cut off due to lack of time. The focus of these cuts have been, precisely, in the topics concerning financial literacy as it is easy to think that literacy, and particular financial literacy, is something that everybody is already proficient in.

For all these reasons, it is crucial to provide individuals and their families with instruments and competences that allow them to better manage their monthly budget and to increase their savings, allowing for good investment. Consequently, an augment in available capitals will be possible, the economy will grow and the quality of life of citizens will also be improved.

PROJECT AIMS
The main aim of the project is to improve the financial literacy competences of adult learners in order to prepare them for the challenges and temptations of the consumer society and to prevent situations of financial indebtedness. By financial literacy and education we mean

the process by which financial consumers / investors improve their understanding of financial products and concepts and, through information, instruction and / or objective advice, develop the skills and confidence to become aware of (financial) risks and opportunities, to make informed choices, to know where to go for help, and to take other effective actions to improve their financial well-being and protection (IGFE, 2011).

The project seeks to impact not only on adult learners’ competences, but also introduce new and more adequate training methodologies and resources. This is to say, we target both trainees and trainers. To accomplish this, the partnership has identified the financial literacy needs of adults in Europe. As a result, a set of materials for trainers and for learners is being developed and translated into each one of the partners’ mother tongues. We also expect that these activities will allow us to achieve other European level objectives, such as the:

• Promotion of dialogue between educators and the community including those with social responsibility in finances, e.g., government,
employers, banks and other financial institutions – to sum up, all of those that have a crucial role in economic decision making;
• Development of innovative practices in adult education to provide adults with pathways to improving their knowledge and competences, e.g., by making available simple hints and materials (such as exercises, manuals) for trainees and trainers;
• Improvement of pedagogical approaches and the management of adult education in organizations, e.g., by applying the most updated pedagogical approaches, including the use of technology, to the materials referred above, not only to facilitate the management of education but also to improve motivation and satisfaction as well as final results;
• Improvement of the quality and volume of the cooperation between organizations involved in adult education.

PRODUCTS TO BE DEVELOPED
Considering the identified needs, the project expects to deliver, by October 2012, three main products to address trainers, trainees and organizations:
• A toolbox for adult users containing training resources in the field of financial literacy.
• A handbook for trainers containing pedagogical guidelines.
• A curriculum for financial literacy that will be supported by web educational technologies such as LMS and other web-based educational tools in order to increase their availability and accessibility.

The topics that will be covered in the educational material include: Budgeting, Savings, Income, Basic Mathematics, Financial Products, Indebtedness, Credit, Risks, Planning and investment, Critical thinking, Shopping and consumer rights and the Monetary system.

These products will be developed and tested by institutions, educators and individuals before distribution. Afterwards, the products will be available on the project website. Social media will be used in project dissemination. The project will end in 2012 with a multiplier conference that will take place in Portugal in July.

Comments and suggestions can be addressed to Anabela Mesquita by the email sarmento@iscap.ipp.pt.

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ANABELA MESQUITA
Ms Anabela Mesquita is coordinator of the FinLiCo project. She is adjunct professor and vice dean of ISCAP (School of Accountancy and Administration of Porto, Portugal).

CONTACT
Email: sarmento@iscap.ipp.pt
http://www.financial-literacy.eu/cms/
This literature review classifies literacy research under three meta-frameworks which are the quantitative, qualitative and metaphorical one. The review examines five actual frameworks of literacy research through their definitions of literacy. The frameworks of the inquiry are: literacy rate, functional literacy, the Freirean concept, the socio-cultural framework, and “literacies of information”. The article organizes literacy research through two dimensions. First, literacy can be defined as universal or contextual. Second, it can be identified as text management or communication. The outcome is four conceptual maps.
**INTRODUCTION**

Literacy is the most important prerequisite for lifelong learning. Its significance has grown with the increasing amount of information in our lives. Today, literacy is understood in a far broader sense than previously. Literacy research has been seen through four following perspectives: 1) an ability, 2) a part of an individual’s life, 3) a social practice and 4) a process of critical interpretation (Lytle & Wolfe, 1989). In this article these four perspectives will be modified to fit better to the real discussions that currently exist. Also a needed update is offered by including “literacies of the information” discourse later in the text. This article aims to formulate a valid model of its subject matter but it is exploratory in nature: hence this work is far from setting the ultimate words in the debate.

The scholarly orientation of literacy research can be viewed through **three meta-frameworks**: the **quantitative**, **qualitative** and **metaphorical** one (see chart 1 below). These three meta-frameworks include **five frameworks**, quantitative and qualitative both consist of two each, and the metaphorical is the fifth. First, quantitative tradition assesses literacy skills by a dichotomous **literacy rate** or with a continuous scale of the **functionality** of certain literacy proficiency. Second, qualitative tradition includes the **Freirean** approach and the **socio-cultural** approach which both emphasize the context-bound nature of literacy. Third, **literacies** required in the context of the **information society** add yet an applied dimension to the discussion.

“No standard international definition of literacy captures all its facets: indeed there are numerous different understandings of literacy, some of which are even contradictory” (UNESCO, 2006, 30). This cross-section review aims to create a coherent picture required in the diverse field of literacy research. The inquiry captures the five most commonly used literacy frameworks and analyzes their definitions of literacy through two dimensions (see chart 1). First, I will examine the multidimensionality of literacy and how this is understood. There is constant tendency towards more diverse understandings of literacy (Collins & Blot, 2003, 3; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Second, I will show the extent to which literacy is seen either as a universal or a local, context-bound phenomenon. This dimension owes especially to Street (1984) who presented the profound critique over the universal literacy concept. In contrast to this Brandt & Clinton (2002) offer the enlightening analysis on how to balance transcontextual and local potentials of literacy. I will distinguish the role of each framework in the field of literacy research. These five frameworks have each one chapter which is followed by the final chapter consisting of the analytical discussion around three conceptual diagrams. The final chapter summarizes this review.

**LITERACY RATE**

The literacy rate is a simplistic measure, for which it is often criticized. However, this concept is still widely used by international organizations, the media and some significant research, so it is still worth analysing. Literacy rate is a dichotomy that divides people to two categories, one of literate and another of illiterate.

Early dichotomist assessments of literacy can be found in marriage records, conscription records and censuses from some Western and Northern European countries, for example, Sweden (a pioneer when considering the literacy of the whole population) as early on as the 1500s. In Western countries literacy records became more systematic from the 1800s (Cipolla, 1969, 113-130; Graff, 1981).

The still most commonly used definition of adult literacy was formed at the 1958 UNESCO general conference. It states that all aged 15 years and over whom can both read and write — with comprehension — a short simple statement on their everyday life can be considered literate. The criteria of basic literacy have been under discussion for over half a century. For example, the USA, Great Britain and the World Bank define literacy as a basic skill that covers reading, writing and arithmetic (See UNESCO, 1957, 18–34; 2006a, 149–159).

Utilizing the two dimensional measures of the literacy rate, UNESCO’s (1957, 13–15) first broad literacy survey reported census data from over sixty countries and estimated that in the 1950s 55–57% of the world’s adult population were literate. Currently, the comparative figure is 83.6%. Seldom is the very basic criterion of literacy high-

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**Chart 1. Conceptual dimensions and meta-frameworks in literacy research**

![-chart](chart.png)
lighted: “a person who can both read and write, with comprehension, a short simple statement on their everyday life can be considered literate” (UNESCO, 2006, 63–66, 162–163; UNESCO, 2008, 23).

Comprehensive international statistics from the 1970s onwards are available, although these should be regarded with caution (UNESCO, 2002) due to serious reliability problems of the data, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Though the literacy rate is a rough measurement with substantial shortcomings, it works as an indicator that shows great disparities between world regions, as well as within many countries. All regions with low literacy rates (Arab states, West and South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa) have large literacy gaps between adult men and women (UNESCO, 2005b, 72). Literacy gaps between young and older age cohorts are also substantial and these peak regionally in Arab states. Similarly disparities occur between rural and urban residents, and in relation to wealth. Naturally, whether or not an individual ever went to school has the strongest effect on literacy (UNESCO, 2006, 167–179).

Despite the problems discussed soon, in some particular situations data on the literacy rate can be considered coherent enough to study social variation. With literacy rate we can grasp the stage in the process of making of a literate society which is a catchword in current literacy research (see Olson & Torrance, 2001a; UNESCO, 2006, 189–213). Additionally, Basu and Foster (1998) used literacy rate in their calculations on household based literacy variations between Indian states. Even one literate family member improves the socio-economic standing of the whole household (Basu & Forster, 1998; Basu, Narayan & Ravallion, 2002).

Literacy assessments are based on the cognitive idea that literacy — reading, writing and arithmetic — are a group of acquired skills that are considered universal (UNESCO, 2006, 149). Many prominent literacy researchers tie literacy inseparably to text-bound skills, such as reading and writing (Ong, 1982; Olson, 1994; Goody, 2000). The critics of this view will be introduced alongside the socio-cultural approach. The literacy rate contains inaccuracies which are based on the universality, comprehensiveness and reliability of the data collected. Here, I concentrate on the issues related to the problems of reliability.

These problems arise firstly from the non-standardised definitions of literacy used by some countries which do not correlate to UNESCO’s standard definition for basic literacy (see four paragraphs above). For example, some countries use the ability to read newspapers, while others use attained years of schooling as the proxy measurement. The latter example is problematic due to the differences in teaching standards. Another problem arises out of missing information. Data collection in countries of high illiteracy has only recently commenced. By contrast some countries of high literacy evaluate only the school attainment level, not the level of basic literacy. Secondly, a country may change the definition of literacy which further complicates comparisons. A case in point is Pakistan, where in each of its five national censuses a different definition of literacy was used (UNESCO, 2006, 156–164.).

Thirdly, another matter of global variation arises from the age that people are generally considered to be (literate) adults. The most common definition is 15 years and older. In some cases, the age of the adult population has been set at 10, 7 or even as low as 5 years of age. Fourthly, there is variation between the methods of data collection. Until quite recently, all cross-national literacy assessments were based on official national census figures in which three methods were used: self-declaration, third-party assessment often reported by the head of the household (both of these measures are subjective measures) and the educational attainment proxy. All of these methods have their shortcomings (UNESCO, 2006, 163–164). Direct testing has revealed that the indirect literacy proficiency assessment methods used in national censuses almost always overestimate the country’s literacy rate (Schaffner, 2005a).

Direct and therefore objective assessments that have been applied in recent years provide a more realistic picture of an individual’s literacy level than recorded levels (UNESCO, 2006, 156–164). In Ethiopia, subjective measures claimed it took 4 years of schooling for 95% of the students to be considered literate, whereas through objective assessment this threshold is not crossed before 6 years of schooling. In Nicaragua the comparable figures are 3 years by subjective and 5 years by objective assessments (Schaffner, 2005b). This shows how problematic educational attainment is as a proxy of literacy. The inconsistencies in the quality of education and its levels result in diverse learning outcomes between countries. Schnell-Anzola, Rowe & LeVine (2005, 874) conclude from a study of the literacy of 167 mothers in Nepal that 27.6% of the women who claimed they could read scored zero when they were later tested. All these examples cast doubt on the validity of subjective measures of literacy assessment.

Currently available literacy rates do not provide information on what individuals know or what they are able to do using different texts of varying degrees of difficulty. The dichotomist concept also does not cover numeracy skills (UNESCO-UIS, 2009, 15). In addition to the non-standardized definitions and the reliability problems of the assessments and surveys, problems also arise out of the use of the single term “literate” that is applied to both rudimentary forms, as well as highly developed forms of literacy. Direct testing is at the core of the activities aiming to provide a richer picture on the continuum of literacy skills. Through direct testing we can gain both more reliable and more comprehensive information than is not possible with the census based dichotomist literacy rate. Functional literacy is the concept that links direct assessment to the focal discussion on what is universal in literacy across cultures.
Functional Literacy

Functional literacy drew attention to the fact that in different cultures, societies, and communities a unique form of literacy is required. Functional literacy was the first critique aimed at the oversimplified nature of the literacy rate. Gray (1956, 19) famously defined functional literacy “A person is functionally literate when he has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable him to engage effectively in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his culture or group.” UNESCO (1957, 179) presents a fine illustration on the possible pre-conditions for literacy. A chart of 35 countries shows that literacy is connected closely to urbanization and industrialization.

In the 1960s and 1970s functional literacy was used as a concept that connected literacy either to economic growth or to the development of a nation. Simultaneously, the idea of literacy as a changing force of society was born. The concept has been troubled by the fact that it does not have clear standards. Kenneth Levine (1982) argued that the concept is extremely elastic of meaning (see also Maddox & Espoito on this, forthcoming). The concept of functional literacy has been attached to mutually contradictory objectives or needs. On the one hand, it has been connected to the economy and productivity, and on the other, it has been used to highlight the need of furthering participation and consciousness (See Gray, 1956; UNESCO, 1973; Verhoeven, 1994; Raassina, 1990, 19-57). Despite the contradictions there exists a commonly used definition of functional literacy. At the 1978 general conference UNESCO defined it in the following manner:

A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective function of his or her group and community and also for enabling him or her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his or her own and the community’s development (UNESCO, 2006, 154).

The latest UNESCO (2005a, 21) definition of literacy has similarity with the definition of functional literacy. Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential and participate fully in community and wider society.

The idea of functionality can be found as one motivation for measuring literacy proficiency. Various international assessments of literacy provide the concrete applications of functional literacy. The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) has examined the literacy proficiency levels of students since the 1960s. In a comparative study of 15 industrial and developing countries, Thorndike (1973) found vast differences in text comprehension between the two groups of countries. This approach initiated by the IEA, is followed by the international evaluation programme of 15 year olds in the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) implemented by the OECD from 2000. The latest assessment consists of a test of reading skills with examinations in mathematics and science skills. The students were tested in 70 countries that account 90% of the world’s economy. The students in China, Korea, Finland and Singapore did particularly well in the latest evaluation (OECD, 2010).

During 1994–1998 a survey of 20 OECD countries (where citizens are totally or highly literate in terms of the literacy rate) was carried out. In this International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), literacy was defined as an ability to manage printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential. Proficiency tests mapped out abilities in the three following areas; prose literacy, document literacy, and quantitative literacy, including the ability to handle simple arithmetic tasks in the context of text comprehension.

The survey saw literacy as a continuum of five ability levels. Level 1 indicates very low literacy skills, where the individual may, for example, have difficulty identifying the correct amount of medicine to give to a child from the information found on the package. Level 2 respondents can only handle simple material. Level 3 is considered as the minimum desirable threshold for living in a modern urban society. Levels 4-5 show increasingly higher literacy and information handling skills (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000; Linnakylä, Malin, Blomqvist & Sulkkanen, 2000).

A notable proportion of the adult population in the Western world has a modest level of literacy. Over one in five adults on average stayed at the level 1. According to IALS results in some Eastern European countries almost 70%, and in Chile over 80% of adults, remain at the lowest levels of 1-2 on the 5-point scale, while in the US, the UK and Canada over 40% receives similar low results. The Nordic countries attained the best literacy proficiency. In Sweden less than one out of four read at the low levels of 1-2/5 (OECD & Statistics Canada, 2000, 16-18).

It is important to consider literacy proficiency alongside the problematic measure of the world’s adult literacy rate (83.6%). We can draw a rough illustrative estimation using the IALS results as a point of reference for the Global South. It is most likely that over half of the world’s adult population are at level 1 or below. It can be also estimated that roughly only one tenth of the world’s adult population read well on the scales of 3-5.

Statistics Canada & OECD (2005) continues the comparison of developed countries in its ALL-survey (Adult Literacy and Life Skills). This includes comprehensive data of the relationship between literacy and health, family background and labour markets in eight sample countries. Murrey, Clemont & Binkley (2005) have compiled a book on the methods, teamwork as well as information and communication technology literacy of the ALL survey. The successor of the ALL-survey, PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competen-
by the OECD is the most comprehensive survey on adult skills ever undertaken. It covers 26 industrial countries. Africa is not represented and Chile is the only country in the sample from South America. The major surveys on adult literacy are presented in the table below according to the years of data collection.

Due to the lack of standardized in-depth information on the literacy rates and the limited country coverage of IALS- and ALL-surveys, there is a need for the global evaluation of literacy proficiency. UNESCO’s Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) aims to evaluate world literacy by a similar method to IALS and ALL, with the exception of not evaluating problem solving (see table 1 above). LAMP is the most significant effort in cross-national measurement of literacy and numeracy due to its global reach. While IALS and ALL were conducted mainly in industrialized countries and European languages written in the Roman alphabet, the pilot phase of LAMP focuses on developing countries (El Salvador, Mongolia, Morocco, Niger and Palestinian Autonomous Territories) with a wider array of language families (5 vs. IALS/ALL had 2) and scripts (3 vs. IALS/ALL had 1) (UNESCO-UIS, 2009, 22).

Researchers of the socio-cultural framework have criticised IALS for being based on the assumption of a homogenous supranational culture. According to these researchers, the test elements are always better known to inhabitants of some countries than to others, and this distorts the results (Hamilton & Barton, 2000). Nevertheless, it is worth considering how the questions of modern society could be applied to members of a culture that relies on a subsistence economy.

One of two main axes of literacy observes whether literacy is defined as a text-bound or a communicative phenomenon (see chart 1). LAMP as a text-bound framework shows receptivity to the critique presented by the socio-cultural literacy scholars by addressing the following aspects:

- Orality, oral cultures and oral languages and their relationship to literacy
- The relationship between literacy and literacies
- The relationship between the skills of individuals and social practices linked to written materials
- The value of literacy and education in general and different visions of the social world.


LAMP admits that “oral cultures have cultural traditions as rich as any other”, and “there is no way to test literacy skills in a language that is not written”. In contrast to this, LAMP worries about the situations where the orality of a culture is connected to marginalisation of the community. LAMP is conscious that “literacies” in the context of information society refers to “specific sets of skills”. LAMP can not involve this plurality into its scope. The measurement of individual skills by LAMP provides rich and systematic information, but does not preclude the contribution from the alternative views. E.g. the argument on the proximate literacy, discussed briefly earlier in this article, completes the individualistic design. LAMP endorses a view of literacy that goes beyond the economic benefits of literacy. It stresses the fact that education is a fundamental human right (UNESCO-UIS, 2009, 19–21).

A Harvard University research project interviewed over 160 women both in Nepal and Venezuela. The project carried out the direct assessment of literacy and language skills and was able to identify the mechanism of how female literacy enables positive social change in people’s lives. (See also Rene Raya’s, Maria Luz Anigan’s and Cecilia Soriano’s contribution in this issue of LLinE.) New knowledge, models and aspirations gained in school shape reproductive, child-rearing and health patterns in multiple ways. Literacy is advantageous as it is a general set of skills, an academic register, that helps women in their contact with the modern services and administration (LeVine & al., 2001; 2004; Schnell-Anzola & al., 2005).

Hannum and Buchmann (2005) demonstrate how the educational level of mothers very closely connects to health and demographic outcomes such as children’s immunization rates, child mortality and fertility in the eleven poor countries studied. Additionally, Schnell-Anzola & al. (2005) state that the effect of childhood schooling retains on the scores on an academic literacy test many years. The next chapter elaborates on this perspective as the focus in the Freirean approach is in this transformative potential of literacy.

THE FREIREAN FRAMEWORK

This approach is named after the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. His classic manifesto Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1972) highlights the meaning of collective learning in creating social justice. The book was first published in

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**Table 1. Areas assessed in adult literacy surveys**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>OECD &amp; Statistics Canada</th>
<th>UNESCO</th>
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<tr>
<td>Prose literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Document literacy</td>
<td>Document literacy</td>
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<td>Quantitative literacy</td>
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<td>Problem solving</td>
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Portuguese in 1968, and was translated and published in English in 1970. In Freirean pedagogy the poorest part of the population learn literacy skills when they work on the concepts of their everyday lives in dialogue with a teacher (Freire, 1987; 2001). The significance of literacy arises from the fact that existence is realised through new interpretations of language: “Reading the world is reading the world” says the classic Freirean proverb from the book name (Freire & Makado, 1987). Freire was of the opinion that societal development was only possible when the masses become conscious and powerful enough.

REFLECT is a powerful world-wide programme that works within the Freirean framework, with the practical visualisation methodologies developed within Participatory Rural Appraisal. REFLECT was developed to help many traditional literacy programmes, which were based around the use of a literacy primer. “Each literacy Circle develops its own learning materials through constructing different types of maps, calendars, matrices and diagrams to systematise the existing knowledge of participants and analyse local issues” (p. 5). The review of 16 REFLECT evaluations gives a general picture of the method that has been used in unexpectedly diverse contexts (Duffy, Fransman & Pearce, 2009). The programme has created a handbook Communication and Power (Archer & Newman with the REFLECT practitioners world-wide 2003) which helps various groups to form their own practice.

Auerbach (2005) criticises Freire’s point of view for simply assuming literacy as a transformative vehicle. Her concept pedagogy of not-literacy means, that what matters is how literacy education is embedded in political struggles either on a local or global level. The grassroots movements that concentrate on practical problems can, as a side effect, produce literacy. What Freire, REFLECT and Auerbach have in common is their idea of highlighting an individual’s activity within a group and learning literacy in connection to everyday experiences. Another example of this view is an action-oriented El Sis-
tema. This Venezuelan social programme integrates excluded children by introducing them to music. The poor, often illiterate children are given a musical instrument and a seat in the orchestra. Later on they can even be a part of the symphony orchestra. This empowerment of the children can be assumed to lead to a desire to acquire literacy skills that are essential in a modernizing society.

Freire’s ideas receive support from the UNESCO report (2006, 139) amongst others, which introduces several examples of how the educational level, and through that the rise of literacy levels, have a positive effect on political involvement. People who are more highly educated tend to vote more often and they generally have more liberal attitudes. They support democracy. Also see Hannum & Buchman (2005, 345–347) on the link between education and political change. Additionally, the political involvement of Nepalese women is intrinsically tied to how actively they take part in the adult literacy programme (Burchfield, Hua, Baral & Rocha, 2002).

Literacy can be seen as either a tool of control or liberation. The Freirean perspective sees it as a tool of liberation. In contrast to this, Lévi-Strauss (1973, 392, orig. 1953) reminds us of the other side of the coin:

The only phenomenon with which writing has always been concomitant is the creation of cities and empires, that is the integration of large numbers of individuals into a political system, and their grading into castes and classes (...) it seems to have favoured the exploitation of human beings rather than their enlightenment.

Still, in the various contexts of the modernizing world, the Freirean view is more relevant than the long-term historically valid control view by Lévi-Strauss. Next, the socio-cultural literacy research offers detailed accounts on literacy in context, which helps to avoid too wide generalizations.

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL FRAMEWORK
The pioneer of the socio-cultural approach, Hoggart (1957), was significantly ahead of his time when he approched literacy as a part of everyday life and examined its uses in popular culture. Particularly, researchers from the 1980s onwards (Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1984; Gee, 1990; Collins, 1995) have shown that literacy is a far more multifaceted phenomenon than previously thought. This is why nowadays it is also discussed in its plural form, literacies. Graff (1979) emphasized the need for literacy to be examined in specific historical and social contexts. With his concept the literacy myth, he referred to the fact that literacy has been turned into an omnipotent and over-simplified cause of social change.

Before the turn in thinking during the 1980s literacy was largely connected to a binary way of thinking. Binary opposites included literate/illiterate, educated/illiterate, as well as modern/traditional. In addition to these, civilised and barbaric, and written and oral cultures were connected to discussions of literacy (Collins & Blot, 2003, 3-10). Street (1984, 19–125; 2001, 7–10) challenged this binary way of thinking by creating a typology that later became classic. In this theory he criticised the type of literacy concept that does not pay attention to the social context, or oversimplifies the role of literacy in relation to oral culture. He has called this approach the autonomous model which criticises certain previous studies (for example, Goody, 1968; Ong, 1982). The binary opposite to the autonomous concept is the ideological model which takes into account the context and power-structure, as well as its own position in defining literacy.

Along the lines of Street’s (1984) critical typology, which forms the core of the socio-cultural approach, the so-called New Literacy Studies (Gee, 1990; Street, 1993; Collins, 1993) was established. It focuses on what literacy is used for, and it emphasizes the situatonal and context-bound nature of literacy research (Street, 2001, 10–11; UNESCO, 2006, 151). Ethnographic methods are central in socio-cultural literacy research. For example, Barton & Hamilton’s (1998) study based in Lancaster deals with how people use
their literacy skills in organising their daily lives, as well as in operating in their local community. Hare (2005) analyses which of the practices of the native Canadians can be regarded as “literacy”. Recent studies located in the Global South have documented the multiplicity of literacies, as well as the variation of the cultural contexts which have not previously received enough attention (see Street, 2001; Olson & Torrance, 2001a; Robinson-Pant, 2004). This framework works at its best in mapping the colourfulness of literacy practices. Beyond this, originally a socio-cultural scholar himself, Maddox (2009, 188) criticises Street, considering the socio-cultural framework too general to work well in understanding how literacy impacts on development and change.

An early work of the socio-cultural framework, Scriber & Cole (1981) studied literacy of the Vai people, a small West African group who have developed their own syllabic script in the early 1800s. The group’s complex linguistic and scriptural settings include Vai and Arabic as non-schooled literacies and English as schooled literacy. Each of these languages had a distinctive ‘literacy mode’ connected to particular practices and particular profile of skills. Scriber & Cole introduced word practice which is elementary for this framework and current understanding of literacy. Additionally, they concluded that rather than the familiarity with literacy, the particular style of schooled talk was crucial for cognitive skills of Vai people studied (Olson & Torrance 2001b, 7).

Street (1984) became aware of the limits of the binary literacy concept when carrying out anthropological fieldwork in Iran at the beginning of the 1970s. The prevailing form of literacy was Maktab-literacy, based on learning verses of the Koran by heart in Koranic schools. By the international literacy definition, these Iranian students reciting the Koran would have been classed as illiterate, despite their noteworthy grasp of literary text.

In its definition of literacy The New Literacy Studies approach highlights the meaning of communication. In this approach, the text is only one form of communication. Literacy research as a whole, therefore, contains two differing interpretations as to whether text-based communication adds anything significant to reality construction. The question of how writing differs from other forms of storing cultural knowledge and communication methods can be posed (Collins & Blot, 2003, 160–167). How can other forms of symbolic representation such as pictographic writing, smoke signals or ritual dance be compared to written text (Barton, 1994, 112–115; Hare, 2005)? According to Street (1995, 150–159), it is language and concepts that construct reality, not the matter if the words are written or spoken. According to this interpretation, pictures, rituals and stories constitute reality in contrast to the beliefs of Ong (1982), Olson (1994) and Goody (2000).

Literacy as a textual skill does not cover all that is integral to communication. However, colourful oral communication skills alone do not achieve the benefits of the communication of the written word, such as effective data transfer, data storage and possibilities of analysis. Due to these benefits of data management, reading and writing aid abstract thinking. Writing offers the opportunity to introduce thought patterns to various audiences, as well as to oneself (Barton, 1994, 43–45). For a modernising society, writing plays a significant role as an organisational tool (Ong, 1982; Goody, 2000; Olson & Torrance, 2001b). The role of writing in knowledge societies (see UNESCO, 2003b) will be discussed in the next chapter.

Literacy is a meta-ability learned via language use, and the realisation of this meta-ability has socio-political significance (Gee, 1990, 149-154). Heath (1983) also came to this conclusion in her comparative study on socialization into literacy and language use in three different South-Western communities in the USA. The communities consisted of one white, and one black working class community, and a mixed black and white middle class community. Heath noted racism’s connection to literacy. She found that for official institutional practices, languages of the community or linguistic practices of the home were not ascribed as much value, and that black cultural linguistic difficulties were defined on harsher terms than those of white people. Ethnographic research proved that literacy is not neutral, and that power structures are produced and renewed through language. The multiculturalism of the USA makes literacy an important means of building cross-cultural unity, though this may simultaneously squeeze cultural diversity (Hirsch, Kett & Trefil, 1987). Heath’s study is a useful reference for any research on multiculturalism.

The great challenge to education and literacy is formed by the multiplicity of world languages. There are over 6000 languages in the world in less than 200 countries. So, multilingual countries are the rule, monolingual the exception. For example, in Asia there are 2000 languages. Out of these, only 45 are official languages in 30 Asian countries leaving the others mentioned with unofficial status. For example China has pursued a single language policy based on Mandarin Chinese in direct contrast to India which has 19 official languages. These language policies - as possibilities to multilingual education - concretise people’s cultural rights. In addition to community language, a language for the participation in the wider society is often required. This usually means learning an official language. Cultural rights related to small languages – be they oral or written – are both highly important and highly political (UNESCO, 2007 2–4; 2006, 202–205; UNESCO-UIS 2009, 19 see also Barton, 1994, 69–74). The majority of the world’s over 6000 languages are spoken but do not have a written form. UNESCO (2008, 19) states: “It is true that not all languages are written but there are well-known techniques to develop writing systems, so every language can serve as a means of literacy.” Collins and Blot (2003, 99–167) analyse literacy in the context of colonialism and the cultural repression faced by the indigenous people of North America. In today’s multicultural world, literacy is constantly connected to a political struggle for the right to a certain culture and identity.
Education, for the most part, is provided in the official languages leaving members of minority language groups without education in their mother tongues. In Sub-Saharan Africa where the situation is the worst, only 13% of populations are taught in their mother tongue. By contrast, in Asia two out of three children can learn in their mother tongue (UNDP, 2004, 34). Half of the world’s drop-outs are youngsters who cannot obtain education in their mother tongue (World Bank, 2005, 1). The destinies of many individuals or groups are decided in national language and education politics. Provision of education in the mother tongue is essential as it increases the effects of learning. The central issue is how to integrate multilingualism into formal education and adult learning programmes (UNESCO, 2006, 204; 2007, 6–16). Aikman (e.g. 2001) has written extensively on the meeting points of culture, education and literacy across the Global South.

Bommaert’s (2008, 7) grassroots literacy brings a new dimension to the conceptualization of literacy in the globalizing world. He defines: “Grassroots literacy is a label I use for a wide variety of ‘non-elite’ form of writing (...).” Grassroots literacy can be identified by:

- Hetero-graphy, which means people deploying graphic symbols in the ways that defy orthographic norms.
- Vernacular language varieties being used in writing.
- People writing in distant genres, to which they have been only marginally exposed and whose full realization they often lack required resources.
- People being partially inserted in knowledge economies. They may rely on spoken knowledge sources rather than using literate corpuses.
- Texts being often only locally meaningful and valuable.

Blommaert (2010, 197) outlines the positive programme on grassroots literacy with the concept of “vernacular globalization” that recognizes “the myriad ways in which global processes enter to local conditions and circumstances and become a local reality”. Language shifts from a static, totalized and immobile system to a dynamic, fragmented and mobile one.

The socio-cultural approach to literacy has taken a critical stance towards power. The ethnographical approach however, tends to over-emphasize locality and disregard external forces, such as colonialism or globalization (UNESCO, 2006, 151). Brand & Clinton (2002, 351–352) show that many studies (e.g. Heath, 1983; Street, 1984) on “local literacies” conceptualize human action and things involved in the studies through “localizing moves”. This means that the “globalizing connections” are in danger not to be noticed. They cite Vincent’s (2000) notion on the effect of the growth of steamships and railroads alongside the simultaneous creation of a Universal Postal Union for the transcontinental letter sending. The number of letters and postcards sent through the system reached 25 billion in 1922, which was mostly an international practice. “Obviously the computer and internet are globalizing instruments par excellence but so are any other things associated with unified communication systems.”

The next chapter debates the links between current communication technology and literacy.

LITERACIES OF INFORMATION

This chapter introduces two interconnecting issues. The first concerns a conceptual shift towards a multidimensional understanding on literacy, as the meaning of literacy is reshaped in the context of the information society. Secondly I discuss the most important “new literacies” which are information literacy, digital literacy and media literacy (see also e.g. John Potter’s contribution in this issue of LLinE). Bawden (2008, 17) calls these “literacies of information”, which is the best name for the whole framework. Lankshear & Knobel (2006, 24) argue these literacies are “new” because “they consist of a different kind of ‘staff’ from conventional literacies (...).” Here is a conceptual breaking point.

The extended conceptualization of the multidimensional understanding identifies literacy as a metaphor for “competence” or “proficiency” (see Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, 20). In this view literacy refers to “understanding of an area of knowledge” (Barton, 1994, 13). In this new broad understanding literacy has become a widely used concept in the information society. In addition to cognitive competences nowadays one can have “emotional literacy” or “moral literacy” (Collins & Blots, 2003, 1–3). With foresight, Linakylä (1991) questioned why everything has to be discussed under the general heading of literacy instead of talking about the issues with their own names.

A conceptual extension is offered by Lankshear and Knobel (2006, 64), who define “literacies as socially recognized ways of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in discourses (...).” The primary focus lays on communication whilst text is an encoded element behind communication. It is unclear how much their “literacy” really relies on text. However, currently communication and texts are increasingly multimodal (Kress, 2003). Lankshear and Knobel (2006, 69) wrote: “Someone who ‘freezes’ language as a digitally encoded passage of speech and uploads it to the internet as a podcast is engaging in literacy. So, equally, is someone who photoshops an image – whether or not it includes a written text component.” Lankshear and Knobel (2006, 105–136) want to extend the borders of writing by citing the ideas of Lawrence Lessing on “the digital remix as writing” who considers writing with text as just one way to write. The more interesting ways are increasingly to use images and sound and video to express ideas. As discussed earlier, many forms of symbolic representation constantly challenge the definition of writing.

Also UNESCO’s (2004, 7) “plurality of literacy” definition broadens from individualistic to various societal perspectives but does not account of the metaphoric understanding of literacy which UNESCO openly admits. UNESCO’s emphasis on social literacy links to another catchphrase of the framework. The concept of multiliteracies refers to two arguments: increasing
Writing with text is just one way to write.

salience of cultural and linguistic diversity and the multiplicity of communications channels and media (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 5). Both of these processes are true in the current era, but packing these under the term “literacies” is conceptually confusing. This article keeps these aspects separate. We have already discussed cultural diversity in the previous chapter. Let’s see now what new communications channels and media, “literacies of information”, have to offer to “old literacy”.

The pioneer of media literacy, Marshall McLuhan (1964) contemplated the effects of new ways of experiencing reality and communication. Media literacy is the central viewpoint of the now popular subject of media education. Media literacy is a perspective with which we interpret the media messages we face (Potter, 2001, 4). Literacy in the digital age is connected to the multiplicity of information channels and their simultaneousness. Media literacy along other “literacies of information” faces a shift to blogs, podcasting and video-casting, of all which Lankshear and Knobel (2006, 137–178) provide colourful examples.

In an information-intensive society, we are witnessing a transition from the verbally transmitted story to the visually conveyed message. The screen is replacing the book as one of the central communication tools (Kress, 2003, 1–6; 172–175). A central part of media literacy is the ability to form a visual literacy which is “the ability to understand the cultural meanings of visual signs”. Being able to read images is an important element of visual literacy (Seppänen, 2002, 19, 148–150). Images have been an important teaching method prior to the spread of literacy, an example of which is the icons and paintings in churches.

Currently people face an ever increasing amount of information and require more information processing tools. Digital literacy, internet literacy and computer literacy each draw a distinct map of literacy with which to navigate the information society. With the concept of information literacy, Bawden (2001) refers to a broader framework than solely specific skill-based abilities such as computer literacy. Bruce (2003) introduces seven faces of information literacy. These windows range from using information technology and constructing knowledge even to approaching elements of wisdom. Gilster (1997, 1) on the other hand, ties the concept of digital literacy to knowledge acquired via the computer and Internet.

In the Global South, these “literacies of information” are to be promoted simultaneously alongside the “old” form of literacy as both are equally needed. How could the typical low literacy proficiency level in the South and electronic communication be combined in a productive way? What is, for example, the significance of radio, TV, mobile phones, newspapers or the internet in different countries? As audio-visual media takes over globally, abilities to utilize modern media differ greatly between the South and North. Do oral culture, rudimentary literacy, and the lack of media literacy put people at risk of a one-sided dependency on such media messages and governance that pursue goals other than those of the community? And how do new text-based communication modes such as SMS and e-mails motivate people of the South to learn literacy skills (see UNESCO, 2006, 178)?

MAPS OF LITERACY RESEARCH

This article has discussed five concepts related to literacy research. Charts 2 & 3 below portray these frameworks from two dimensions. The size of the boxes in chart 2 bear no relation to the significance of the frameworks, however, the position the concept is located in is important. The horizontal axis refers to either to text management or communication. The vertical axis displays the degree to which cultural differences are emphasized.

The literacy rate assumes literacy as a skill of text management and numeracy that could be defined in the same manner everywhere. Similarly, literacy proficiency, which is the core of functional literacy, is based on culture-neutral skills of text management. Actually, the diversified framework of functional literacy balances between universality and contextuality. Instead, the Freirean and socio-cultural approaches call for complete attention to contextuality. The socio-cultural framework more often defines literacy as communication practices (charts 2 & 3). The Freirean approach emphasizes critical agency within the community, using literacy as a medium in the social struggle (see chart 2 & 3). Currently this framework is enhanced by vital programmes such as REFLECT. Since the publication of the iconic “Pedagogy of Oppressed” by Freire this framework has been a distinctive and influential approach in literacy research (see chart 4). The Freirean framework has worked well in diverse contexts. Can the Freirean approach also be applied to learning “literacies of information” as well as learning reading and writing?

“Literacies of information” also often refer to communication skills and practices rather than to text management (see chart 2 & 3). New communication devices and practices replace text but simultaneously also create a demand for text skills. The “literacies of information” framework emerged on the coattails of the socio-cultural approach (see chart 4). That is why it is surprising how “literacies of information” are posed as a normative social reality for all, with little discussion on social or cultural diversities. Socio-cultural research has exposed “autonomous” claims between “old” literacy and development but can the same critical position be applied to “new literacies”. At the current unchallenged stage, this “literacies of information” framework is characterised as a universal communication based literacy concept.

Chart 4 is based on a perusal of the frequently cited texts in literacy research. It provides a general picture of the field. Chart 4 shows that literacy rates were the only way of analysing literacy until the end of the 1950s. The functional literacy framework first connected literacy to economic and social
development. It also substituted the literacy rate as a way of discussing literacy. The international assessment on literacy proficiency has added more concrete content for functional literacy, especially since 2000 when the IALS survey was published. Functional literacy is also an applicable concept when discussing learning difficulties or the integration of immigrants. International measurement of literacy is still needed, and it is carried out in ever more nuanced and precise ways. Simultaneously, we are increasingly more conscious of the lingual and cultural diversity that challenges the validity of the international literacy comparisons.

In the 1980s, socio-cultural literacy research and the application of ethnographic methods to literacy become more common. The context, situation and community in which literacy was being examined became important. Socio-cultural research has also clarified the position of oral and literary culture. This framework has a critical stance towards international literacy measurements and towards “dominant literacies” (Street, 1993) eroding cultural independence of a community. There is still much to do with equalizing possibilities to literacy, as this links to sensitive lingual rights issues with crossing political interests. Furthermore, increasing mobility of symbolic commodities and people across cultures creates hybrid cultural globalization which forms colourful substance for sensitive accounts on literacy. Additionally, can the socio-cultural framework also challenge some of the universalities related to media and IT as arenas of literacy?

The site of literacy learning also matters. Schools and related facilities offer the best possibilities for learning. The world is very unequal in terms of schooling starting from the lingual rights and ending with the material resources. Beyond schools there are informal ways of learning which also vary considerably in extent across the globe. The Freirean REFLECT is a flexible down to earth programme for gaining literacy skills while promoting communal good. Though literacy is an individual set of skills it also works as a communal resource which can be shared within a household.

In the information society, literacy sporadically refers to reading and writing but more often literacy is used as a

![Chart 2. Frameworks of literacy research](chart.png)

![Chart 3. Analytical map of literacy research](chart3.png)

![Chart 4. Timing of the frameworks of literacy research](chart4.png)
synonym for “competence”. This is the case for example with media literacy and information literacy. Because the visual image is re-gaining importance as a transmitter of meanings, image reading abilities are also required. Both text and image are increasingly in electrical form, and supplemented by sound and video.

With the help of the charts above, we are able to choose a convenient way of understanding literacy in different contexts. There are many good research questions connected to literacy in the South, such as whether uneducated people can go from oral culture to laptops? Can a part of the population of urban mega-cities in the South operate solely on image and speech based information? When answering these questions, it is important to bear in mind the multiplicity of literacy. On the one hand, the different concepts of literacy help answer these questions. On the other hand, using more than one approach can render the study and its interpretations relative.

Whatever the case, the traditional abilities of reading and writing, as well as “literacies of information” affect which kind of practices are possible, in addition to affecting how citizens can take part in public discussions concerning themselves. From a global point of view, oral culture has a long history. In contrast, the 20th century and more intensively a few last decades emphasize the value of written culture and literacy (see chart 4). Will the future see a return to oral culture? I do not mean the old form of local culture, but an oral culture coloured with electric communication of images and videos crossing geographical boundaries. How long will written word maintain its central position? The options are not irrelevant in the frameworks of global governance and global justice.

REFERENCES


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MIKKO PERKIÖ
Mikko Perkiö is a doctoral candidate of the Finnish National Graduate School of Social Policy. His upcoming doctoral thesis is titled “Female education for infant survival: A mix methods reassessment on the relationship”. Mikko is interested in the mechanisms enhancing wellbeing on the global scale. This motivated this review on literacy. Besides his research, he is the representative of the University of Tampere in the UniPID (University Partnership for International Development) executive board.

CONTACT
Mikko Perkiö
School of Social Sciences and Humanities
University of Tampere, Finland
Tel.: +358 3 35 51 71 76
Email: mikko.perkio@uta.fi
Literacy and women’s empowerment

Adult female illiteracy remains a persisting problem particularly in poor countries and among socially excluded groups. While the literacy level has improved globally, gender disparity remains a continuing challenge, with women accounting for two-thirds of all adult illiterates. There is growing evidence showing the positive impact of literacy on the lives of women, children and communities. Literacy enhances women’s mobility, strengthens their participation in decision-making, ensures a better command over their own lives and reduces their vulnerability to abuse and violence. Stories of women show the difficulties faced by illiterate women and the empowering impact of alternative education and literacy programmes.

Rene Raya, Cecilia Soriano and Ma. Luz Anigan
The World Education Forum organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 adopted the Dakar Framework for Action for Education for All (EFA) which consists of six goals to be achieved by 2015. EFA Goal 4 aims to achieve, by 2015, a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy, especially for women. While literacy levels have improved globally through the years, the number of adult illiterates remains high at 796 million, two-thirds of which are in the Asia-Pacific region. South Asia, the sub-region with the biggest concentration of adult illiterates housing about half of the world’s total, has the lowest literacy rates and the highest gender disparities in adult literacy (UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report [GMR], 2011).

Overall, illiteracy rates are highest among the poorest countries and population groups, a link observed even down to the household level. The Education Watch studies undertaken by the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) showed that within countries, wide disparities in literacy levels remain across gender, age groups, income levels, locations and family backgrounds. Individuals who are poor, older and residing in rural areas are more likely to be illiterate than the non-poor, younger and urban residents.

Two-thirds of the world’s adult illiterates are women. This situation has not changed in the last 40 years and the latest projection indicates that this ratio will remain at this level by 2015. That means that the world will miss out on a critical target on gender parity which has been highlighted by both the Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Women are being denied access to a powerful tool that could enable them to meaningfully and effectively participate in defining the development course that guarantees gender justice and give women the power to transform their lives. Literacy is crucial for promoting women’s rights and achieving empowerment. It is a critical first step for lifelong learning to build capacities, reduce vulnerabilities and improve the quality of life.

There is growing evidence culled from different country experiences showing the positive impact of literacy on the lives of women, children and communities. In particular, the studies done by Oxenham (2005, 2008), Burchfield et. al. (2002, 2000a) and Carr-Hill (2001) among others discussed the positive outcomes of female literacy programmes implemented in developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Literacy improves human capabilities, enhances productivity, broadens earning opportunities and develops personal well-being. It contributes to engendering a healthy, equitable, gender-aware and democratic environment.

Oxenham (2008) argued that literacy education is a sound investment, noting that estimated social returns are generally higher compared with that derived from primary education. He asserted that literacy education supports the achievement of the MDGs, specifically the improvement in livelihood and productivity which helps to reduce poverty. Literacy education contributes towards improving knowledge, attitude, and practices on personal and family health. In addition, literacy education programs tend to promote stronger and more confident social and political participation by poor, unschooled people, particularly poor women.

Studies done by Burchfield et. al. (2002) on the impact of literacy programs among women in Nepal and Bolivia yielded similar findings. Women who participated in literacy programmes exhibited improvements in terms of income-earning activities, reproductive and overall health, political participation, community involvement and greater role in decision-making at home. Nepalese women gained confidence as skills and knowledge increased. They became more aware of family planning and sexually transmitted infections, including awareness of ways of preventing HIV/AIDS. Similarly, Bolivian women learners were found to be more active in accessing medical services such as seeking immunization for children and family planning assistance. They exercised greater influence in important household decisions concerning health and education spending, allocation of selfearned income, family-planning methods and domestic violence.

In Uganda, a World Bank study (Carr-Hill, 2001) showed that literacy improves family health care as indicated by proper nutrition for children and disease prevention through immunization of children. Those who attended more literacy classes tend to be more likely to send their children to school.

"Social returns of literacy education are higher than those of primary education."
and assist the latter in their schoolwork. Empowerment of women learners is likewise expressed in better income from economic activities, shared decision making at the household level and increased mobility because they can already read instructions, labels, street signs and signage.

In Bangladesh, tracer studies done on a World Bank assisted project on literacy designed for neo-literates indicated that gains were achieved in empowering women by improving livelihood and facilitating employment which resulted to significant increases in household incomes. With higher incomes, female learners gained confidence in getting involved in family decision-making particularly for household budgeting, family hygiene, children’s education and participation in community activities.

**SHORT NOTE ON METHODOLOGY**

ASPBAE complemented these studies by using nationally representative surveys to establish a clear linkage between literacy and women’s development. This article draws from the findings of this study. In particular, the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) conducted in a number of Asian countries in the last seven years generated internationally comparable data on literacy and its association with other social indicators. ASPBAE referred particularly to data generated from the national surveys conducted in India (2006) with 124,385 female respondents aged 15–49 years old; Bangladesh (2004) with 11,440 female respondents aged 13–49 years old; Cambodia (2005) with 16,823 female respondents aged 15–49 years old; and the Philippines (2003) with 13,633 female respondents aged 15–49 years old.4

UNESCO defines literacy as the “ability to read and write, with understanding, a simple short statement related to his/her everyday life.” The Global Campaign for Education (GCE) broadened the definition, stating that: “Literacy is about the acquisition and use of reading, writing and numeracy skills, and thereby the development of active citizenship, improved health and livelihoods and gender equality.” For purposes of this study and to be consistent with the survey instruments and methodology used, the basic and simple definition by UNESCO is adopted. This study classifies literacy into three levels based on the respondents rating on the simple literacy test taken during the surveys:

- **Literate** refers to those individuals who can easily read and write a statement in any language.
- **Semi-literate** refers to those who can read and write only a part of a statement in any language or those who can read and write a statement with difficulty.
- **Illiterate** refers to those who cannot read and write at all.

Literacy is acquired largely through formal and non-formal education. It may also be acquired or upgraded from informal learning through the mass media and through social interaction such as involvement in community affairs or economic activities. Though limited in coverage, adult literacy programmes have been implemented in several countries to address illiteracy. For purposes of this paper, no distinction or disaggregation is made on how literacy is acquired.

This study also drew from the research on women literacy done by the Civil Society Network for Education Reforms or E-Net Philippines. The stories of women are presented in this study to concretize the difficulties faced by illiterate women and their struggles to access alternative education. These stories were culled from a series of focused group discussions with women from urban poor communities in Metro Manila, from indigenous peoples’ communities in the provinces of Zambales (Central Luzon) and North Cotabato (Central Mindanao), and from Muslim communities in Central Mindanao.

**BASIC PROFILE OF LITERATE AND ILLITERATE WOMEN**

Gender disparities in literacy to the disadvantage of women remain widespread in the Asia Pacific region, particularly in countries where illiteracy is highest. The GMR 2010 noted that for the period 2000–2007, literacy rate among women in South and West Asia remains low at 53%, accounting for 63% of all adult illiterates. Literacy figures for East Asia and the Pacific is much higher but disparity by gender is greater, with women accounting for 70% of all adult illiterates.

As can be seen in table 1, India hosts the biggest concentration of adult illiterates, 65% of whom are women. In contrast, Bangladesh has virtually eliminated gender disparity, although adult illiteracy remains a major development challenge. Cambodia’s adult literacy rate at 76% is among the lowest in the region with women accounting for some 72% of total adult illiterates. The Philippines has long achieved gender parity in adult literacy and educational achievement, but the social status of and economic opportunities open to Filipino women remain low and limited compared to men.

Illiterate women are found everywhere - in both rural and urban settings, and across geographic regions within the four countries covered in this study. However, a larger proportion of illiterate women reside in rural areas. Illiterate women are distributed across all age groups, although, on average, they tend to be older by 4 to 6 years compared to literate women. A large majority of illiterate women have had none or very little formal education and belong to the poorest households. In comparison, most literate women have gone beyond primary education. A much smaller percentage of literate women belong to the poorest section of the population. Illiterate women tend to get married at a younger age and have, on average, 1 to 2 more children compared to literate women.

**LITERACY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT**

A. On Vulnerabilities of women to being controlled

Literacy empowers women, enabling their mobility, enhancing decision making and ensuring better command over their own lives...

National surveys conducted in India and Cambodia among women aged 15 to 49 reveal that illiterate females are more susceptible to controls imposed
by their husbands, affecting their family and social relations, mobility and self-esteem. In India, nearly half (48.0%) of the female respondents admitted to having at least one control issue imposed by the husband. Among literate females, the percentage is significantly lower at 36.6%.

In the case of Cambodia, women who lack literacy skills tend to hold on more strongly to traditional beliefs concerning the role of women compared to literate respondents. A significantly higher percentage among illiterate women respondents agreed that family decisions should be made by men; that married women should not be allowed to work; and that it is better to educate the son rather than the daughter.

In the case of Bangladesh, women who lack literacy skills are less likely to go outside the village/town alone. Similarly, these women are less likely to say that they can go to a health centre or hospital alone. More Illiterate males, on the other hand, tend to think that it is not acceptable for the wife to work outside the home while literate men tend to be more open to this idea.

B. On the capacity to make decisions

Literacy strengthens women’s participation in making decisions about themselves and their families...

In India and Bangladesh, literate women are likely to participate more in decisions about their own health, large household purchases and making family visits, compared to illiterate women. Women who lack literacy skills tend to inhibit themselves from making important decisions concerning their own health and concerning household purchases. Instead, they rely more on the husband/partner or others to make such decisions.5

In the case of the Philippines and Cambodia, the response pattern is quite different – a higher proportion of wom-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Adult literacy rate (15 and over) 2000–2007*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy Rate (%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia &amp; Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South &amp; West Asia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data are for the most recent year available during the period specified. Source: EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Background of Women Respondents by Literacy Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bangladesh</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**India**

| Literate | 46.2% | 53.8% | 26.7 | 0.6% | 10.3% | 5.1% | 10.8% | 19.2 | 2.9 |
| Illiterate | 18.4% | 81.6% | 31.6 | 88.9% | 11.1% | 31.7% | 27.7% | 16.2 | 4.6 |

**Cambodia**

| Literate | 21.6% | 78.4% | 27.8 | 0.9% | 53.9% | 9.8% | 13.7% | 20.3 | 4.5 |
| Illiterate | 11.0% | 89.0% | 32.3 | 59.3% | 40.7% | 32.4% | 27.2% | 20.2 | 5.4 |

**Philippines**

| Literate | 59.9% | 40.1% | 29.6 | 0.0% | 18.1% | 13.0% | 17.2% | 22.1 | 4.2 |
| Illiterate | 28.1% | 71.9% | 33.6 | 40.7% | 59.3% | 64.5% | 19.6% | 19.7 | 5.8 |

* Filtered for female respondents aged 40–49 years old Source: Generated by the authors from DHS databases
en decide by themselves when it concerns their own health or when making household purchases for daily needs. But when it comes to large household purchases and family visits, the preference is to decide jointly with the husband/partner or with some other people.

C. Attitude towards wife beating

Literacy reduces women’s vulnerability to abuse and violence...

National surveys conducted in India, Cambodia and Bangladesh assessed the attitude of respondents towards wife beating and inquired about actual incidence of domestic violence involving emotional, physical and sexual abuses committed by the husband or partner. Tolerance level to wife beating varies across countries and across cultures. About half of women respondents in India (48.6%) and over half in Cambodia (58.6%) responded affirmatively (that wife beating is justified) to at least one of the hypothetical situations presented. In the case of the Philippines, only a fourth of the respondents did so. Analyzing the responses for varying levels of literacy, a consistent pattern is readily observed across the three countries, showing that tolerance or acceptability of wife beating decreases as women become more literate. A similar response pattern is observed among male respondents in the survey conducted in Bangladesh, showing a higher percentage of illiterate males responding affirmatively to one of the questions on wife beating. In other words, more illiterate males believe that wife beating is justified under certain situations.

Among all the reasons presented in the survey, neglecting the children is the most likely reason in which women respondents agree that wife beating is justified. This response pattern is observed across India, Philippines and Cambodia. Going out without telling the husband was also considered a major reason that justifies wife beating in India, Cambodia and Bangladesh.

Finally, it is important to note that in all the reasons cited, there is a consistent pattern in the responses across different levels of literacy in all four countries. Literacy among males and females is associated with decreasing tolerance to wife beating.

D. On domestic violence

A set of questions were asked of married women aged 15–49 on whether they have ever experienced specific acts of violence. In the case of Bangladesh, a similar set of questions (limited to physical and sexual abuse) were administered to currently married male respondents aged 15–54. The male respondents were asked if they committed specific acts of violence against their wife or partner.

It is alarming to note the prevalence of domestic violence committed against women. Two of five women respondents in India and nearly one of four in Cambodia experienced at least one type of violence - emotional, physical and sexual. Three of four male respondents in Bangladesh, likewise, admitted to having committed acts of violence against their wife or partner.

At the outset, it must be stressed that violence against women cannot be justified under any circumstance or context. There can be no excuse or justification for such actions. Second, it must be emphasized that domestic violence occurs everywhere – among couples who are literate and illiterate; among the poorly educated and the highly educated; in rich and poor households; in urban and rural areas. The data clearly articulates that literacy, education and wealth are no guarantees from experiencing abuse and domestic violence. The data clearly shows that abuses occur in a variety of situations, cutting across classes and education levels and across national areas.

While literacy is not a guarantee to eradicate domestic violence, illiteracy is another handicap among women that further adds to their vulnerabilities. The data shows a consistent pattern that illiterate women are more vulnerable to abuse. In the case of India, illiterate women are nearly twice more likely to be abused compared to literate women. In the case of Bangladesh, nearly 80% of illiterate and semi-literate males admitted having committed at least one act of violence against their wife.

Table 3. Attitude towards wife beating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement with at least one reason presented to justify wife beating*</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>64.2%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Literate</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Situations or reasons presented to respondents to obtain attitude as to whether wife beating is justified: 1) if wife goes out without telling the husband; 2) if she neglects the children; 3) if she argues with him; 4) if she refuses to have sex with him; and 5) if she burns the food/fails to provide food on time.

Source: Generated by the authors from DHS databases
Table 4. Incidence of Domestic Violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cambodia (Female)</th>
<th>India (Female)</th>
<th>Bangladesh Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experienced any emotional violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humiliating, threatening or insulting wife</td>
<td>18.34%</td>
<td>15.79%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate/Semi-literate</td>
<td>19.05%</td>
<td>19.11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate</td>
<td>17.55%</td>
<td>11.30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced any less severe violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushing, shaking, throwing something, slapping or twisting of arm</td>
<td>11.90%</td>
<td>34.55%</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate/Semi-literate</td>
<td>14.70%</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate</td>
<td>9.00%</td>
<td>23.32%</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced any severe violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punching, kicking, dragging, strangling, burning, or threatening/attacking with knife/ gun/ other weapon</td>
<td>6.10%</td>
<td>20.35%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate/Semi-literate</td>
<td>6.70%</td>
<td>26.64%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate</td>
<td>5.40%</td>
<td>11.84%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced any sexual violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forcing sexual intercourse or sexual acts not wanted</td>
<td>2.90%</td>
<td>9.98%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate/Semi-literate</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>12.12%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate</td>
<td>2.10%</td>
<td>7.09%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced any emotional, physical and sexual abuse</td>
<td>22.30%</td>
<td>39.72%</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate/Semi-literate</td>
<td>24.00%</td>
<td>48.08%</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
<td>28.43%</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Generated by the authors from DHS databases

STORIES OF POOR AND ILLITERATE WOMEN FROM THE PHILIPPINES

“Paz,” from an urban poor community in Metro Manila

Paz, now 40 years old, just finished grade 2 and had for the most part of her life shied away from people because she was often referred to as the one who is “No Read No Write”.

Paz is the 6th in a brood of 12 siblings. She had always envied her elder siblings who were able to finish primary schooling because she did not. Her mother had made her stay at home to help out with taking care of her 6 other younger siblings while her “Nanay” (mother) would do the laundry down by the riverside, fetch drinking water from the upper part of the river, pick out some vegetables on her way home, and cook dinner for the family. Her father worked the rice fields from sunrise to sundown. Her nanay promised to send her to school someday. When it was her time to go to school, her nanay got sick and so did her father which drained their remaining resources and she eventually became an orphan at an early age. Her aunt, a teacher, took her in. Paz, hoping this could be her opportunity to go back to school, eagerly went but she became the all-around household help, which was the only thing she knew how to do then – doing the laundry, cleaning the house inside and out while barely having time for herself except sleep. Paz grew into her teens and twenties but unlike the others, Paz would always hide behind the curtains when visitors came. She was too shy to meet people because she said, oftentimes, she could not understand what they were talking about.

Married life heightened her feelings of self-pity. She has four children but she felt frustrated when she could not assist them in their homework because she just did not know
how. She also wanted to vote, but her husband discouraged her saying how can she vote when she cannot even read nor write her own name. To augment their family income, she tried to put up a small retail store in front of their house, but rumors spread fast around the neighbourhood that she did not know how to list down the items bought from her nor to compute how much change she should give back to her customers. Some neighbours took advantage and got more than they should. She was always the object of ridicule in the neighbourhood.

Her life changed when a friend introduced her to a local Non-Government Organization (NGO) in the nearby village which facilitated literacy classes. She attended the class every day, rain or shine, even if she had to walk 2 kilometers just to save on transportation money. Today, Paz is no longer the shy, ridiculed, illiterate woman that she used to be. She now looks forward to a new beginning with hope and enthusiasm for more learning. She excitedly awaits the coming elections to exercise her right to vote for the first time. She even spoke in a youth congress on the out-of-school where she told her story of how disempowering illiteracy is and how her new learnings helped in building a new life for herself and her family. The story of Paz is just one among many testifying to the fact that literacy and education can broaden options and change the course of lives.

“Zeny,” from the Aetas in Zambales

The Aetas are one of the groups of Indigenous peoples living in the in the mountains of Zambales, one of the Philippine provinces located in Central Luzon. Zeny is one among many Aetas who have always wanted to go to school but never did. She can write only her name but cannot read. Poverty, early marriage, engaging in economic activity even as a child, the absence of schools within the community and Aetas as object of ridicule of the lowlanders are among the barriers to education faced by minority groups in the Philippines. Usually, it takes half a day of walking to reach the town centre.

Like many other Aetas, Zeny wanted a way out of poverty. At the young age of 13, she crossed boundaries to look for work as house help in the urban town centres. But she could not make sense of the signboards on the buses because she cannot read so she found herself heading back home by asking for directions. Back home, she blamed her parents for not sending her to school and for her inability to read. Her parents who also never went to school had told her that “with or without education we can eat.”

Zeny could not find any paying job in Zambales and ended up getting married at a young age. She was lucky enough to have a husband who already had a job. Like many other women Aetas, Zeny got married and gave birth at fourteen years old and had lived most of her life in the mountains. She gave birth to 12 children but only seven survived. Although she wanted to have a say on the number of children she thought they should have, her husband mostly made the decision.

Eventually, Zeny separated from her husband. She struggled to send her children to school. However, of her seven children, only one reached high school, four made it to primary level, while the remaining two did not attend school. Her hard earned money from planting cogon grass was just not enough to send all of them to school.

Today at 70, Zeny still plants cogon to put food on the table. But something has changed. Zeny was able to join basic literacy classes facilitated by NGOs in their village. She gained self-confidence and became involved in community affairs. She actively advocated for support to women Aetas attending basic literacy classes by offering different class schedules to accommodate more women Aetas and providing day care support to babies and children whose mothers are attending literacy classes.

Like Zeny and other women Aetas who married and got pregnant in their early teens, the women from other indigenous groups live under similar situations and experience the same barriers as a result of poverty, neglect and cultural practices. Arranged marriages are still common practice not only among indigenous groups, but also among Muslim families in southern Philippines. The practice is also seen as a way out of poverty, especially if the prospective husband has the means to raise a family. Young couples tend to raise big families which burden the woman and eventually force her to engage in livelihood work to augment family income. All these make it virtually impossible for the young mother to return to school or acquire literacy and life skills through alternative delivery mode. Muslim women see the need for innovative approaches to delivering education given their particular situation and the prevailing cultural practices in the community.

“Violy” and “Gina.”

migrating from the province to the big city

Violy, the eldest child in a family of 6 children, did not complete primary school and reached only up to grade 5. She is a migrant from the province of Albay in Southern Luzon who eventually settled in Pasig City, Metro Manila. As the eldest in the family, she had to help her parents take care of her younger siblings. But when her younger brother became ill, she had to stop schooling altogether not only to take care of her brother but also because the family could no longer afford to send her to school. She tried to find ways to augment the family income even as she tried to find the means to go back to school.
She stayed with her aunt in a nearby city and worked as a waitress in a small eatery, sending her earnings back home. Another aunt took her in and promised to send her to school. But she was first made to serve as the house help. One day, when her aunt was away, her uncle attempted to sexually assault her. She escaped by running away and never returned to that house again. She never expected that people who are close to her and whom she trusted could take advantage and attempt to abuse her.

Violy did not go back to the province and, instead, went to Manila. According to her, life in the province is difficult - choices are limited and livelihood activities centered solely on farming. In the big city, she believed one can be a saleslady, a waitress, or a hairdresser. But Violy never became any of these because the shops and restaurants were looking for someone who completed secondary school. Eventually, Violy just decided to get married to have a place to stay. She rarely sent money back to her family because she was totally dependent on her husband.

The story of Violy is the same as the story of Gina who also had very little education and also the eldest in a brood of 12. She also migrated to Manila thinking that she would find more opportunities for work as well as be able to go back to school to complete secondary education. But like Violy, Gina’s Godfather attempted to rape her. She ran away but could not find a job and eventually ended up getting married at 16 years old and raising 4 children. Gina felt handicapped every time her children asked her assistance in doing their homework. She gave all sorts of excuses, saying she had to cook dinner, wash the dishes, clean the house, and so on. Eventually, she ran out of excuses.

Both Violy and Gina are now looking forward to a second chance at education after enlisting in a newly opened livelihood and literacy class for women. They are lucky enough to avail of these services in the community where they currently reside because there are so many women in similar situations who are not afforded the same opportunity. They showed that even married women with families are still eager and able to finish a basic course to improve their lives and livelihood.

CONCLUDING NOTE

The studies done previously on the topic of women literacy presented an analysis of the impact of literacy programmes on the lives of women as culled from evaluation reports and longitudinal studies. While in-depth and comprehensive, the findings and conclusions drawn from these studies are specific to the particular programmes, communities and population groups covered by the research. This article built on these reports and generalized the key findings through quantitative analysis using nationally representative samples that are internationally comparable. In addition, life stories of women were used to highlight and substantiate the key findings of the study. Their stories are consistent with and validate the survey findings and the earlier studies done on the impact of literacy on women.

Poor and illiterate women, especially those coming from socially excluded groups face multiple barriers that impact negatively on women’s lives. Illiterate women tend to marry younger, get pregnant in their teens, bear more children and have little knowledge of reproductive health. They tend to be less mobile, participate less in decision-making, and are more susceptible to impositions from their husbands or partners. Illiterate women are also more vulnerable to abuse and violence committed by their husbands or partners.

While literacy is no guarantee for achieving gender equality, it is an important and powerful tool that contributes to women’s empowerment by building awareness and capacity, facilitating mobility, increasing community involvement and enhancing participation in decision-making. Literacy broadens the options of women in managing their personal lives, their families and their livelihood.

While there is increasing recognition about the imperatives of literacy for women’s development and empowerment, the policies and programmes to address the literacy gaps are grossly inadequate. It is for this reason that ASP-BAE seeks to heighten the advocacy initiative to address female illiteracy.
Women are being left behind in all aspects of life as indicated by their low participation in education and learning activities and in decision-making processes. These impact most especially on livelihood, education of children, child health and nutrition, gender equity and reproductive health. It is imperative, therefore, to provide women with adult education and literacy programmes that are flexible, participatory and appropriate to improve their life skills, reproductive health and livelihood; which strengthen their participation and leadership in the public sphere; and ensure gender justice through equal access to adult education and lifelong learning processes.

Along these lines, the following policy measures are urgently proposed:

- Fast track female literacy campaign to achieve EFA Goal 4 and the key MDG targets.
- Customize literacy programmes for adult females to suit their particular context, vulnerabilities and needs.
- Develop appropriate strategies and institutional mechanisms to reach out to adult female illiterates, particularly disadvantaged women in poor, remote, ethnic, disaster-prone and conflict-affected areas.
- Consider additional premium allocation for literacy programmes that focus on reaching out to women learners in view of the multiple barriers faced by women.
- Incorporate modules on women’s rights, gender sensitivity, reproductive health, family life and women’s participation in community affairs in adult literacy and learning programmes.

ENDNOTES

1 This article drew from the studies done by ASPBAE and E-Net Philippines as part of the European Union-supported project on “Innovative Advocacy Approaches in Promoting Adult Female Literacy”.
3 The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) are nationally representative household surveys that provide data for a wide range of monitoring and impact evaluation indicators in the areas of population, health, and nutrition. These data can be analyzed according to background characteristics of respondents including their education and literacy levels. These surveys have been conducted in cooperation with official government authorities.
4 The survey datasets are available upon request at http://www.measuredhs.com/accesssurveys/
5 Control Issues: 1) whether the husband is jealous if she talks with other men; 2) whether the husband accuses her of unfaithfulness; 3) whether the husband does not permit her to meet her girlfriends; 4) whether the husband tries to limit her contact with family; 5) whether the husband insists on knowing where she is; and 6) whether the husband does not trust her with money. Statistics cited in this section are generated by the authors from DHS databases.
6 Data presented in this section are based on statistics generated by the authors from DHS databases.

REFERENCES


RENE RAYA
Rene Raya is lead policy analyst of Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) and coordinates the EU-supported project on women literacy. He is also co-convenor of Social Watch Philippines and sits in the Management Collective of Action for Economic Reforms.

CONTACT
Email: rraya@gmail.com

MA. LUZ ANIGAN
Ma. Luz Anigan is senior research associate of Action for Economic Reforms and participated in the development of research and advocacy tools for the ASPBAE project on women literacy.

CONTACT
Email: luz.anigan@gmail.com

CECILIA SORIANO
Cecilia Soriano is the national coordinator of the Civil Society Network for Education Reforms (E-Net Philippines) and leads the advocacy component of the EU-supported project on women literacy. She coordinated the study on women and literacy in the Philippines.

CONTACT
Email: cecilia.enetphil@gmail.com
Seven and a half million people of working age are functionally illiterate in the heart of Europe, Germany. This figure has been confirmed in a nationwide study for the first time. This article describes current developments in the area of literacy and basic education in Germany, visiting also literacy education for immigrants. The magnitude of functional illiteracy in Germany is creating the impetus to take action in the area of educational policy. The Ministry of Education is promoting an area of research within the context of the World Literacy Decade that is setting many things in motion.
INTRODUCTION
Since the end of the 1970s, adult basic education has emerged as a new work area in Germany. As simple workplaces started to be replaced by new technologies and unemployment quickly increased, the phenomenon of illiteracy also became more apparent. In order to not lose out in the employment market, many people were faced with having to deal with their problems in reading and writing. This led to the creation of the first literacy courses at various educational institutions, as well as educational initiatives. Due to the changes in economic conditions, adult education was given a new target group and tasks at educational institutions (see Bastian, 2002, p. 5; Tröster, 2007, p. 4). Although this area fulfills an important educational mandate, it led to rather marginal existence and there was little acceptance from society for the issue.

Literacy and basic education gained new relevance when the PISA results were published in 2001, which confirmed that one quarter of German students leave school without having an adequate basic education. In general, however, this has not had enough of an impact on developments in this area. At the same time, and independently of one another for the most part, literacy work with respect to immigrants has developed, with more exchanges and cooperation gradually taking place in this area.

Although the importance of adult literacy and basic education is undisputed, a comprehensive established educational offering for adult learning in this field still does not exist, even after three decades of intense work. As shown by the previous developments, projects and campaigns raise awareness and lead to proposals. However, the necessary general framework for sustainable work in the area of literacy and basic education in the different states is still missing. There is hope, however — the Ministry of Education is promoting a core area of research within the scope of the World Literacy Decade that is setting many things in motion.

For the first time, there are figures available on the extent of functional illiteracy, which is creating the impetus to take action in the area of educational policy. On account of their significance, the relevant findings of the study will be presented first in this article. This is followed by an overview of the priorities of the Ministry of Education’s current research initiative. Subsequently, a description of the practical research areas is given, including the structures, general framework, agents, proposals and course concepts. In conclusion, the potential future outlook in terms of continuity and sustainability is discussed.

GROUNDBREAKING RESEARCH ON FUNCTIONAL ILLITERACY
Although Germany has been dealing with the phenomenon of illiteracy since the end of the 1970s and the area of adult education has developed since then, the actual extent of the problem was only an estimate up to now. With the findings of the leo — Level One Study (Grotlüschen/Riekmann, 2011) — reliable figures are available on the magnitude of functional illiteracy in Germany for the first time. The percentage of functional illiterates amounted to 14.5%, which represents 7.5 million people of the working population between the ages of 18 to 65 (Alpha Level 1–3) (see Tab. 1).

The Alpha Levels that have been developed enable literacy to be measured in small steps at the lower level of competence. The following table (Tab. 2) gives an overview of the Alpha Levels. Examples of “can” descriptions with respect to the “writing” dimension are given to gain a better understanding.

The term Illiteracy is used when competence is below the sentence level (Alpha Level 1–2), i.e., the persons concerned are able to read and understand individual words completely and also write, but are not, however, able to write complete sentences. The individual words are put together letter by letter. This situation affects 4.5% of the working population (see Tab. 1).

Functional Illiteracy exists when competence falls below the text level (Alpha Level 1–3). This refers to individuals who are able to read and write individual sentences, but cannot put together a coherent text (even short ones). The result of this is that social participation for the persons concerned is limited due to insufficient written language skills. This affects 14.5% of the working population or 7.5 million people in Germany (see Tab. 1). (see Grotlüschen/Riekmann, 2011c, p. 28).

Table 1: Functional illiteracy and poor writing skills in the German speaking adult population (18–64 years of age) (Grotlüschen/Riekmann, 2011a, p. 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Alpha Level</th>
<th>Proportion of adult population</th>
<th>Number (projected)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functional illiteracy</td>
<td>α 1</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>α 2</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>2.0 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>α 3</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>5.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>14.5%</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.5 million</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor writing skills</td>
<td>α 4</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>13.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; α 4</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>30.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>51.6 million</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Difference in the totals of 100 percent are due to inaccuracies resulting from rounding up or down.
The following results also provide insight into the issue of immigration. The study shows that of the 7.5 million functional illiterates, 4.4 million (58%) have German as their first language and 3.1 million (42%) have a different language as their first language. However, it should be emphasised that the individuals who took part in the tests had sufficient command of spoken German to follow an interview and take a competency test. If immigrants without spoken knowledge of German had also been included, it would have had an impact on the findings (see Grotlüschen/Riekmann 2011a, p. 8). In other words, the illiteracy rate would have been higher, although there are no estimates of the actual rate.

While the Alpha Levels are not identical to other European competency models, they are still comparable, for instance, to the entry levels of the English Skills for Life (CQA), or the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). There are similarities between Alpha Level 1–3 and the A1 of the CEFR and the Alpha Level 4–5 and the A2 of the CEFR. Alpha Level 1–2 is close to the Entry 1, Alpha Level 3 is close to the Entry 2 and Alpha Level 4–5 is close to the Entry 3 (see Grotlüschen/Riekmann, 2011c, p. 29).

The need for action has been recognised in the area of educational policy and further measures have been announced. I will concentrate on these measures later in the article, in the chapter Future outlook for illiteracy.

**TERMINOLOGY**

There have not been uniform definitions in the context of literacy and basic education in Germany up to now. Within the scope of the Alphabund’s (Project Management Agency)) present research work, definitions have been established. A definition was developed, which especially applies to the interrelationship between written language and the socially accepted minimum requirements:

According to this, “Functional Illiteracy” (...) exists if the written language competence of adults is lower than that of the minimum required and which is assumed to meet the respective social requirements. These written language skills are considered necessary to establish social participation and for the realisation of one’s individual chances for fulfilment. (...) A critical characteristic of literacy competence is given for the individual, as well as for society if the literacy proficiency is not adequately sufficient to cope with the written language requirements of everyday life and the simplest occupations. This is likely to be the case if a person is not able to make sense of the information contained in a simple text and/or if his writing skills are at a similar level (Alphabund, n.d.).

A definition was also developed with respect to basic education:

The term basic education emphasises (...) the general basic skills at the lowest level. In addition to reading and writing skills, this term also describes competence in the basic dimensions of cultural and social participation, such as command of a working language, basic knowledge of mathematics, (...), social competence, foreign language skills and the general ability to carry out activities in everyday life and in society (...).

Since approaches to literacy are increasingly being discussed in Germany, Alphabund has established the following definitions:

Literacy, in the traditional sense, refers to reading and writing skills, however, proficiency in arithmetic (numeracy) is often included as well. The term “literacy” has now been broadened to include other areas of knowledge and competence that are necessary for life in a modern (information) society (e.g., computer literacy, health literacy, and financial literacy). Literacy is based on the application of written language in everyday life. Based on these observable practices, research and didactic approaches to teaching written language are developed (ibid.).

The attempt is made to capture the multidimensionality of this area, but the definitions – in particular those of functional illiteracy – are geared towards the social requirements directed at the individual.

**RESEARCH-DRIVEN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE FOR LITERACY**

Unlike in other European countries and those outside of Europe as well, the issue of illiteracy or basic education did not have a clear significance in research in Germany for a long time. There were many promising approaches at the beginning of the literacy efforts. For instance, the research in the 1980s focussed primarily on the causes of illiteracy in adults or on their learning history in order to come up with preventive measures. In subsequent years, isolated research projects

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**Table 2: Descriptions of Alpha Levels classified according to “can” descriptions — Writing Dimension**

(Grotlüschen/Riekmann 2011b, p. 16f)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>α 1</td>
<td>Logographically at letter level: able to write individual letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α 2</td>
<td>Alphabetically at word level: able to divide words into syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α 3</td>
<td>Alphabetically at sentence level: able to write simple sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α 4</td>
<td>Alphabetically at text level and orthographically with higher word frequency: able to write several orthographically correct sentences (simple texts) freely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α 5</td>
<td>Orthographically and morphologically: able to write complex texts that are orthographically correct for the most part</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**LITERACY**

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were carried out within the scope of the projects promoted by the Ministry of Education or within the context of dissertations.

With the United Nations’ proclamation of the World Literacy Decade (2003–2012) in February 2003, developing and industrialised countries have committed to drawing up comprehensive programmes. It is in this international context that the Federal Republic of Germany makes its national contribution. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research [Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung] set up the funding programme for “Research and Development Projects in the Area of Literacy/Basic Education for Adults” in 2006. The funding programme (2007–2012) with a total of 30 million euros focuses on four research areas that are closely interconnected.

Research Area 1: “Research on the Foundations of Literacy and Basic Education Work with Adults” aims to improve the theoretical foundations of literacy research. This includes analysis and documentation of the current research status in Germany and especially internationally—of particular importance here is the transferability of knowledge and experience of other countries e.g. England or the Nordic countries. In addition, the systematic description of the features of adult literacy is of interest, such as specific learning and participation barriers, in order to determine the implications for teaching and methodology. In this context, investigations on the “Heterogeneity of the Target Group” should be carried out. Another part of the research work focuses on improving the availability of data regarding the problem of “functional illiteracy”. On one hand, this has to do with obtaining figures that indicate the extent of the problem. On the other hand, the intention is to ascertain differentiated comprehensive data on the structure and development of providers, as well as the participants.

Research Area 2 focuses on “Research for Increasing the Efficiency and Quality of Support and Advisory Services for Adults with Insufficient Basic Education”. The areas designated for the research projects are the development, testing and investigation of the effectiveness of efficient forms of advisory services that are appropriate to the needs of the individuals concerned. In addition, the question of how lasting learning success can be sustained will be addressed, as well as the role of web and media-based learning arrangements.

In Research Area 3, “Research and Development on Literacy and Basic Education Work in the Context of Business and Work”, the role of written language and basic education in different business sectors will be assessed and analyses of the requirements of basic education for today’s working environment will be carried out. Some of the areas that are looked at are the low wage sector, household related services and work in the interest of the community. In addition, concepts for different groups of people will be developed and tested. One of them has to do with young adults, who cannot participate in vocational training or subsequent vocational training because their basic education is insufficient.

The role that different ethnic, regional or gender-specific considerations play in restricting access will also be studied. Another group is made up of people who are in danger of becoming unemployed because their basic education is inadequate. The research focus here is to determine to what extent in-house supervision opportunities, such as mentoring or tandem programmes support the individual and which success factors are decisive.

Research Area 4 covers “Research and Development for the Professional Training of Teachers for Literacy and Basic Education Work with Adults”. Uniform and mandatory regulations do not exist in Germany with respect to teacher training and qualification. Therefore, it is an important goal to develop a concept for the profession of “Adult Literacy Educator”. In this context, an appraisal of the education and continuing education concepts that have existed up to now are carried out and international experience is evaluated.

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research has set new priorities with this research initiative. A group of 25 projects will be funded with over 100 individual projects. Actors from both academia and the practical field of education from across Germany will be interconnected by working together on mutual research projects. The projects correspond to the four research areas described above. It is important to highlight that the work carried out in the research groups is often also interdisciplinary. In addition to educationalists and trainers for adult education, other participants include sociologists, psychologists and brain researchers. Over 30 universities and research institutes are involved, as well as 30 educational providers and numerous associations. Of the 16 state associations, 12 are also represented. Also involved are job centres, as well as youth centres and social institutions. This variety reflects the complexity and range of the work research area.

The activities give us reason to hope that this subject matter will remain a concrete part of research beyond the funding period. In addition, there are high expectations that the findings will be implemented in practice and that the area as a whole will remain and grow stronger.

In the meantime, most of the research projects I have just discussed have already ended. Pooling vital and trendsetting research findings and utilising them in practice in a lasting way presents a great challenge.
repeatedly from the beginning of the literacy work to the present, but there is still a lack of an appropriate infrastructure. The states and municipalities are responsible for the creation of an infrastructure for course provision and for implementing results of literacy research in the classroom. This means that the course offerings, general conditions and infrastructure in the respective states are different (see Döbert/Hubertus, 2000, p. 99; Tröster, 2007, p. 6).

RELEVANT ACTORS AND SERVICE INSTITUTIONS

Different actors and service institutions are actively committed to literacy and basic education on the national level.

The Federal Literacy Association [Bundesverband Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung e.V.]

The association is a specialist service and lobbying institution. Its objectives include supporting individuals and institutions in the field of literacy by providing information, representing educational policy interests, lobbying and public relations work. The Federal Association publishes the magazine, ALFA-FORUM, as well as learning and teaching materials. In addition, it offers continuing education and conducts various projects. It also offers ALFA-Telefon, an anonymous telephone service that offers advice to individuals who have difficulties with reading and writing or family members and friends who have problems in this area.

German Adult Education Association [Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V.] and the Länder Associations of Adult Education Colleges [Landesverbände der Volkshochschulen]

The German Adult Education Association, as an umbrella organisation, represents the educational and association-related policies of the adult education colleges and Länder (states) associations of adult education colleges on a national and European level. It develops principles and guidelines for continuing education. In the context of literacy, the Association participates in different projects having also developed the learning portal “ich-will-lernen.de” (see below).

The German Institute for Adult Education – Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning [Deutsches Institut für Erwachsenenbildung – Leibniz-Zentrum für Lebenslanges Lernen e. V. (DIE)]

The German Institute for Adult Education is the central institution for research and practice in the area of continuing education in Germany. It addresses actors in academia, practice and politics, who provide their own research and development and make their services available. Since the beginning of the literacy work, the German Institute for Adult Education has been actively committed in this field, conducting the first projects in the 1980s and providing trendsetting incentives. Since then, the German Institute for Adult Education has continuously set important trends in different national as well as transnational projects, such as “Employment-Oriented Basic Education” (1999–2001) or “Media-Based Access for Basic Education” (2001–2004). With its focus and expertise, the German Institute for Adult Education contributes to promoting national discourses and makes international cooperation possible.

UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) [UNESCO – Institut für Lebenslanges Lernen]

The UIL is an international institute that conducts research projects and runs an information and documentation centre. The institute is involved in implementing the UNESCO programme (see also Arne Carlsen’s interview in this issue of LLinE.), “Education for All” (EFA), and contributes to the world education forum of Dakar (2000) and the UN’s World Literacy Decade (2003–2012) within the framework of follow-up activities.

The Alliance for Literacy and Basic Education [Bündnis für Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung]

In 2003, an “Alliance for Literacy and Basic Education” was formed within the context of the World Literacy Decade. In addition to the institutions mentioned above, the following actors also belong to the alliance: The Federal Ministry of Education and Research, The Trade Union for Education and Science [Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft], The Foundation for Reading [Stiftung Lesen] and the Ernst Klett Verlag Sprachen. Its aim is to bring together further important players concerned and strengthen the work in the field of literacy and basic education.

COURSE PROVIDERS AND COURSE OFFERINGS

Most of the providers of literacy and basic education in Germany are adult education colleges (80%–90%). Of the around 1000 such colleges in the country, 307 of them offered at least one literacy course in 2008. Furthermore, there are associations or initiatives, such as the Working Group for Orientation and Educational Aid [Arbeitskreis Orientierungs- und Bildungshilfe, (AOB)] or the Reading and Writing Association [“Lesen und Schreiben”], both of which are based in Berlin. In addition, courses are offered in penal institutions, and to some extent, in the area of vocational training as well.

Most courses take place once or twice a week, mainly in the evenings, and last two to three hours. There is, however, also a demand for morning courses. The fees for these courses vary greatly. While a great number of institutions offer the courses free of charge, others do not. Given the fact that learners generally have a low income, where possible, fees are often lower than regular course fees. Compared to other courses, such as language or computer courses, these courses do not generate a profit, but rather are very costly for institutions. Generally, there are special terms and conditions stipulating that the courses should not have more than ten participants in order to guarantee better support for the learners. In addition to the course offerings mentioned, occasionally there are also courses or other arrangements offered that are carried out over a longer period of time (6–12 months).

CONTENTS OF LITERACY AND BASIC EDUCATION WORK IN COLLEGES

Generally – at least in the case of larger adult education colleges – courses are offered at different levels. First there is an initial consultation, which is followed by a personal interview and possible further meetings. Intensive monitoring and mentoring should be provided, especially at
the beginning. Ideally, advisory services should also accompany the courses. However, due to the unstable financial situation, institutions are scarcely able to continue offering these services.

Standard course offerings now also include “Numeracy”, “Writing on the PC”, or “Internet Competence”. With respect to the subject of communication, there are courses, like “Making Myself Understood – Asserting Myself”, “Listening – Speaking – Reading” or “Dealing with Officials with Confidence”. “English in the Area of Basic Education” has also established itself. Additional courses along more creative lines include open reading and writing workshops, writing days and creative writing, or yoga and writing. Educational holidays as well as summer courses and also writing days or writing weekends – some with childcare – have been offered at some institutions for several years. In addition to the relevant topics, creative writing has become especially important.

It is clear that these programmes go beyond traditional literacy and are to be placed within the framework of a more comprehensive basic education. The example of the Hamburg Adult Education College (Hamburger Volkshochschule) shows the development direction of this research area since the area of basic education was established there at the beginning of the 1990s. With a new and expanded concept, it was possible to respond to the increasing social requirements and challenges in educational policies.

In addition to and also independent of the courses, the German Adult Education College Organisation has been offering the learning portal ich-will-lernen.de in the area of literacy and basic education since 2004, which has been continuously expanded with the areas of arithmetic and preparation for equivalency tests for school leaving certificates. It is designed as a learning platform with a total of 16 levels, which range from learning individual letters to the subjects covered for the certificate of secondary education. It contains more than 28,000 interactive exercises and can be used for free since the portal is funded by the Ministry of Education. The portal, which has received several awards, is used by more than 250,000 learners. This shows the great importance that the use of new media has for the target group.

THE IMMIGRATION ACT BRINGS ABOUT INTEGRATION COURSES

Another strand of adult literacy can be found in the context of immigration. In 2009, there were 81.9 million people living in Germany. Around 15.7 million thereof were people with an immigration background, which represents 19.2% of the entire population (see Statistisches Bundesamt 2011).

In the past 60 years, Germany has become an important immigration country, which is illustrated with a short retrospective. One of the results of the economic growth of the mid-1950s was the recruitment of “migrant workers”. At the beginning, they came primarily from Mediterranean countries. Since at first it was assumed that they would not remain in Germany, they were also called “guest workers”. After mass immigration in the 1960s, a drastic change occurred. On account of the recession in the 1970s, many West European countries changed their immigration policies; the Federal Republic of Germany declared a recruitment ban in 1973 for individuals from non-EC countries. During this time, many immigrants were faced with the decision of returning to their respective countries or remaining in Germany; the majority of the immigrants remained and sent for their families within the framework of family reunification. The situation has changed once again since the 1980s and 1990s. Immigration is now primarily a result of difficult political conditions in different countries, so that many people are forced to seek political asylum. In addition, immigration can mostly be attributed to the high number of ethnic German repatriates from the former Soviet Union, Poland and Romania (see Özürk 2007, p. 3; Hussain 2010, p. 13).

The year 2000 marked a decisive political turnaround because legal regulations were created with the introduction of limited citizenship and the development of the Immigration Act, which came into effect on 1 January 2005. The goal of this act is to facilitate the integration process of immigrants into the German society. Another consequence of the Act was the introduction of integration courses, the implementation of which is regulated nationwide by the National Integration Plan (2007) (see Feldmeier 2008, p. 7).

Since the beginning of the 1980s, literacy courses have existed for the autochthonous population, as well as for immigrants (at least in the second language, i.e., German) – the developments, however, proceeded mostly independently of each other. The first and second language course offerings for immigrants that gradually formed in the cities and communities received government funding. Literacy work with immigrants is characterised by extreme heterogeneity, which can be attributed to differences in spoken and written language, and individual, social and cultural factors (see Feldmeier, 2010, p. 18ff). Different approaches to teaching methodologies have developed that, in addition to teaching reading and writing skills, also promote intercultural learning and enable active participation in society.

THE SYSTEM OF INTEGRATION COURSES

Since the Immigration Act came into effect in 2005, the newly created Federal Office for Migration and Refugees [Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, (BAMF)] is the institution responsible for managing the integration courses. Specific concepts or (framework) curricula have been developed that are aligned along the lines of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), [Gemeinsamen Europäischen Referenzrahmen für Sprachen]; they serve as an important foundation for the various integration courses. The process is clearly structured and defined. A placement test must be taken before being admitted to an integration course; and an appropriate module is determined according to the existing language ability.

The adult education colleges are the main providers of the integration courses, followed by language and vocational schools, educational institutions/educational workshops, as well as different supporting organisations and initiatives.
The different courses (see below) are followed by a respective orientation course, which is usually a total of 45 course hours (Exception: 30 units in connection with an intensive course). German law, history and culture are taught.

The Intensive Course is aimed at individuals who have already learned other languages and/or who are quick learners. German is taught in 430 units with the goal of reaching a B2 language level. The standard integration course, which is also called the standard course, is split up into a basic language course and an advanced course, which consists of a total of 645 units. General everyday topics are dealt with here, like shopping and living, health, work and profession, training and education, leisure time and media. The target language level is B1 (e.g. ability to understand the main points of clear standard input and to produce simple connected texts on familiar matters.

In addition, special integration courses are offered:

In the Integration Course for Women and the Integration Course for Parents (900 units each), cultural aspects, as well as the life situation of women and families are considered; and the differences and similarities between the countries of origin and Germany are compared. Within the context of training and education, there is the opportunity to get to know the nurseries and schools of the children, as well as the various local advisory services available. Childcare is guaranteed during the course. (Level: B1)

The Integration Course for Youth, which is aimed at teenagers and adults up to the age of 27, includes lessons on the standard topics, as well as a practical part, in which trips are made to educational institutions and workplaces. In addition, participants are informed of advisory services that could be relevant with respect to future career and life plans. (Level: B1)

The Remedial Course is for individuals who have lived in Germany for a longer time, but who have not had the opportunity to learn sufficient German. This covers 900 units and is a preparation for the language requirements of the workplace and everyday life. (Level: B1)

At the end of the courses, a final examination for the B1 level is taken. Upon passing the exam, a certificate is issued. If the exam is not passed, it is possible to take an additional 300 course hours. This, however, can be done only once.

The Literacy Course is aimed primarily at illiterates, functional illiterates, as well as those who are learning a second alphabet and consists of 945 units. The literacy work is in German, not the native language. This requirement is effective not only for speaking German, but also to learn how to read and write the Latin alphabet at the same time. It is assumed that the primary illiterates and also a large part of the functional illiterates will not be able to achieve the actual goal of the integration course (the B1 Level) within the funding period. The goal here is to reach the minimum language level of A2.2. or A2.1 (ability to understand sentences related to areas of most immediate relevance on a very basic level for primary illiterates).

### EXPERIENCE WITH THE ILLITERACY COURSES – TAKING STOCK

After five years since the implementation of integration courses, many diverse experiences and evaluation results are available. This is a good opportunity to take stock. There has been a significant increase in the course offering: over 56,000 people have taken part in an integration course with literacy since 2005. In 2009, over 16,000 participants were recorded; that represents 14.1% of the participants in integration courses since that time (see BAMF, 2010). The number of units has also increased. During the time of the language association in the 1980s, the number of hours per year was 160–400 (Paleit 1989, quoted in: Schramm/Roll, 2010, p. 6). The figure is now 945–1,245 hours (ibid.).

However, there are also very fundamental criticisms by academics as well as by practitioners with regard to the integration courses, and especially with regard to the literacy courses.

Generally, it has been said that the processes and procedures are highly bureaucratic. It has also been pointed out that economic goals take priority, such as the integration of the participants into the labour market, whereas issues of emancipation play less of a role. The fact that literacy is taught exclusively in German and the fact that too little attention is given to “the simultaneous or successive literacy in the first or second language” is questioned (Schramm, 2011, p. 224). The results of a current study of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees with regard to the first language of the participants yielded some interesting findings. The most commonly spoken first lan-

### Table 3: Overview of integration course system; placement of literacy courses within the integration course system, funding period and goals (BAMF 2009, p. 150)

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<th>+ 300 Units</th>
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<td>B1</td>
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<td>430 Units</td>
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In addition, remedial courses are offered:

**Intensive Course**

- Standard Integration Course
- Youth Integration Course
- Integration Course for Women and Parents
- Remedial Course
- Literacy Course

**Remedial Course**

- A2.1 to A2.2

**Table 3: Overview of integration course system; placement of literacy courses within the integration course system, funding period and goals (BAMF 2009, p. 150)**
guages of the literacy course participants are Kurdish (22.4%), Arabic (14.1%), Turkish (11.0%), Russian (9.8%), Albanian (6.1%) and Persian (4.7%) (Rother, 2010, p. 23). Schramm and Roll point out that based on this groundwork, the “first language and bilingual literacy could be furthered in a targeted manner” (Schramm/Roll, 2010, p. 7; Schramm, 2011, p. 224f).

In terms of the staff situation, it should be noted that course leaders usually work as freelancers and under precarious conditions. In addition, in most cases they are qualified to teach German as a second language, i.e., the language course, not the area of literacy. Adequate advanced and continuing training courses are necessary in this field.

The issue of immigration is complex because in addition to speaking a language, it also includes other elements, like cultural identity and a sense of belonging. The personal experience of immigration, the world in which they live and the culturally determined value systems and norms of the individuals with an immigration background also shape their learning experience and learning progress. This has to do not only with learning the German language, but rather points to the necessity of developing holistic approaches that allow self-paced learning and social participation.

FUTURE OUTLOOK FOR ILLITERACY—GOVERNMENT ACTS ON ILLITERACY FIGURES

As has been pointed out, the area of literacy and basic education has a long tradition. However, to date there has not been a satisfactory implementation of successful concepts and research results. The current developments, however, give new hope.

When the results of the study on the magnitude of functional illiteracy were presented, the Minister of Education, Annette Schavan and the President of the Education Committee, Bernd Althusmann announced a basic education pact, which brings together not only the federal government, but also the state and company associations, chambers of commerce, unions, adult education college associations and academics. A broad social alliance should emerge from this in order to cope with future challenges, to ensure exchange and bring about continuity. Literacy and basic education are also dealt with in the Lower House of German Parliament [German Bundestag]. The issue is on the agenda for educational policy.

The Minister of Education has already announced that an additional funding initiative focusing on literacy at the workplace will follow. What has not yet been decided is what the contribution of the states that bear the main responsibility for these educational tasks will be.

The political expectations are big. A determining factor will be whether the political will is strong enough to deal with literacy and basic education as a joint educational policy task of the federal government and state, as well as the social partners in a sustainable way. Diverse efforts are necessary in order to achieve this. To what extent will it be possible to overcome insular thinking and pool the competencies of the government and states, as well as of the ministries for education, social affairs and employment in order to develop a comprehensive partnership and financial model? The hope is that literacy education could be funded by a variety of stakeholders, including the federal state, the states (länder) and the private sector.

However, not only does the responsibility fall on politics, but also on society. The question is why was there no outcry when the figures on functional illiteracy were published, like there was with the so-called “Pisa” shock? There were articles in the media about the figures but only for a short period after announcing the data and around World Literacy Day on 8 September. Some media did notice the curious lack of public debate and an article title could be seen, lamenting: “Where is the debate on the high number of functional illiterates?” All this raises the question: Why is there no greater interest? Why does this topic have such little significance - or is it still a taboo? Is there no adequate lobby? Does the heterogeneity of the group contribute to the bias?

“Is illiteracy still a taboo?”

What has been known for a long time is that investing in literacy and basic education is costly. However, it is an investment in the future of our society. It is also known that the consequential costs of illiteracy for society are much higher. After all, there is no question that literacy and basic education belong to the fundamental cultural heritage of our society and represent an important prerequisite for inclusion (see Kronauer, 2010).

Why do we continue to experience stagnation and setbacks? Why does the necessary institutionalisation and professionalism still not exist? The commitment of practitioners and academics to this funding aim is a remarkable example of what can be done in the area of literacy and basic education when adequate funding and support structures are provided. Basic knowledge, comprehensive insights, as well as future-oriented concepts are available. They could be implemented immediately and thereby strengthen literacy and basic education in Germany in a sustainable manner.

ENDNOTE

1 Refer to the article by Lübke (2008) and the Alphabund brochure “Verbundprojekte” (2010) for a detailed description of the funding aim; the brochure includes brief summaries of all the research projects.

2 The German Federal Statistical Office describes the “Population with an Immigration Background” as “Individuals who moved to the Federal Republic of Germany after 1949, as well as all foreigners born in Germany and all those born in Germany with at least one parent that moved to Germany or was born in Germany as a foreigner”.

3 Refer to the article, “The Case of Germany: Literacy Instruction for Adult Immigrants” by Feldmeier (2008) for a detailed description of integration courses and immigration in English.

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Tröster, Monika. Tröster is a research associate in the programme “Social Inclusion/Learning in Social Spaces” (Inklusion/Lernen im Quartier) in the research and development centre of the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE). Her duties include the management of national and European projects for literacy and basic education and international expert activities. Ms Tröster is a member of the International Literacy Expert Group in the context of the PIAAC.

CONTACT
Monika Tröster
German Institute for Adult Education
Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning
Heinemannstr. 12-14
53175 Bonn
Germany
Tel.: +49 (0)228 3294-306
Email: troester@die-bonn.de
www.die-bonn.de

LITERACY
MONIKA TRÖSTER
Monika Tröster is a research associate in the programme “Social Inclusion/Learning in Social Spaces” (Inklusion/Lernen im Quartier) in the research and development centre of the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE). Her duties include the management of national and European projects for literacy and basic education and international expert activities. Ms Tröster is a member of the International Literacy Expert Group in the context of the PIAAC.

CONTACT
Monika Tröster
German Institute for Adult Education
Leibniz Centre for Lifelong Learning
Heinemannstr. 12-14
53175 Bonn
Germany
Tel.: +49 (0)228 3294-306
Email: troester@die-bonn.de
www.die-bonn.de
This article presents details of national assessments of learning outcomes organised by the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) since 1999 to assess reading and writing skills among 15-year-old Finns. A recent study conducted under the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has obtained similar results about young Finns’ reading literacy, but national assessments have repeatedly revealed major problems in terms of writing skills and pupil assessment at comprehensive schools.

This article outlines the proposals for development that have been presented in national assessment reports. The results of the most recent assessment of learning outcomes in mother tongue and literature (2010) have revealed such deterioration of writing skills that a new type of developmental approach both from the National Core Curriculum and teacher training programmes is required.

Hannu-Pekka Lappalainen
The Finnish National Board of Education has assessed pupils' reading and writing skills and other key areas of studying the subject known as mother tongue and literature in many ways at Finnish comprehensive schools during 1999–2010. Assessments have been based on samples, such that results can be generalised to apply to entire age groups in mainstream basic education provided by comprehensive schools. On the whole, about 37,000 Finnish-speaking sample pupils in basic education have participated in tests exploring reading and writing skills as part of these assessments.

The standard of reading literacy among 15–16-year-olds in the final 9th grade of basic education has generally been found to be relatively good. First and foremost, assessments have revealed deficiencies in pupils' written and oral communication skills and mastery of the basic linguistic and literary concepts. Attention has also focused on the considerable differences in learning outcomes between girls and boys and on the fact that boys have not considered mother tongue and literature to be an interesting subject to the same extent as girls. National assessments have also unearthed problems in terms of pupil assessment and considerable differences in mother tongue skills between pupils aiming to continue in general upper secondary education and those opting for vocational education and training.

The assignments and scoring methods used in assessments have varied. Writing skills assessments, for example, have used a wide variety of assignments in order to gain a reliable overview of the status of writing proficiency and the different aspects of writing skills. Many assessments have involved writing two or three different types of texts. In connection with different assessments, teachers have considered the level of difficulty of the assignments to be appropriate. The criteria used to determine the content and level of difficulty of the assignments were derived from the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education.

### LATEST ASSESSMENTS ABOUT PUPILS' READING AND WRITING SKILLS

The Finnish National Board of Education has most recently reported results on a follow-up assessment of learning outcomes in mother tongue and literature organised in the final grade of basic education in the spring of 2010. Data for the assessment was collected through stratified sampling from 60 Finnish-language comprehensive schools representing a comprehensive cross-section of different regions and groups of municipalities. Pupils were selected to take part in the assessment from the schools' 9th grades using systematic sampling. The total sample of test participants consisted of 2,601 pupils (1,246 boys and 1,355 girls).

The test included a wide variety of assignments in reading, knowledge of literature and texts, knowledge of vocabulary, language and basic concepts, and writing skills. On average, the general level of performance was satisfactory among girls and moderate among boys. Good or very good results were achieved by 34% of pupils (45% of girls, 22% of boys), whereas 16% of pupils (7% of girls, 26% of boys) obtained poor results. The level of competence was similar in different parts of the country. Regional differences were small, but the average test scores among sample pupils at individual schools varied between 40% and 80% of the maximum score. Differences between schools were particularly visible in relation to major variations in writing skills.

In previous assessments of learning outcomes in mother tongue and literature organised in the upper grades of basic education (1999–2007), variation between schools has accounted for 7–9% of variance in test scores. The proportion of variation between schools (13%) in this latest assessment is more than a third higher when compared with the 2005 assessment of learning outcomes in mother tongue and literature in the 9th grade or the equivalent 2007 assessment organised at the beginning of the 7th grade. A similar increase in inter-school differences in outcomes has also been reported in the recently published 2009 PISA results in relation to Finland.

In reading and literature assignments, average pupil performance was satisfactory. Performance in knowledge of language, vocabulary and basic concepts was satisfactory (62%) among girls and moderate (53%) among boys. Writing skills were satisfactory (68%) on average among girls and adequate (49%) among boys. There were considerable variations in writing skills between schools. One in three boys' writing skills turned out to be poor. The major differences in writing skills between girls and boys have remained unchanged compared with earlier ninth-grade assessments, while the overall levels of learning outcomes and attitudes among pupils in the final stage of basic education have remained similar to those reported as part of the assessment organised five years earlier. However, pupils' perceptions of the usefulness of the subject had become more negative during recent years.

Another aspect examined at the 39 sample schools was the way in which learning outcomes had developed among the same young people (N = 1,629, including 813 boys and 816 girls) from the 7th grade to the 9th grade. The most prominent factor correlating with the results of a school's 9th grades was the baseline level of sample pupils' knowledge and skills in mother tongue and literature in the 7th grade. Competence had increased during the last years of comprehensive school as expected in those areas that teachers had considered to be teaching priorities, i.e. in assignments related to knowledge of literature and texts, interpretation of texts and reading. There was a connection between positive development in a school's learning outcomes and how useful pupils in grades 7–9 considered studies in mother tongue and literature to be in terms of their everyday lives, further studies and future careers.

A school-specific questionnaire survey was also carried out to investigate teaching arrangements and resources as well as pupils' perceptions of their studies, mother tongue skills and the subject. 42% of girls felt that mother
tongue and literature was an interesting subject, whereas 17% of boys shared that opinion.

The assessment revealed that the grading scale applied on pupils’ school reports was more limited than the dispersion in knowledge of the subject and, in particular, in writing skills found in the assessment would suggest. As indicators of writing skills, report grades did not provide an accurate picture of the prevailing skills level. The majority of those pupils whose writing skills proved to be at an adequate level at best in the tests had, nevertheless, received satisfactory, good or very good grades in mother tongue and literature on their reports. There was no connection between pupils’ grades and how frequently different themes of oral communication had been addressed in class, which means that neither the excessively high general level of grades nor the variable grading practices can be explained by the proportion of oral communication.

On average, pupils opting for vocational education and training had usually received higher grades with the same level of knowledge and skills than those applying to general upper secondary school. In addition, the grades shown on pupils’ reports systematically portrayed different levels of knowledge and skills at different schools. The grades awarded by every fourth sample school were on average one mark higher than those given by reference schools to pupils showing the same level of knowledge and skills.

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS IN THE SPRING 2010 TEST**

**Letter of enquiry**

One of the writing assignments was a letter of enquiry in factual style, which was scored analytically on the basis of several different criteria:

According to teachers, the general level of performance was good (72%) among girls and moderate (52%) among boys. Pupils had generally been able to order some brochures and enquire about the departure time of the ferry to the island and, as a general rule, they did not make any superfluous or irrelevant additions or statements. In these respects, their average skills were at a very good level.

On average, pupils had explained their plans to visit the site to a good standard and many letters also had an appropriate conclusion, such as Best regards, Thank you in advance, With thanks for your help, etc. The most common omission was the enquiry about the departure place of the ferry. The consistency of the text style was also assessed to be at a satisfactory level on average.

Only 43% of the letters (31% and 54% of those written by boys and girls, respectively) included a postal address for brochures to be sent to, even though this was specifically mentioned in the assignment. In this respect, performance remained at an adequate level. On average, the writers’ ability to end their letters with a signature was adequate (38% of boys and 58% of girls who signed using their first and last names). The aspect that caused even more problems for pupils was starting the enquiry with an appropriate salutation or greeting. Only 5% (!) of writers had been able to use expressions such as To Hailuoto Tourist Office or To whom it may concern. Initial and final greetings had been completely omitted from every third letter, while many pupils had started their enquiries casually, using expressions such as Hello or Hi.

Your class is planning a class trip, which would include a visit to Hailuoto Island. You are currently putting together a programme for the trip. You know that Hailuoto is home to at least a lighthouse and some wind power stations.

Your assignment is to enquire about additional information about Hailuoto Island via e-mail. You would like Hailuoto Tourist Office to provide information about the departure times and place of the ferry to the island. You should also ask the office to send some printed brochures to give your class a chance to learn about the area in advance. You can come up with an appropriate address yourself (it does not have to be exactly the right one).

Write a letter in **factual style**. The tourist office may have several employees and you are not familiar with any of them. This is why you cannot address them by their first names. The letter is supposed to be sent using a computer, but this time the text should be drawn up by hand for practical reasons.

(The letter template had lines for writing the text and separate shorter lines for writing the recipient’s name, salutations and the sender’s signature. The top of the form showed the recipient’s e-mail address and the topic, “Enquiry about Hailuoto”.)

Average performance in clause structures and spelling remained at a moderate level. External readers observed that pupils’ own teachers had often been remarkably lenient when assessing the texts in terms of structures and spelling.

The following two examples demonstrate different levels of performance:

‘Hello and hi there,

Send us a schedule of when and where the ferry to Hailuoto leaves. Also send a few brochures, the address is P— Street 18.’

(3 points)

‘Greetings!

Our Class 9 C of H— School is planning a class trip to Hailuoto, its lighthouse and wind power stations. In order for us to be able to learn as much as possible during our trip, I would like you to send us some additional information about other sights on Hailuoto Island. In addition, we would appreciate it if you could send us some information about ferry departure times and places. In addition, we would like to order 25 printed brochures to the following address: L— Lane 12, 0XX20 X—. In the event of any possible payments and postage expenses, I would like you to send a separate message. Thank you in advance! Tuomas N – —’

(15 points)
In order to gain a broader picture of writing skills, sample pupils were also asked to submit the reflective essays of 60 to 80 lines that they had written in a double period during the spring term, accompanied by the grades awarded by their teachers for these essays.

Pupils’ texts covered four themes relating to the subject’s contents. A considerable proportion (38%) of the writers reflected on the significance of theatre or cinema to the young people of today. Another 23% of pupils had chosen a topic that dealt with the usefulness of studying mother tongue and literature at school, while 21% discussed how language unites and divides people. The remaining 18% had chosen a topic where they were to recommend a book that they had read and argue from several points of view why their friends should read that particular book.

The average performance level shown in the essays was good among girls and moderate or satisfactory among boys. The difference in writing skills levels between girls and boys (16 percentage points as calculated from the success rates) was roughly the same as shown by previous assessments of pupils in the final grade of basic education.

A variance analysis showed that variation between schools accounted for 14% of the total variance of grades awarded for the essays. The analysis also revealed that pupils who had performed poorly in reflective writing assignments had, nevertheless, frequently (75%) been awarded moderate, satisfactory or good report grades for the subject.

At the planning stage of the assessment, it was decided that the reflective essays written at the beginning of the 2010 spring term as part of ninth-grade mother tongue instruction would be specifically used as the basis for a more detailed analysis of the different aspects of pupils’ writing skills. The purpose was to gain information about details such as how writers had expressed their opinions and justified their views and to what extent they had developed into versatile writers with their own distinctive voices. A representative sample of typical texts was submitted for analysis by expert readers.

The most skilled pupils had presented their views and opinions boldly and directly in their reflective essays, while also being able to take opposing ideas into account when laying out their own arguments. However, many writers had problems defining the point of view of their papers. As part of their conclusions, the researchers involved in analysing pupils’ essays suggested increasing interactive writing and teaching argumentation skills in order for pupils to become more accustomed to taking the recipient into account when writing a text as well. Analysis of the results of the assessment also drew attention to those pupils who had only been able to provide minimal evidence of their writing skills in the test organised in the final grade of basic education. As a general rule, these pupils had already shown poor writing skills at the beginning of the 7th grade. Nevertheless, they reported that they had received very little remedial instruction or special needs education in mother tongue and literature. The researchers found considerable differences between schools in terms of the relative proportion of those pupils who turned out to be virtually unable to write in the test organised at the end of basic education.

The follow-up assessment of the performance level also involved schools where it was possible to follow up on development of pupils’ knowledge and skills from the beginning of the 7th
grade to the end of the 9th grade. Competence had increased during the last years of comprehensive school as expected in those areas that teachers had considered to be teaching priorities: over the three-year period, the pupils’ performance level had increased by an average of 15 to 18 percentage points in terms of assignments related to knowledge of literature and texts, interpretation of texts and reading.

**PREVIOUS STUDIES OF WRITING SKILLS AMONG PUPILS FINISHING COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL**

The Finnish National Board of Education also assessed the writing skills of pupils in the final grade of basic education on previous occasions in 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2005. The writing assignments given to ninth-graders in different assessments have included writing on the basis of text and images and writing a letter, a story, a poem, a news item or a description. The writing assignments in the 2005 assessment included drawing up an enquiry to a tourist office, writing a clear test answer and finalising a text. The general level of writing skills achieved in the assessments organised in the final grade of basic education has settled between 59% and 63% of the total score available. On average, the general level of writing skills has been satisfactory or fairly good among girls and moderate or adequate among boys. Major differences have emerged in the outcomes between girls and boys and between pupils applying for different further study tracks. There have also been considerable variations in the results of different schools. These differences are much greater than inter-school differences in terms of pupils’ reading proficiency.

In 2003, writing skills were assessed on the basis of reflective essays. Writing instructions indicated that the topic of a reflective text should be examined from several points of view, with care and so as to weigh up different possibilities. Those pupils who were used to writing position-taking or reflective texts at school actually performed relatively well in the test regardless of the topic. A considerable proportion of writers had, however, prepared accounts that were based on lists or composed in a narrative fashion. Instead of reflecting on and analysing the topic, these writers presented opinions and often unjustified generalisations. The external readers involved in assessing the texts concluded that these writers had not had much practice in writing other types of texts besides narrative texts. Particular attention was drawn to deficiencies in spelling, reflective analysis and structuring of the text.

The above-mentioned assessment also revealed that 63% of writers showing poor outcomes were those who reported that they had never received regular special needs education to help with any difficulties in reading, writing or speaking. Assessment reports paid attention to the obvious need to develop more varied or challenging working methods for learning writing skills. A further conclusion was that it should be possible to intervene in deficiencies in basic writing skills as early as during the early years of education, in order to prevent inadequate skills from becoming obstacles to learning motivation and development of more advanced skills.

Similar indications of the uneven distribution of writing skills also emerged in the assessment organised in the final grade of basic education in the spring of 2005. One of the writing assignments was a typical, relatively short test answer. Instructions for the assignment had specifically mentioned that pupils were to use standard language and full sentences in their answers. Nevertheless, many pupils’ answers lacked cohesion, while their sentences were disconnected and the text as a whole resembled a list. Based on the outcomes, it became clear that pupils had seldom had enough practice in producing written test answers or concise essay-form answers required for further studies. Gender differences in the level of writing skills were particularly pronounced \((t = 25.7 – 32.2)\) in terms of command of the basics of spelling, the structuring and coherence of text, reference relations, clause structures and factual standard language. These differences are considerably higher than those found in the levels of reading literacy among girls and boys, which are also exceptionally high in Finland in international terms.

Furthermore, the average level of pupils’ writing skills also varied from 37% to 81% of the total score at different sample schools, which unfortunately suggests that, alongside top schools, there are also those schools in Finland where learning writing skills is quite inadequate. School-specific results were most clearly linked to how useful pupils considered studies in mother tongue and literature to be in terms of their everyday lives, further studies and future careers. Good average results had been achieved at those schools where pupils had formed a clear understanding of the usefulness and necessity of the educational contents of mother tongue and literature based on their studies during the three upper grades of basic education. Schools where the average level of sample pupils’ performance in reading and literature assignments was good or very good accounted for 17% of the sample. The average level of writing skills was assessed to be good at 5% of schools, while pupils’ average knowledge of language, vocabulary and basic concepts was at least at a good level at 2% of schools.

Consequently, uneven writing skills and differences between schools in terms of the focus areas of pupil assessment in the subject seem to constitute a persistent problem for mother tongue instruction. After nine years at comprehensive school, a high proportion of boys have only achieved an adequate level of writing skills. In the perceptions of Finnish comprehensive school pupils, mother tongue and literature is identified as being a subject for girls applying to general upper secondary school. The didactic development of the subject has for too long been neglected by departments responsible for teacher training; teacher organisations have also not taken an active role to develop subject studies in a more equal direction, where working methods and practices typical of boys would also be taken into account sufficiently in studies. Academic research and production and use of learning materials focus on promoting...
reading literacy and knowledge of literature, whereas research into instruction in writing, which is typical of other Nordic countries, hardly exists in Finland. Moreover, text production skills are also not emphasised in mother tongue grades on pupils’ school reports, which primarily represent teachers’ perceptions of the level of pupils’ text reception skills.

The majority (65%) of those pupils whose writing skills proved to be at an adequate level at best in the 2010 assessment had received satisfactory, good or very good grades in mother tongue and literature on their school reports. It also became clear that teachers of mother tongue and literature tend to set a lower standard for pupils in terms of writing skills and linguistic finalisation of texts when compared with assessment of other exercises. Every other sample school appeared to pass an age group of pupils to upper secondary level, who had had the opportunity to virtually neglect studying the basic writing techniques in terms of spelling during their comprehensive school years.

The high dispersion in the outcomes of writing assignments cannot be attributed to varying or inadequate teaching hours allocated to the subject, because the amount of lesson hours during grades 7–9 had no correlation with the performance level achieved by a pupil. Nor does any possible focus of teaching on practising oral communication explain the problems in written communication. Neither a pupil’s grade nor his or her test score had any correlation with the frequency of various oral communication exercises in mother tongue and literature classes during grades 7–9. The conclusion remained that studying writing skills has not been sufficiently effective during comprehensive school years, even though the issue has been a focus of attention in national assessments of learning outcomes for several years now. Pupils’ lack of practice is demonstrated by issues such as their inability to take the reader into account, consider arguments and possible counter-arguments or define a perspective for their analysis when writing reflective texts. Undeveloped writing skills can probably be traced back to a lack of practice in basic skills: the poorest writers had mostly been left to their own devices during both primary and lower secondary years of comprehensive school. 80% of these pupils reported that they had been completely excluded from remedial instruction, while 76% of them stated never having received regular special needs education due to their reading and writing difficulties during their comprehensive school years.

PROPOSALS FOR ACTION BASED ON THE ASSESSMENTS

As part of the national assessments of learning outcomes conducted between 1999 and 2010, the following observations and development needs have been reported in relation to writing skills, which should be taken into account when drawing up the new National Core Curriculum for Basic Education and updating teacher training and learning materials:

- Comprehensive school pupils are most commonly used to writing narratives and stories as part of mother tongue instruction during all their school years. At many schools, pupils also become accustomed to producing literary texts and book, play or film reviews at lower secondary level (grades 7–9). The external readers involved in assessing the texts have drawn attention to the fact that pupils do not seem to have had much practice in writing other types of texts besides narrative texts. Instruction mostly focuses on practice in such genres that are not much use to pupils at a later stage in civic activities or working life.
- Factual articles, reports, research papers and other such factual texts, as well as reading journals, meeting documents, releases, news items, abstracts and written test answers are the types of texts that have been practised in mother tongue classes during grades 7–9 to a considerably lesser extent at some schools than others. However, this does not explain the major school-specific differences on its own.

Appreciating mother tongue instruction leads to good results.

- Good average results have been achieved at those schools where pupils have formed a clear understanding of the usefulness and necessity of the educational contents of mother tongue and literature based on their studies during the three upper grades of basic education. On average, those pupils who are accustomed to writing texts such as position-taking or reflective texts, reports, essays or factual articles at school have generally performed relatively well in writing skills assessments (2003 and 2001 assessments).
- It would be necessary to start practising different text types as early as during the primary level (grades 1–6) and to write diversely as part of different subject studies.
- Basic writing skills and the knowledge base of written expression should be consolidated at least starting in grade 5. At lower secondary level, pupils should practise planning and structuring various factual texts, defining the topic and reflective analysis more systematically.
- Teachers should also prepare their pupils more frequently for finalising the spelling and language of their draft texts during comprehensive school years.
- Poor writers would need more basic practice useful for everyday life and further studies and more diverse forms of study. Mother tongue and literature textbooks should deal more extensively with planning the content and structure of writings and issues relating to the coherence and choice of words for written assignments and the characteristics of different genres.
- Learning materials, methods and continuing training aimed at facilitating instruction in writing skills should be available for all class and subject teachers teaching mother tongue and literature. It is advisable to develop diverse web-based sup-
port materials for instruction and practice in writing skills.
- It is crucial to focus on the didactics of writing and assessment of writing skills in initial and continuing training for class and subject teachers teaching mother tongue and literature.
- The Finnish National Board of Education should add a separate grade for writing skills to pupils’ term reports and final certificates.

YOUNG FINNS’ READING LITERACY IN THE LIGHT OF NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

The previous sections have extensively covered writing skills, the deterioration of which is a major problem for Finnish schools. Both national and international assessments have gained considerably more positive information about young Finns’ reading literacy.

In 1999, the Finnish National Board of Education organised the first national assessment of learning outcomes in mother tongue, comprising assessment of both reading and writing skills and oral communication skills. The results of the assessment of reading literacy revealed at the time that literal text comprehension was generally easy for pupils in the final grade of comprehensive school: they did not have problems finding individual pieces of information and identifying the main theme and key situations of the text. Pupils also performed moderately well in finding arguments and logical relationships within the text and identifying the narrator and likely audience of the text.

The aspects of reading comprehension that turned out to be the most difficult were those where pupils were expected to draw conclusions on the narrative solutions that had influenced the tone of the text and other text-building devices used by the writer or to master the basic concepts of literature and language. Pupils also found it difficult to interpret and draw conclusions about the content based on the whole text, include general knowledge from the external reality in their interpretative reasoning, choose the most sensible solution between several correct alternatives, or identify several shared themes in writings representing different genres. Reading argumentative factual texts turned out to be demanding at all levels of reading proficiency, while inferential understanding was not easy even when reading narrative or descriptive texts. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study has subsequently made similar observations: it has not been easy for young Finns to reflect on the expression methods and word choices used in the texts that they read or the connections of these to the purposes of the texts. Analysing styles, structures and linguistic expressions has also caused difficulties for pupils involved in the international study.

In connection with the 1999 assessment, it was observed that boys in the final grade of comprehensive school had performed distinctly worse than girls in test assignments of inferential and interpretative reading literacy that required written answers. People have subsequently discussed whether the considerable differences in outcomes between boys and girls that emerged in that particular type of assignment were specifically related to deficient writing skills and girls’ higher writing motivation. This observation has also been an impetus for the Finnish National Board of Education to start investigating writing skills in more detail in its subsequent assessments by using different types of varying writing assignments.

PUPILS’ PERFORMANCE MORE CONSISTENT IN READING THAN IN WRITING

The results obtained in 2001 were in line with the previous assessment organised for pupils about to finish their basic education: pupils’ reading literacy was relatively good and, on average, they performed better in reading and text reception assignments than in terms of writing and linguistic knowledge.

Searching for information and understanding table and document texts was generally easier than inferential reading. Boys’ table or graph reading skills were almost as good as those of girls. Pupils were more familiar with general information relating to the use of books and libraries and to genres than with domestic literature or literary concepts.

Average performance in reading skills was 7–8 percentage points higher than in writing skills in both assessments (1999 and 2001). In these assessments, average differences between girls and boys were in the range of 8–10 percentage points in terms of reading skills and as high as 15–18 percentage points in terms of writing skills.

TEXTBOOKS IN SUPPORT OF READING LITERACY AND LEISURE-TIME READING

In the 2001 assessment organised in the 9th grade, average performance in reading, literature and textual knowledge assignments was good among girls and satisfactory among boys. In general terms, pupils at sample schools performed both better and more consistently in these assignments when compared with the other areas of the subject included in the assessment.

In addition to teachers’ interest and professional skills, the good outcomes in reading proficiency have presumably been influenced by the fact that literary texts, the basics of literature and literary samples have, in teachers’ opinions, specifically been the aspects that have been covered well or at least sufficiently in textbooks. More than half of the text content of textbooks commonly used in instruction have expressly dealt with reading, media texts and literature; the focus of the subject matter was naturally in line with the assessment results demonstrating young people’s good standard of reading literacy.

In connection with the 2003 learning outcomes assessment, mother tongue teachers at the sample schools reported that knowledge of literature and diverse leisure-time reading as well as introduction to different literary genres and domestic literature had, on the whole, constituted the focus areas of instruction at the majority of schools during 2000–2003. Subsequent assessments of learning outcomes in mother tongue and literature have also indicated that literature and reading have specifically been the focus areas of mother tongue instruction.
SCHOOLS AS INSPIRATION FOR A REGULAR READING AND WRITING HABIT

The 2003 national assessment of learning outcomes in mother tongue and literature concentrated on establishing the standard of writing skills among pupils about to move on to upper secondary studies and on charting their knowledge of the basic concepts of the subject and the knowledge base required for further studies. In the same context, pupils also provided information about their leisure-time reading habits.

Variation between schools accounted for a relatively small proportion (3–4%) of variance in pupils’ responses about their leisure-time reading habits. This suggested that schools had generally managed to inspire pupils’ interest in leisure-time reading evenly in every respect. Co-operation between schools and libraries and effective school libraries had played a prominent role in discussions concerning instruction.

Conversely, the proportion of variation between schools was remarkable (15–26%) in terms of writing certain types of texts (such as reports, factual articles, research papers and other such factual texts, as well as reading journals, meeting documents, or book, play or film reviews). The situation in 2003 was similar to the situation found at sample schools in the 2001 assessment: at some schools, pupils had worked with these text genres more actively in average terms and this also correlated to their outcomes.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ASSESSMENT RESULTS IN ALIGNMENT

In 2002, an in-depth report based on an international comparative study, entitled Siuomen tulevaisuuden osaajat – PISA 2000 Suomessa (Knowledge and skills for future – PISA 2000 in Finland), revealed similar results in terms of reading literacy to the national reading literacy assessments: according to both national and international estimates, poor readers account for less than 10% of the age group in Finland.

The 2009 international assessment suggests that 13% of Finnish boys and only 3% of girls are poor readers. In the 2005 and 2010 national assessments of learning outcomes in mother tongue and literature, 9–12% of sample pupils performed poorly in reading and literature assignments.

Based on the international comparison, just over a quarter of young Finns have reached high performance levels in reading assignments related to information acquisition, reading comprehension and interpretation. National assessments have provided a similar picture: 24–26% of pupils have achieved very good outcomes in many assessments. In terms of reflection on and appraisal of reading matter, 14% of pupils have reached top outcomes in the international comparison, while national assessment results indicate that 15–16% of pupils have achieved a very good level of inferential reading proficiency.

Based on all assessments, differences between girls and boys in test scores have been relatively high. According to the international study, Finnish girls have also shown considerably higher interest in reading than boys; national assessment results indicate that a large proportion of boys have generally not been interested in mother tongue and literature as a subject. Information provided by national and international assessments has also been consistent in terms of leisure-time reading habits.

Both national and international studies suggest that regional differences have been small and variations between Finnish comprehensive schools in terms of reading literacy have been relatively small.

COMPLEMENTARY ASSESSMENTS

Although the international comparative PISA study on reading literacy does not reveal anything about pupils’ writing skills, it has complemented the picture of reading proficiency provided by national learning outcomes assessments by offering the opportunity to compare the performance level with that of pupils of the same age in other countries. Differences and deviations in learning outcomes and the profiles of reading cultures in different countries have become visible in cases where it has been possible to compare the results of the same assessment with the results obtained in other countries. National curricula and the priorities and methods of teaching are different, which means that international comparative reading literacy tests need to be designed in a way that allows implementation in a wide variety of cultures. The extensive background surveys carried out in connection with the tests also allow collection of reference data that offers opportunities for more in-depth analysis while also providing stimuli for national research into reading literacy.

DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Even though the good standard of reading literacy among Finnish pupils has emerged in both national and international assessments, national assessments have also made it possible to discover many key areas for improvement in terms of mother tongue instruction and teacher training. They have revealed major differences in boys’ and girls’ communication skills, various deficiencies in the knowledge of basic linguistic and literary concepts, as well as considerable differences between schools in areas such as writing skills and equitability of pupil assessment. These national development needs of education could not have emerged in international assessments, which have only focused on performance in reading literacy, mathematics and science assignments in different countries. PISA assignments in mathematics and science have also been designed to measure diverse reading literacy of different texts.

National assessments have indicated that development needs in education and teacher training exist in teaching writing skills and knowledge of concepts in particular. Different assessments have shown similar problems in writing skills regardless of whether pupils have written narratives, news items,
précis, letters, descriptions or poems. Major differences have also emerged when assignments have involved writing a reflective text or finalising a complete text.

ASSESSMENT IN SUPPORT OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE CURRICULUM AND EDUCATION

National learning outcomes assessments provide better opportunities to design assignments in different areas of mother tongue studies when compared with international comparative tests. Assignments used in international comparative tests need to be suitable for use in Mexico, Russia, New Zealand, Korea as well as in the Nordic countries. Consequently, it is necessary to choose globally suitable texts and tasks for international assessments. In national learning outcomes assessments, all assignments can be originally drawn up in the native language and so as to diversely chart the objectives and educational contents of the National Core Curriculum as part of different assessments. There is no need to translate written texts related to the assignments from major world languages into Finnish, which is necessary in international comparative school attainment studies. National assessments can also be carried out with considerably fewer economic resources than long-term international comparative studies.

The similarity of the results obtained in international comparative studies of reading literacy and national tests confirms that the tests provide a good overview of the standard of proficiency. This result also asserts that Finnish researchers and mother tongue teachers have succeeded in designing assignments for national assessment tests.

A key purpose of national follow-up assessments of learning outcomes is to develop education and provide reliable reference data for use by schools and education providers in support of development of schools and evaluation of their own work. The schools involved in assessments receive feedback based on preliminary results about their own situation for the purposes of educational development soon after each assessment. Feedback covers aspects such as reference data about the results obtained in individual schools and the entire country, pupil perceptions relating to studies and grades awarded to pupils. The hope is that schools will benefit from the results of national assessments and make use of the feedback provided to them when evaluating the performance profile in the subject and application of the grading scale, as well as when revising the local curriculum for the subject as required or improving practical teaching arrangements. The Finnish National Board of Education, teacher organisations and cities and other municipalities have organised training events, where teachers and those involved in curriculum design, implementation of assessments and educational services have deliberated on the issues highlighted by the assessments.

Schools have welcomed the opportunity provided by the assessments to compare their own results and grading practices with the national level and to use the assessment as a tool to develop instruction in the subject. In their discussions, mother tongue teachers and school principals have generally examined their own school’s test performance in relation to municipal or national results. Based on assessments, schools have reviewed the working methods, arrangements and focus areas applied in teaching the subject. Information about test results has been used as a basis for revising the local subject curriculum and planning schoolwork for the following school year.

CHALLENGES HIGHLIGHTED IN RECENT ASSESSMENTS

Based on the results of the follow-up assessment of learning outcomes in mother tongue organised in the spring of 2010, attention has focused on the gradually growing differences in outcomes between schools. In previous assessments of learning outcomes in mother tongue and literature organised in the 7th and 9th grades of basic education (1999–2007), variation between schools has accounted for 7–9% of variance in test scores. The proportion of variation between schools (13%) in the latest assessment from spring 2010 is more than a third higher when compared with the 2005 assessment of learning outcomes in mother tongue and literature in the 9th grade or the equivalent 2007 assessment organised at the beginning of the 7th grade. A similar increase in inter-school differences in outcomes has also been reported in the recently published 2009 PISA assessment results in relation to Finland.

Another key observation concerns pupil assessment and the reliability of grades awarded on school reports. Less than half (39%) of teachers working in the schools involved in the assessment believed that the National Core Curriculum provided enough guidance for pupil assessment. Consequently, the Finnish National Board of Education should steer pupil assessment in the subject in a more clear and detailed manner. For the purposes of assessing success in the subject, schools would need clear-cut criteria that would be realised more equitably in practical schoolwork in order to ensure the equivalence of the adequate, moderate, satisfactory, good and very good report grades awarded by different schools.

The report grades awarded to pupils for mother tongue and literature do not currently provide a sufficiently reliable picture of the standard of writing skills. Due to the deterioration in basic writing skills, the Finnish National Board of Education should add a separate grade for writing skills to pupils’ term reports and final certificates.

The reasons underlying the obvious deterioration in basic writing skills are probably related to gaps in the curriculum and old-fashioned methods of teaching writing skills. The National Core Curriculum does not specify in sufficient detail the amount and types of texts that pupils should write at school. Pupils should get much more practice in writing in real-life situations that they find necessary and in natural connections with their studies and leisure interests. The use of technical aids and media texts and diverse project work should be increased to allow pupils to practise writing skills. Pupils should gain plenty of experience of how to de-
sign and edit a text and how to get the message across to several readers. It is necessary to effectively teach structuring different types of texts, clause structures and spelling and to demand the entire age group more clearly to master these basic skills as well. Initial and continuing teacher training should address the didactics of writing different genres and ways of increasing equitability in pupil assessment in this subject.

ENDNOTES
1 The Finnish National Board of Education is the agency responsible for development of education and training in Finland, working under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. It is responsible for developing pre-primary and basic education, morning and afternoon activities for schoolchildren, general upper secondary education, vocational upper secondary education and training, adult education and training, liberal adult education and basic education in the arts. The Board assesses learning outcomes in different subjects and fields in basic education in particular. It contributes to enhancing the performance of education and training and supports providers in development of self-evaluation and quality management.

2 The view of reading literacy in the Finnish National Core Curriculum is functional in the same way as the idea set out in the international PISA study that reading literacy is understanding, using and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential. At Finnish schools, pupils learn about various explanatory, descriptive, instructive, narrative, reflective and position-taking text types in factual texts, media texts and literature. During their school years, pupils become accustomed to recognising typical genres of everyday, media and literature texts and to study, reflect on, analyse and compare the texts that they have read. According to the Finnish curriculum, reading literacy covers skimming, reading to search, literal reading, as well as inferential reading, and pupils practise fluent basic reading proficiency and diverse text comprehension, complete with information management skills.

3 For the purposes of describing the results, very good refers to the average level achieved by those pupils who received more than 80% of the maximum test score. Correspondingly, a good level refers to 71–80%, satisfactory to 61–70%, moderate to 51–60%, adequate to 41–50% and poor to 40% or lower level of competence calculated as a percentage of the maximum test score.

4 Poor readers comprise a wide variety of pupils. Some may remain unclear about the actual contents or main purposes of texts, while still being able to search for specific details from texts. Often they are also able to compare details of what they have read with their own experiences, as long as the texts have been clear and short.
New literacies, new practices and learner research: Across the semi-permeable membrane between home and school

Navigating new media is at the core of digital literacy. While much researched and commented on, there is a lack of learner-participant research into social practices surrounding new media. This article aims to expand the analysis into this wider social culture surrounding new media and to connect it with pedagogy. The article focuses on two research projects where school children and youngsters, who cross between home and school cultures every day, are asked to reflect on new media practices in each space. This is done in a way that engages the informants as active participants in the research process, through new media use.

John Potter
INTRODUCTION

Changes in social and cultural practices as a result of new media technologies and permanent fast Internet connection in the affluent, developed world have been commented on time and again in study after study (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006). Very few arenas are unaffected by these changes, from the worlds of work and personal intimacy (Gregg, 2011), through to the lived experience of childhood in consumer culture (Buckingham, 2011) and into the contested spaces of education (Selwyn, 2010). I choose the word “contested” carefully in this context because there is disagreement between the cheerleaders of educational transformation through technology (Downes, 2004; Johnson, 2005) and the more cautious and measured commentators of those who would like us to consider that this is an issue of lived, agentive experience in digital culture and not one of technology ownership and use alone (Buckingham, 2007). Indeed, the view which is frequently lost by the more enthusiastic academic and populist commentators is a sense of the wider culture and social practices around new media. As a result there is a lack of learner-participant research which genuinely attempts to locate such practices in lived experience.

Those commentaries which do seek to address issues of wider culture in relation to learning and new media are coming from the new literacies domain which essentially sees changing cultural practices as changing literacy practices following Street’s arguments about a socio-cultural literacy (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000; Street, 2003; Lankshear and Knobel, 2006) (see also Mikko Perkiö’s article in this issue of LLinE). This article seeks to make a further connection with pedagogy, by reference to some recent research, and to consider what happens when learners who cross between home and school cultures every day, characterised in this article as a semi-permeable membrane, are asked to reflect on practices in each space.

Two research studies are commented on in the sections which follow. The first of them takes the concept of “learner voice” into the realm of home-school technology and media use. The second examines an autobiographical video editing project in the context of learner identity and proposes a new “curatorship” as a metaphorical new literacy practice in the assembly of media assets into new, self-reflexive material. Both studies come from the pre-adolescent age range, towards the end of the temporal boundary between primary and secondary education, which is itself a transitional experience located in an age-range which is somewhat under-researched in new media practices and cultures by comparison with older youth.

LEARNER VOICE, MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY PRACTICES

Involving younger students of primary school age (4-11 years) in their own learning at the level of choice of strategy and content has a tradition in English schools from the Plowden report (1967) onwards. Throughout the educational reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, however, there was a politically motivated and concerted effort to reverse progressive teaching of this kind and encourage teacher-directed pedagogy, particularly in the national strategy for literacy (DFES, 1998) which, whilst no longer perceived to be compulsory as a model, still exerts a strong influence. This and other teaching guidance also appeared in different versions in secondary school classrooms and the system in England, bounded by complex but narrow assessments and simple league tables of exam scores, enforced on all participants by a punitive and performative inspection regime. Thus in many classrooms, whilst good teachers abound and new methods are introduced in pursuit of higher and higher standards, the educational experience has been exposed to the risk of fossilising around the traditional transmission mode of pedagogy in classrooms dominated by “teacher talk”. This has been concomitant with a narrowing of the curriculum, although there is wide recognition of the need to broaden the experience of children and to explore new curriculum models, such as those proposed by the thorough and well-researched primary curriculum review published by Robin Alexander and others (2009).

The attempt to hear the “learner voice” on these issues in one recent project in England (Selwyn, Potter and Cranmer, 2010) was based on a democratic, participatory and emancipatory view of research design using models of learner-involvement in curriculum activities proposed by Michael Fielding (2004). He suggested there were four stages of learner engagement with the curriculum. In the first of these stages, learners are used simply as a data source, assessed against normative targets. At the second stage, we think of learners as active respondents to questions with teachers able to listen and analyse the responses that they give in particular settings where they have the freedom to discuss aspects of their learning. The third level positions learners as co-researchers with increasing involvement in the learning decisions taken by teachers. Finally, with learners as researchers themselves, partnership is the dominant motif in activities, with the “learner voice” leading the way. It was felt that, in using methods which had an accordance with these views on participant involvement, we might get closer in our research to hearing a more authentic “learner voice” and, subsequently, closer to an understanding of new literacy practices in this age group as they moved between uses of technology and media at home and at school.

The methodology we chose in the end was fairly complex, with independent elements running in parallel which, nevertheless, yielded extremely interesting results about the inter-relationship between children, their self-reflexive views on their uses of technolo-
gy and media at home and at school. We decided to involve pupils in collecting the qualitative data by setting up focus groups in which children would record interviews with each other using simple handheld audio devices. We would listen in and eventually join in with adult directed questions afterwards. We would also collect drawings of future uses of technologies in places of learning in the final section of a pupil questionnaire. Finally we would encourage the filming by children themselves of short commentaries in school about the places and practices there and at home. Our research had, therefore, a triangulated focus on agentic and self-determined ways of using technology (as opposed to being used by technology) and remained cognisant of the factors which come into play when young people are engaged in techno-literacy practices which are also technocultural practices. We found that recording their own voices and their own response in media with which they are familiar builds on children’s existing and developing skills and dispositions in new media.

Our sample size comprised primary schools in five settings in England from children in the upper age range, between the ages of 7 and 11. The wider findings have been reported and published elsewhere (Selwyn, Potter and Cranmer, op. cit.). The focus of this article is on commenting on the salience of the video data in which children recorded views on new media literacies at home and at school whilst simultaneously using new media artefacts and making new media texts.

Most of the short interview clips made by the children were filmed handheld and in mid shot or close-up. They frequently featured a child or pair of children, with the questions asked from behind the camera. This had the effect of freeing up dialogue between children familiar to each other as well as allowing researchers to look for other key markers in gesture and choice of framing. In order to do this, adapted frames for multimodal analysis were applied to the moving image texts (see Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001; Burn and Parker, 2003).

**FIVE EXAMPLE VIDEOS**

Five videos in particular proved useful to the triangulation of agency in the study as a whole. By themselves they may sound trite and obvious; weighed against the survey returns, interviews and drawings which the children also made came up time and again as useful markers of young children’s views on the issues of technology in school, in particular recurrent findings about a wish to have more control over their uses of new media, to be more playful with it and to use their autonomy in these activities for more learning by moving the locus of control closer to themselves. It is important to note that this is still not about technology itself but about the situated practices at home and at school.

In the first of these five videos, however, a more prosaic, but nonetheless real, response was given by a young child who expressed her doubt that anything useful would be found out in the research project. She is framed in mid shot, seated at a table whilst an older girl asks her whether anything can be learned about children’s technology use in the home which might be usefully applied to school uses of technology. She answers “no”, casting significant doubt on the enterprise in one sense, but reinforcing our key finding overall that, for the learners in this school, there is a well recognised and understood gap between media and technology uses in the home and those at school. It is recorded on this clip during the eight long seconds it takes for the girl to think it through. She does not give the expected answer; neither does she give an automatic response. Her gaze and her gesture at least suggest the performance of thinking the issues through.

In this and in the other clips, it took control of the camera to free up the learner-researchers to provoke deeper thinking on the subject. Pupil-led talk on the subject of home-school links was rich in many of their productions with children frequently moving off-script and being confident to follow a line of thought. This helped to create a series of “fly on the wall” documentary-style productions which allowed the interviewers to assume the role of investigative journalists.

The videos which examined more closely the issue of home use took the form of focus group discussions, led by pupils. They used some of the techniques which the researchers had employed, building on answers in the style of a semi-structured interview and, in most cases, allowing for discussion to take place. In the second example, the main topic of conversation concerned the different uses of websites and social networking and alluded directly to the subversive nature of the activity at home compared to school. There was a knowing moment of performance in which one of the speakers at least suggested that banned sites could be explored in either setting if you knew how to keep it concealed. The speaker acted the concealment in embodied form by covering his mouth as he revealed himself to be a regular user of the social networking site, Piczo, which was blocked in school and discouraged at home. The speaker was well aware of the fact that the research video was being made in school by his friends and could be seen by teachers and researchers. He was keen to reveal his use of this site, yet in the gesture of partial disguise of his voice, he was signalling that he was aware that doing so is effectively transgressive. He showed awareness of the watching children, teachers and researchers and of his position as a particular kind of subversive, social actor in the setting.

There is a gap between media uses in school and at home.
The third example showed a girl in one classroom in extreme close up, criterial in filmmaking for suggesting that confidential information is being shared. In this segment of film the child’s gaze is directed only at the questioner as she ponders the ways in which it is possible to access sites beyond the suggested age limit. A long pause ensues in which the interviewer moves things along with the word “Anyway…” and the girl responds, smiling in agreement with “(Yes) Anyway…” in the sense of “…Moving along…” a familiar linking technique in television presenting. Awareness of form coalesces with the knowing curatorship of the moment. Just as the Piczo example above, the children suggest they know a way of being which matches their motivations and attentions as social actors regularly traversing the space between home and school in their Internet use.

If sophistication, or perhaps a knowing subversiveness is suggested in the previous two clips, the fourth example shows that there is much to be done in the way of understanding certain cultural-literacy practices as potentially dangerous. Two girls are seated side by side in mid-two-shot being filmed by a third. As the interview progresses the girl reveals that at home she will “talk” to anyone on the Internet using her real name and answer any questions that strangers ask her. This answer in a school setting which prided itself on a successful e-safety campaign revealed a staggering mismatch between assumptions on both sides of the semi-permeable membrane between home and school. It also further underlined the usefulness of being open and communicating in research in ways which are as close as possible to the learner voice. New media texts and artefacts in this clip and in these circumstances were revelatory of hidden practices in this and in many other examples.

In a more techno-celebratory mode, the fifth example clip, filmed somewhat more conventionally than others, showed an older girl, aged about ten, eulogising her mobile phone. This device and the practices around it were the most pleasing and, to her, most easily integrated way of working with technology between home and school. It seemed obvious to her that this should be so. She could not see any disadvantages to this but alluded to the potentially most prosaic finding of all which was that running out of charge was perceived as being the only downside to mobile phone use. As in life outside, so in life inside the school.

Data from the videos were analysed alongside the initial survey returns across all five schools, the children’s drawings of new technology use across the divide between home and school (see Selwyn, Boraschi and Özkula, 2009) and audio-interview focus groups in which the children were trained as facilitators and left to work on their own. Across all available artefacts and media, there was, as reported elsewhere (Selwyn, Potter and Cranmer, 2009), much unsurprising evidence of the disconnect between home and practices with technology (not least the expected regulatory effect), but much also revealed about the ways in which the young people positioned themselves as agentive, able and knowing in both settings. Particularly evident in the evidence collected using these new practices, as well as in the drawings, was a desire for change and a plea for greater integration into school of new literacy practices which allowed young people to break free from the constraints shaping the social and pedagogic functions of the school. Pupil engagement with the process suggested that they had a sophisticated understanding of the ways in which the social spaces operate and how their new media use differs in the context of home and school. The desire for change did not appear to spring so much from wanting to engage less with the formal curriculum, as might be imagined by following the “digital natives” argument (Prensky, 2005), so much as from a wish to bring some of the skills and dispositions developed in technology use and media consumption outside school across the membrane boundary between home and school, back into the educational setting.

**Digital Video Production, Autobiography and Curatorship**

Student-generated video by younger learners in another context entirely forms the basis of the second study in this commentary. In this case the production was not framed by an overarching investigative enquiry by outsiders. In this case the content of the videos was much closer to the fourth level of learner voice research proposed by Fielding (op. cit.) with children as researchers of their own learning and context. This study analysed the process and the productive output of a video project by young learners in two primary schools in which freely authored videos were conceived as a commemorative piece about their time in the school, celebrating spaces, relationships and memories; in the case of one group, this was just before leaving those spaces and relationships. The project has been discussed and written about at a micro level of individual video pieces (Potter, 2005; Potter, 2010) as well as the macro overview of the whole enterprise within the parameters of a (completed) doctoral study (Potter, 2009).

The suggestion made earlier in the article that new media practices reveal hidden aspects of lived experience was certainly present in the videos made in this project. In representing their identity at the moment in time in which the production was shot and edited the learners were also, in addition to responding to the commission to curate an aspect of their lives, putting down a marker of their changing identity. This is a powerful framing of video making in school, making explicit use of the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) which the children were able to bring in struc-
turing their pieces and representing themselves. Active, agentive curatorship of media resources in production enabled some of these previously hidden experiences in the spaces of school around growing and changing to be represented in media remixes and reformulations. In this there is a degree of accordance with aspects of theories of identity (Goffman, 1990; Giddens, 1991; Merchant, 2005) as well as with those of learner or student voice (Fielding, op. cit). The authenticity of these voices may be difficult to prove and highly contested, as perhaps in the project outlined in the previous section, but, allowing for these debates, a key aim was to find a way to analyse carefully the video productions, as well as the associated interview responses, to see if activities and artefacts close to the lived culture of the learners were permitting control and curatorship of media assets. In this, it was important to adopt the view of active assimilation of such assets as derived by those working in the field of new media literacies (Robinson and Turnbull, 2005). However, the study aimed to pursue a different goal, investigating this active assimilation in terms of a kind of “curatorship” of media assets, implying collection, assembly and exhibition. This positioned the curatorship of media assets, self-produced (as in the actual shots in the video) or collected from other sources (the music, other images) as an active skill and disposition which bridges literacy practices and identity representation and is both evident and inherent in children’s media production.

While an adapted form of multimodal analysis was used to unlock the modes in the productions (Burn and Parker, 2003) there were further frameworks drawn from media literacy and socio-cultural theory (de Certeau, 1984; Foucault, 1984; Bourdieu, 1986) which enabled a rich account to be constructed about the purposes, skills and dispositions of the learners as they represented their identity. With some of the similarities in form in evidence in the children’s video productions, including parody of news and interviews, or anarchic free play interspersed with more obviously narrative forms, there were clear distinctions in terms of the successful use of expressive qualities across all of them. It was also possible to locate aspects of Street’s proposed model of “ideological” literacy (Street, 2003) across all these practices, in the children’s rich and active engagement with the productions.

Some of these issues have previously been addressed specifically in relation to younger learners (Marsh, 2004; Larson and Marsh, 2005) in arguing for a wide and inclusive definition of, and engagement with, new literacies; which takes into account the range of practices undertaken by young people with new technologies in the home and at school, such as we have seen in these productions. Marsh also points out that the necessary inter-disciplinary engagement between these domains is still in its earliest stages, certainly where the youngest learners in the education system are concerned (op. cit).

Evaluations of media production by children and associated instructional texts have sometimes focused exclusively on teaching formal aspects of narrative and editing concepts, drawn from the tradition of film language (Barrance, 2004). Whilst these are important elements to consider in pedagogy around the construction of meaning it is no longer the only way of framing the subject for learners. In an era in which the short video form is growing rapidly, made and exchanged online, and sits alongside other media assets, readily appropriated and exchanged, we need a way of understanding children’s engagement with digital video as a rapidly changing social literacy practice in the experience of new media and popular culture (Tyner, 1998; Street, 2003; Marsh and Millard, 2006). In the view of Sefton-Green (2005) and Buckingham (Buckingham, 2003) we further need to align this with a socialised view of creativity which is much more closely connected with group work, situated peer-review and an awareness of group roles in cultural production than with individual auteurs and the realisation of a personal expressive goal.

It is possible that, instead, building on viewing and evaluation in the very public spaces of YouTube, would allow an eliding of the process of media production with the end-product more closely. Writers are already commenting on the ways in which such spaces are changing the nature of the process of composition and consumption of media texts and are becoming a form in themselves, based more on cultural resonance and exchange (Davies and Merchant, 2007). Many of the videos in this project depended on the organisation of particular patterned communication which reflected the children’s lived social experiences up to that point; how they had found their voice and exhibited the general, performed self in the spaces of the school. To an extent this is how the children organised their short videos intended as vignettes and records of their lives up to the point of boundary crossing between schools. Recording these ways of being involved a process of assembly of the resources needed to represent both the anchored and the transient forms of identity (Merchant, 2006).

**Curatorship**

The aspects of “curatorship” of experience which suggest themselves as new literacy practices in this work entail the conflation of many skills and attributes into one, all of which involve being literate and functioning in new media. Curating, as a verb, incorporates many sub-components and actions; it suggests at least the following: collecting, cataloguing, arranging and assembling for exhibition, displaying.

Firstly, collecting resources or media assets: this refers to assets that you create yourself and save, such as video clips, sound files, still images and more.
Equally, it could be assets collected from family and friends. These could be in many forms, such as comedy, parody, news, drama, documentary, tutorial video. Furthermore, they can, as in the case of many of the videos in this study take the form of re-enacted and re-imagined media assets. It was possible to see in these productions, that these re-enactments are themselves intertextual references which are collected, played with and incorporated (Potter, 2009).

Secondly, cataloguing: As the children discovered, it is much harder to edit in digital video without knowing where your various media assets are, what they are called and what they contain in the way of meaning-making resource. This has already been noted as an area for potential development as both skill set and resource in educational settings, developing learners’ capacity for working with user-generated folksonomies as opposed to author-generated taxonomies (Davies and Merchant, 2007). This has recently further emerged as a research focus by the Futures of Learning new media study group in the United States in work directed by Anne Balsamo under the heading Virtual Museums: Where to Begin? (2009) and in practical application development in the global tagging of web artefacts by end users in “Steve: The Museum Social Tagging Project” (SteveProject, 2009).

Thirdly, Arranging and assembling: these skills are those of planning for elements to be in dialogue with one another, to suggest specific meanings by their location and juxtaposition in the timeline of the video, on the screen, in the production when it is complete. This is an active process of working with intertextuality, using the tools in the software to assemble a coherent whole in a time-based text, working in the kineiconic mode (Burn and Parker, 2003).

Miller wrote how, in this respect, digital media create their own “sensual field” which respects “the larger integrity of connections between the media it incorporates” (2008, p.71). This “integrity of connections” is an important concept because it suggests a set of organising principles. The particular kind of production in new media dictates these to an extent so that, in the examples of new media in these studies, the short moving image form has its own conventions, the breaking of which results in incoherence and lack of a viable representational form. Where it works, however, it allows users to control, select and publish aspects of their performed, recorded self in new media; and we can see here an essential life skill; the management of resources and assets made for, by and about us in a range of media, as positioned in recent work which focuses specifically on the digitisation of personal memories in media assets (Garde-Hansen, Hoskins and Reading, 2009; Williams, Leighton John and Rowland, 2009).

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGY IN MEDIA CULTURE, PEDAGOGY AND YOUNGER LEARNERS

Two sorts of implications emerge from the projects described in the preceding sections. The findings from the “learner voice” project in the first of the two sections above suggest a need to develop forms of curriculum organisation which fit better with the cultural and literacy practices of young learners. This rather prosaic and reductive finding nevertheless conceals some important detail about the ways in which digital media culture is becoming a field in which skill sets and dispositions are developed by younger and younger learners outside school. In the project, over time, in their expressive modes in the video output they provided, the texts, practices and social arrangements of recording and capturing ideas became a facilitator of richer, qualitative data comprehensible by unlocking the many modes which underpinned both
Children merit a participatory role in access to media technology in formal education.

the form and content of what was being said. In bringing this forward in their work, the children were thoughtful, articulate and constructive, demonstrating perhaps that they merit a genuine participatory role in the access to media technology in the settings of their formal education.

On the basis of the second project, the autobiographical-curatorial video explorations, one replicable piece of pedagogy is also the basis for research itself, namely, the finding of rich sources of data through self-representational work with younger learners in the setting which, by its nature, crosses the boundary between home and school. This finds a corollary in print literacy where thematic work around the self is often the earliest writing experience in schools but it moves this experience into an expressive mode in media with which the children are already familiar. Both projects reported above point to a powerful and as yet largely untapped resource for moving forward with research and pedagogy at the interface between young children and their learning in the digital age. This resource is the literacy and cultural practices of the children themselves as they navigate both the boundary between home and school and the boundary between childhood, adolescence and beyond, into a world in which their curated selves will be ever present.

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JOHN POTTER
John is a Senior Lecturer in Education and New Media at the London Knowledge Lab in the Department of Culture, Communication and Media at the Institute of Education, University of London. He is the programme leader for the MA Media, Culture & Communication and teaches on the core module on Media Cultural Theory and Education as well as optional modules in digital video production, animation and internet cultures. He has published his work in journals and in book form and his research interests include: digital video production by young learners (the focus of his doctoral research); the use of social software and online networks for publication and learning; Media education - Investigating ICT, creative activity and learner agency; Issues in ICT in Education: Social, cultural and political aspects of pedagogy in its relationship to technology; the changing nature of teaching and learning in response to the pervasive use of media technologies, computer games and other online environments in formal and informal settings.
Prior to joining the IOE, John worked extensively in teacher education at Goldsmiths College and the University of East London, focussing on ICT and Literacy, having previously been an advisory teacher in the London borough of Newham. Before that, he was a primary school teacher for a number of years mainly based in Tower Hamlets, East London at Harbinger Primary School.

CONTACT
John Potter
London Knowledge Lab, Institute of Education, University of London, 23-29 Emerald Street, London, WC1N 3QS
Email: j.potter@ioe.ac.uk
www.lkl.ac.uk/people/potter
The UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL) is the research and policy-driven arm of UNESCO for the promotion of lifelong learning. Housed in Hamburg, Germany, the Institute coordinates the CONFINTREAV lifelong learning advocacy process on behalf of UNESCO. The UIL is viewed as a strong advocate for literacy, particularly in the third world, with its activities geared towards the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), both UN-led movements for achieving general developmental and learning goals.

Danish Arne Carlsen was appointed Director of the UIL in June, bringing to the task experience from a long career dealing with research and policy related to lifelong learning. LLine met with Carlsen in late June to share a thought on what lies ahead for the Institute and its new Director, and on why 2015 will be such an interesting year for adult learning.

LLine: Congratulations on the post! How do you feel about starting this new chapter?

Arne Carlsen: First of all, I am stepping into a UIL that moved into a new era not so long ago. In 2007 the Institute became a fully-fledged institute of the UNESCO, no longer under German law. This means we have a clear mandate, as formulated by the UN and its member states to take forward UNESCO policies.

I am also looking forward to working with our Governing Board which includes very insightful top lifelong learning experts from around the world.

LLine: As the new Director, what will be your primary focus?

AC: One of the mid-term strategies of UNESCO is that adult learning in Africa is a priority. The future profile of UIL will include this priority. This is of course not to say that we would neglect other continents. My aim is to establish two or three major learning projects in each world region, that is Europe and North America, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Arabic states and Africa. The idea is that these major projects with 2-3 countries at a time, would function as role models for all countries in the region.

Also, UNESCO has delegated the task of global monitoring of the CONFINTREAV follow up process to UIL, so we advocate for the Belém Framework for Action to be a reality for the national policies of UNESCO member countries.

LLine: What content will these big regional projects have?

AC: The projects will be within the overall strategy of UNESCO and the mandate of UIL, that is advocacy, research, capacity building and technical advice in the field of literacy and adult learning and education in a perspective of lifelong learning. The projects will be adapted to the needs of each region. In Europe then, for example, we would focus on functional literacy, citizenship education for social cohesion and learning for the world of work.

LLine: UIL was in fact among the first to sound alarm bells on the prevalence of functional illiteracy in industrialized countries. How have we, in the West, ended up in a situation that large parts of our populations lack the basic skills to fully function in society?

AC: We have to remember that many adults today have had rather bad experiences at school, which has hindered their learning. Also we know that very many suffer from dyslexia and other disabilities that luckily can be helped. But of course our high functional and digital illiteracy figures also spring from the fact that we have raised the bar for ourselves and education has not caught up with it. As we know, we have expanded the concept of literacy from basic literacy including reading, writing and numeracy to include also the basic skills, such as digital literacy and life skills, needed in the knowledge society.

LLine: Can you shed some light on the immediate future of the Institute: What will be the highlight of 2012?

AC: Well, in 2012 the second GRALE report, that is, the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education, will come out, and it has the title of adult literacy. The report de-
scribes global adult education trends based mainly on national reports submitted by UNESCO member states by the end of 2011. The GRALE will come out again in 2015: then it will have collected and gathered together all results from the evaluations on the progress of the EFA and Millennium Development Goals and also the UN Literacy Decade ending next year. I actually believe that GRALE, from 2015, will have the same status as the OECD’s Education at a Glance has now. I aim for our report to be as awaited by all stakeholders, including civil society actors and the private sector, as the OECD report is today. The year 2015 is hence crucial as it is the target year for EFA and MDG’s and the GRALE also materializes.

One more exciting thing I would like to bring up is that in the near future the UIL will also try to come up with a clear concept of lifelong learning. It will place adult education in a lifelong learning perspective and direct the work of the Institute in the coming years. We will of course not do this alone, rather we will include many stakeholders from governments and civil society, other UN agencies like WHO, UNICEF, ILO and the world of work. Lifelong learning is sector-wide and sector cross cutting. As a result I believe we will come up with an integrated definition with elements of employability, social inclusion, active citizenship and personal fulfillment. But I think that our concept will be more than the sum of its parts: I would like to see a holistic concept of lifelong learning based on a foundation of humanistic values, such as the right to learning, peace, democracy, tolerance, respect for others, and intercultural understanding. In the 21st century there are high demands for learning for living and for working. This calls for developing learning societies. UIL will contribute to supporting UNESCO-member states in putting this on the agenda.

1 The Belém Framework for Action is the final document of the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI), adopted on 4th of December, 2009. The document makes recommendations on issues such as policy and governance, adult education financing and equity. The Framework names literacy as the “most significant foundation” for lifelong learning.
Integration through adult and continuing education: Integrating immigrants into Nordic labour markets

In the Nordic countries a large proportion of immigrants and their descendants are excluded from the labour market and the group is overrepresented among the unemployed. International experience shows that adult education and training can be useful tools in providing immigrant groups a foothold in the labour market. To facilitate that process we need to know what factors motivate immigrants to participate in adult education and training and what the results and effects of different approaches are. In 2009 the National Centre of Competence Development in Denmark conducted a comparative study in the Nordic countries, analysing the use of adult education and training targeted at the integration of immigrants into the labour market (employability)\(^1\). This article outlines the findings and relates them to international experience.

Bjarne Wahlgren and Tinne Geiger
IMMIGRANTS IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

The five Nordic countries differ in terms of the number of immigrants, their immigration history, and the composition of immigrant groups. Thus, the proportion of immigrants varies from 16 per cent of the population in Sweden, 11 per cent in Norway, 9 per cent in Denmark, 8 per cent in Iceland to just 2.5 per cent of the Finnish population. Iceland primarily experiences labour immigration, while the majority of the immigrants in Sweden are refugees. In the remaining three countries, the largest proportion of immigrants has immigrated on the basis of family reunification.

With an employment rate among immigrants at around 90 per cent in Iceland and around 50 per cent in Finland, there are great differences between the five countries. However, it is a common feature that employment rates are lower for immigrants than for the indigenous population in all the Nordic countries.

There are significant differences between the prerequisites for seeking and obtaining permanent residence permit and citizenship in the five countries. Sweden is the only country that does not have any demands concerning language skills, either in form of passed language tests or proof of language training. At the other extreme, Denmark requires, as a prerequisite for citizenship, that the final test in Danish be passed with the grade 4, and that a citizenship test be passed.

NATIONAL INTEGRATION STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES

The five countries all emphasize employment in their integration strategies and efforts. In all the countries, employment and empowerment are regarded as key elements of successful integration. The five countries all consider language competences an essential prerequisite for employability and inclusion in society.

Denmark, Finland and Norway have integration laws. Denmark and Finland were among the first in Europe when they enacted integration laws in 1998 and 1999 respectively. In Norway the Introduction law was adopted in 2003. Sweden and Iceland have no equivalent law but, similar to Denmark, Finland and Norway, they too have a centrally-defined integration strategy, focusing on employment and self-sufficiency as decisive factors of integration. Iceland differs from the other countries by having no corresponding focus on immigrants’ employment, which is due to the fact that immigrants in Iceland first and foremost are labour immigrants (from outside the EU), who consequently have employment agreements in place before they enter the country.

Most of the national strategies and resolutions concerning integration efforts include an individual action plan as a central element. There are differences between the countries regarding the specificity of the action plans and whether there are penalties attached to not adhering to the plans. The differences range from Denmark’s claim on an individual contract that specifies the objectives of the integration period, the road to achieving the targets and the penalties for non-compliance with the contract, to Iceland which, at the other extreme, has no statutory regulations for integration or introduction programmes.

In all the Nordic countries, the voluntary sector is involved in integration, both in relation to language teaching, and through the immigrant’s own integration efforts. In several of the Nordic countries, popular education plays a central role, especially regarding courses that connect language learning to social education.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES WITHIN ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

In all of the five Nordic countries, the educational activities for immigrants include both courses within the ordinary adult and continuing education system and courses specifically targeted at immigrants. In the next section, distinctions will be made between language teaching, general adult education at basic levels, and vocational education programmes targeted at adults. Examples of specific initiatives and projects showing good practice will be presented in the last section.

LANGUAGE TEACHING

Language teaching is a focal point of the immigrant integration process. In all the Nordic countries, the language courses correspond to the CEFR levels, and the courses are divided into different tracks, levels and modules. The division of the language courses into levels and tracks helps to ensure that the participant groups are homogeneous in terms of linguistic competences. In Sweden and Iceland, the participants can be relatively heterogeneous; therefore it can be difficult to target the teaching. Thanks to a new module system, introduced by Sweden in 2003, class composition (based on prior educational achievement) is more uniform than before. Yet, participants’ educational backgrounds can still vary considerably in both Sweden and Iceland.

The overall objectives of language teaching — to achieve sufficient language skills and knowledge of cultural and social conditions in order to engage effectively in society on an equal footing with other citizens — are very similar in the five countries. To achieve these objectives, the immigrants are taught basic language skills (basic reading, speaking, listening and writing skills), as well as cultural and social norms. The number of teaching hours varies greatly between the five countries. While immigrants in Denmark and Finland can receive almost 2000 hours of teaching, the figure in Norway is 300 hours and 240 in Iceland.

In terms of literacy education, Sweden is different from the other countries, as the course can be conducted in the immigrants’ mother tongue. In the other Nordic countries, literacy education is carried out in the country’s official language. However, to underscore the importance of the adopted country’s cultural and community norms, the “cultural and social content” can be taught (in all the Nordic countries) with the aid of interpreters.
Denmark is the only country with completely formalized requirements for teacher competences for teaching Danish as a second language. In Norway, teachers’ competencies should include Norwegian as a second language or second migration pedagogy, while general teacher training is the only requirement in Sweden.

Finally, the five countries differ significantly in relation to the financing of language teaching. In Denmark and Norway, the state pays grants based on the number of students attending the courses and the number completing the courses. In the other countries, funding is not related to the number of participants in a similar way.

In Denmark, Finland and Sweden a relatively high proportion of immigrants are still unemployed after completing the language courses. In Denmark, about half of the immigrants are unemployed after language course completion, while about one third are unemployed three months following the Introduction Training in Finland and Norway. Evaluations from Denmark further suggest that the teaching of Danish as a second language does not provide sufficient language skills to continue into higher education. Finnish experience suggests that foreigners conducting a labour market-oriented education perform better than average.

**GENERAL ADULT EDUCATION AT A BASIC LEVEL**

In all the countries there are specific courses for bilingual students in connection with some of the general and preparatory adult education courses. In Denmark, the proportion of bilinguals attending relevant adult education has increased since the mid-1990s. In 2009, requirements for teacher competences in teaching Danish as a second language were introduced (qualification to teach Danish as a second language). In adult education centres, bilingual participants attend the same courses as Danish-speaking participants, something that both the centres and the students highlight as beneficial in relation to integration.

Language teaching is commonly connected to general courses. In Denmark, Iceland and Norway, specific courses and initiatives targeted at immigrants within the general ordinary system have been developed in addition to the language courses.

**VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMES AIMED AT ADULTS**

While immigrants in Norway and Sweden constitute a significant proportion of the total number of participants in labour market training (39 per cent in Norway, 34 per cent in Sweden), similar training is attended by a comparatively low number of immigrants in both Denmark and Finland. The initiatives within labour market training that are directed specifically towards immigrants combine language training with vocational education. That is the case in all the Nordic countries, all of which have experienced good results from combining language teaching and subject teaching: the interaction between the two seems to be mutually reinforcing.

**SPECIAL INITIATIVES**

In Denmark, the central authorities devote significant economic resources to special initiatives for immigrants, unlike in Norway, Sweden and Iceland, where the integration effort focuses predominantly on language teaching and concomitant language training activities. All the Nordic countries have, however, implemented a large number of specially organized courses of adult and continuing education, either detached from, or in combination with, the ordinary education system. The courses have employability as their overall objective, but emphasize different factors in order to achieve this goal. The courses are carried out against different legal and funding backgrounds; they often combine educational elements from multiple contexts and they often involve co-operation between several agencies. A large number of courses are characterized as development work.

**SPECIAL EFFORTS REQUIRED TO INCREASE EMPLOYABILITY**

The study, the results of which this article outlines, is based on descriptions of good practice in the sense that the described initiatives have had positive results in terms of the participants’ permanent employability. In light of the initiatives, a number of lessons can be emphasized regarding co-operation between stakeholders, organization and pedagogy. The experience points to factors within the mentioned areas which may be conducive to success.

The experience suggests that significant results in terms of increased employability require special efforts; that specially organised courses are required, both within the ordinary system and in terms of special initiatives targeted specifically at immigrants. They also point to the fact that special efforts are resource demanding. For some projects, evaluations and descriptions are made to assess the success rate of the percentage of immigrants who have either found work or started a higher education course as a result of their participation in the project. For other projects, we can find detailed descriptions of invested resources. However, there is no data of sufficient quality to give a clear correlation between the greatest integration results and the resources invested.
FACTORS THAT MAY IMPROVE INTEGRATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

An assessment of the special initiatives will depend on the local and the national context: employment opportunities, participant group, and resources required to organise the initiative. It is against this background that decisions have to be made as to which initiatives and courses should be launched. Within these reservations, both Nordic and international experience point to a number of factors that may (in different contexts) improve and enhance integration with the labour market, if applied consistently and in the right way. There is thus empirical evidence for the following findings.

Responsibility

For the courses to be successful, it is crucial that authorities, companies, educational institutions and other stakeholders acknowledge their responsibility as key players. In Denmark, this responsibility is manifested at the political and strategic level through tripartite negotiations in which ministries, municipalities and social partners produce plans for the implementation of overall integration strategies. At all levels it is essential that the relevant actors work together in order to achieve the best possible outcome. This includes co-operation between public agencies and private companies, co-operation across authorities, and co-operation between language centres and voluntary organizations.

Coupling to the workplace

Studies across the Nordic countries show that the combination of language teaching and subject teaching, often further combined with mentoring and internship, give good results. When employment is the goal, a tight coupling to the workplace is an essential factor.

Clear goals

Courses with clear goals of specific competence acquisition for obtaining employment are those which have proved successful, as have educational courses that are coupled with an agreement for future employment on course completion.

Involvement

Involvement of the target population — immigrants — in both the planning and implementation of the initiatives — has a positive impact on efficiency. Organizing teaching strategies to suit the groups’ competences and needs, as well as a focus on the groups’ accessibility, are important factors for success. There is positive experience with using e-learning and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to enhance a flexible organization, thereby enhancing accessibility. In addition, it is essential that the immigrants’ wants and capabilities are matched with local job opportunities for the projects to contribute to integration with the labour market.

Mentoring

All the Nordic countries use mentoring and guidance arrangements in connection with employment and education. The arrangements emphasize the personal touch and human interaction. The plans consider integration to be a process in which the continuous monitoring of the mentoring role is important. Overall, there is positive experience of the use of mentors in relation to employment and education, but Swedish and Norwegian evaluations (in particular), indicate that mentoring is resource-intensive relative to efficiency, because there are very few mentees per mentor — often the relationship is one-to-one.

THE NORDIC EXPERIENCE IN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

International and comparative studies of good practice regarding the possible impact of adult education and training on the integration of immigrants with the labour market generally support the experience of the Nordic study.

Not surprisingly, several studies (e.g. OECD, 2007) conclude that labour market integration, among other things, is dependent on the state of the market, on factors such as the composition of the immigrant groups in terms of age, qualifications and reason for immigration, and on the policies related to integration. The OECD report also mentions adult and continuing education as an important factor in integration efforts.

In line with the policy in the Nordic countries, several studies highlight language skills as a basic prerequisite for (labour market) integration, and emphasize the importance of language training. Thus, figures from the U.S. (Heide, Chen, White & Soroui, 2009) suggest a correlation between language skills and employment among immigrants. The proportion of immigrants with good language skills (measured as literacy) outside the labour market was only half as high as that of immigrants whose language skills were below the basic level. Two OECD reports (2006, 2007) point, similarly, to the importance of language training; the study from 2007 concludes that language competence is the main form of human capital in connection with the integration of immigrants (2007, p. 44-46).

The study also confirms the importance of work-related courses, while a study based on material from the OECD (Frimodt, 2009) recommends practice-oriented education and co-operation between technical schools and companies on competence development, including courses which combine linguistic and vocational elements. Two reports from the European Commission (Niessen, 2004, 2007) similarly point out that courses integrating language training, vocational education, and validation of existing competences are effective. The reports from the European Commission recommend that language teaching be organized in a way that makes it possible to combine the training with a job. This can be done by

"Language teaching combined with mentoring and internship give results."

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Validation of prior learning may be a barrier to utilising competences.

Flexible organisation through distance learning, e-learning, or part time training.

Both the OECD studies (2006, 2007), the study by Frimodt (2009) and an English report (Torgerson, 2007) conclude, in line with the Nordic experience, that mentoring can have a positive effect on integration into the labour market and education, because, among other things, they can help to reduce drop-out rates.

The Nordic countries are increasingly using, albeit still relatively unsystematically, recognition of prior learning as part of the integration effort. The OECD report from 2007 notes that competences and work experience from the home country are often not recognized by employers, which has implications for both employment opportunities and the wage level (OECD, 2007, p. 49). Similarly, a study on the use of validation of prior learning in Canada and Sweden (Andersson, 2006) concludes that the system often acts as a barrier rather than as a way to include and use existing competences. While some forms of competences are accepted as valid, other immigrants’ skills are often regarded as less valid or invalid. The reports from the OECD (2006) and Frimodt (2009) also point to the positive impact of recognition of prior learning.

Finally, the two OECD reports (2006, 2007) recommend that teaching is differentiated in relation to immigrants’ skills and needs, and that it is organized on the basis of the needs of the (local) labour market. Again, the recommendations are in line with the experience of the Nordic countries.

SUMMARY

The Nordic countries are very — and surprisingly - different in terms of immigration history, extent of immigration and the composition of immigrant groups. Integration initiatives differ similarly. There are, however, some common features and shared experience concerning how adult education and training can help enhance integration to the labour market.

Common to all the Nordic countries is their emphasis on employment and self-sufficiency in their integration strategies. All consider their official language to be a prerequisite for integration with the labour market and society, and all emphasize individual action plans in their national strategies for integration efforts. The focal point of integration in the five Nordic countries is language teaching.

In summary, the experience and evaluations of specific initiatives undertaken in the Nordic countries indicate that labour market integration can be most effectively achieved if the adult education and training programming has the following characteristics:

- Systematic co-operation among relevant actors;
- Tight coupling between the workforce’s needs and the functional organization of education in relation thereto;
- Clear course goals in terms of employment opportunities and recruitment;
- Combination of technical and language learning / teaching;
- Flexible organization of education in relation to participants’ opportunities, such as use of e-learning and ICT;
- Personal support in the form of mentoring - the mentor should have knowledge of local labour conditions; and
- Clear identification of the target group and of the group’s needs and conditions.

The international findings confirm the experience gained from the Nordic initiatives. In addition, systems to validate and recognise prior learning from the immigrants’ homelands are generally insufficiently developed, both in the Nordic nations and internationally.

ENDNOTES

1 The study was initiated and financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers, and was conducted in collaboration with researchers from Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The reports are available on www.ncfk.dk.

2 The comparison is made with the reservation that the assessment methods differ between the five countries. The methods are described in the respective national reports.

3 Danish 3 is equivalent to the level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).


5 Law on introduction arrangement and Norwegian training for newly-arrived immigrants, Law no. 80 of July 4th 2003.


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BJARNE WAHLGREN
Bjarne Wahlgren is professor in adult education at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University and director of National Centre of Competence Development (NCK). In his research he is working with the learning processes of adults with special focus on motivation, reflection, learning in practice and transfer in adult and recurrent education. Throughout his career he has had a special interest in the Nordic perspective and he has participated in several Nordic research projects and research groups.

CONTACT
Email: Wahlgren@dpu.dk
http://pure.au.dk/portal/da/wahlgren@dpu.dk

TINNE GEIGER
Tinne Geiger is MSc in Political Science and academic officer at National Centre of Competence Development (NCK), the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University. During her study she has focused on education in a developmental perspective and she was project leader on the study concerning “Integration through adult and continued education” that NCK carried out for the Nordic Council of Ministers.

CONTACT
Email: tige@dpu.dk
http://pure.au.dk/portal/da/tige@dpu.dk
Supporting learning in cross-cultural expertise transfer
— A case of industrial production transfer from Finland into Estonia

Transferring industrial and business expertise across cultures requires carefully planned human resource training and cultural sensitivity. This special feature research article documents the start up of a new Estonian factory of a well established Finnish convenience foods company. Good practices of expertise transfer relating to, among others, management, group work and cultural and language training are discovered through this case study.

Kirsi Heikkilä-Tammi, Sanna Nuutinen, Marja-Liisa Manka and Marjut Mäenpää
1. INTRODUCTION

Finnish companies increasingly relocate their production activities to new operating environments. The Finnish workplace is also gaining in multicultural exposure. In both cases interacting with new cultures, development of expertise and learning are required. The aim of our research has been to create a procedure model, a method of operating, that would help in the transferring of know-how into desired contexts. Both information flow and operational processes have been under scrutiny. At the same time the aim has been to develop competences for managing a multicultural enterprise and developing expertise resources in an innovative way, and — through these — to affect the business profit of a company.

Saarioinen Ltd., the case study company, has moved parts of its functions into Rapla, Estonia, with the intention of expanding its business of convenience foods into the Baltic area. Saarioinen is a consolidated company specialized in convenience foods, that has operated in Finland for over half a century. The company employs some 2000 people in six localities in Finland and in Estonia. The transfer task is challenging as traditional industries in Estonia have not included convenience food production.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Background

The differences between business cultures in Finnish and Estonian companies culminate in management culture and cultures of team work and dialogue. Ways of managing human resources are, on the other hand, quite similar (Vanhala, Kaarelson & Alas, 2006).

The Estonian management culture has been authoritarian, albeit more and more emphasis is being placed on the proactivity of employees (Heliste, Kosonen & Mattila 2007). The managers of Finnish companies have also tried to increase team work (Heliste et. al., 2007). There has been little interaction between employees and management, and it has not been deemed necessary to pass information about company vision, decision-making processes or the financial status quo to the employees (Erkikli, Heliste & Tani, 2005; Vanhala et.al., 2006). Problems in assuming responsibility often have to do with the employees lacking a big picture of company functions as a whole. The ability to assume responsibility of the Estonian management staff is viewed as satisfactory, however, and the Estonians feel that too little responsibility is given to them by the Finns (Heliste et.al., 2007).

The educational attainment of the Estonian employees is rather high, and their considerable drive to learn and develop has also been noted. The training of work supervisors and managers has been regarded as important, as these older individuals are often acculturated into the Soviet-time working habits (Ignativ & Svetlik, 2003). There are differences in levels of competence between the younger and older generations, and training needs for the older staff have emerged with the introduction of Western production technology (Suutari & Ervasti, 2004). In Estonia, a Finnish employer is viewed as trustworthy in the employee market (Heliste et.al., 2007).

2.2. The two perspectives of expertise transfer

2.2.1. The perspective of knowledge management

Categories of knowledge

The definition of the concept of knowledge is needed, especially in the study of knowledge transfer: what kind of knowledge do we want to transfer and how? Blackler (1995) writes about different categories of knowledge: embrained, embodied, encultured, embedded and encoded knowledge. Embodied knowledge contains concepts and facts. Embraigned knowledge entails the know-how of mastering procedures, which is often tacit knowledge. Encultured knowledge refers to the production processes of shared knowledge where shared stories and discussion fora are needed. Encoded knowledge is e.g. knowledge stored in manuals. Embedded knowledge is constructed into different roles and machines (Blackler, 2004; Järvinen, Koivisto & Poikela, 2000). Thus, an interesting question within the context of knowledge transfer is what kind of information is it possible to transfer, and how, between companies operating in different cultures. Furthermore, current views on the categories of knowledge do not regard these categories as static and directly transferable: knowledge is rather always connected to some form of action (see Blackler, 2004).

Earlier studies have focused on obstacles to knowledge transfer (e.g. Jensen & Szulanski, 2004; Smale & Suutari, 2008). According to studies focusing on the international knowledge transfer processes of companies, one such challenge is to integrate local knowledge into new knowledge (Saka, 2004). Furthermore, knowledge is often sticky and tacit (Nonaka & Toyama, 2003) and attached to the local operation environment of the parent company. Lack of a common language can further complicate transfer (Ambos & Ambos, 2009).

Smale and Suutari (2007) studied the obstacles of knowledge transfer to Russia through expatriates. The focus was on international companies. A central challenge in this case was the transfer of tacit knowledge: companies have had to develop special practices to handle this. A common observation was that while knowledge often is difficult to encode and complicated to teach, the biggest obstacles are not related to these. Far more significant on a national level were social hindrances such as convoluted legislation, poor proactivity, lack of open communication and interaction and different ways of thinking. The level of know-how was another significant obstacle.

Transfer of knowledge

Studying the processes of knowledge transfer is essential from the perspective of knowledge management. Expertise transfer can be studied between organizations (parent company-subsidiary company) and inside an organization (between units). The means of knowledge transfer between organizations have been classified
in various ways (see e.g. Ambos & Ambos, 2009; Kim, Park & Prescott, 2003). In this article we shall use Karhunen et al.’s (2003) four dimensions, formulated in the research of Fenno-Russian production alliances, in observing transferring of expertise (see Table 1 above)

Karhunen et al. (2003) argued that challenges appeared as one party delegated problem-solving to the other one. Technology and Finnish business concepts were transferred from Finland to Russia. Finns, on their part, learned about cooperating with Russian employees and partner companies. Two-way transfer took place when both parties attempted to solve problems using the best practice. Hence, in cooperative projects, expertise is transferred through learning and adopting practices.

Transfer of expertise is facilitated by long-term co-operation and building of mutual trust (Erkkilä et al., 2005). Coordination and control are equally important. A shared company culture and informal communication between parent and subsidiary companies also contribute helpfully to expertise transfer. Local partners or subsidiary company managers help in understanding different methods of working and in networking (ibid., 2005). Finnish expatriates have been sent into a new unit to transfer Finnish organizational culture or working methods. These expatriates aid the diffusion of practices across national borders (Smale & Suutari, 2007).

Training has often been used in the attempt to create shared norms of work performance. In addition to this, companies have to reflect what expertise they want to transfer into the subsidiary and what kinds of new practices they want to bring about there. Problems can be prevented by managers’ acquainting themselves with cultural differences and the complications these might cause (Suutari, 2005). The transfer of expertise between the parent and subsidiary is multidirectional at best. One-way transfer is most typical while establishing the subsidiary but this can later turn into reciprocal transfer (Bresman, Birkinshaw & Nobel, 2010). It is also essential to take into account the previous levels of skills and know-how of the subsidiary company’s employees (educational background/employee’s knowledge of the company), as is organizing training at the work place. Training programmes are a central element in expertise transfer.

2.2.2 The view point of learning

There are thus multiple ways of knowledge transfer but it is not just the manners of transfer that are interesting but also the learning process. The transferred knowledge must be internalized, adapted and connected. Transfer of expertise has usually been studied through the mechanisms that facilitate or hinder transfer of knowledge (e.g. Riege, 2007). It is however not possible to transfer knowledge as such from one context to another as already the different interpretations of individuals influence the understanding of the knowledge that has been transferred. Knowledge is thus socially constructed, and its transfer between companies is affected by the socio-cultural context, such as cultural norms and rules. (see Zaidman & Brock, 2009). In other words, the attitudes of employees, the operation environment and cultural differences must be taken into account in the knowledge transfer process between two companies operating in different countries.

Expertise

The expertise of an individual is defined as the knowledge, skills, experiences, networks, attitudes and personal qualities that help the individual to cope with working life situations or that are sufficient to achieve given objectives (Manka, 1999; Otala, 2008; Weinert, 2001). Tacit knowledge that is difficult to verbalize and is connected to action is associated particularly with experiences. Organizational expertise on the other hand refers to the common conceptions and conventions of the organization. On the organizational level tacit knowledge refers to, for instance, unwritten rules, stories and attitudes. (Otala, 2008)

Learning

Expertise comes about through learning, which can be described as acquisition of knowledge, participation and creating something new (see Figure 1). Learning as acquisition of knowledge – meaning self study and participation in training - is close to the everyday conception of learning. Here learning takes place in the “head” of the individual. This way of thinking has however long been called into question. Knowledge, concepts and mental processing as such are not solely important: rather participation in func-

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expertise is not transferred</th>
<th>One-way expertise transfer: Finland → Russia</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• alliance is dissolved</td>
<td>• technology (machinery, technical blueprints)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• passive knowledge acquisition</td>
<td>• business expertise (organizational structure, focusing on core operations)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One-way expertise transfer: Russia → Finland</th>
<th>Two-way expertise transfer: Finland ↔ Russia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• adjusting business to Russian context</td>
<td>• adopting “best practice”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• accepting insecurity</td>
<td>• adapting technology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learning as participation refers to learning at work, in different activities and as part of a community. Studies looking into international transfer of expertise have utilized for example Wenger’s (2003) framework of social learning (Hong, Snell & Easterby-Smith, 2006; Noorderhaven & Harzing, 2009).

The third metaphor, learning as creating something new refers to innovation and creating new knowledge (e.g. progressive inquiry). This viewpoint surpasses the former two. The basis for this view is that creating something new and learning something new are similar processes. A person learns by developing something already existing in co-operation with others. (see Paavola, 2007.) The expertise of individuals changes into organizational expertise by sharing, connecting and developing expertise together. This however presupposes organizational structures that support sharing of knowledge and expertise and joint development work (see Nonaka & Toyama, 2003).

3. RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND RESEARCH MATERIAL

The objective of this piece of research has been to create an operating procedure that would help a company transfer expertise into desired destinations both abroad and in the company’s domicile. The research material for this article is a series of interviews conducted in the spring of 2010. The objective of the interviews was to understand the process of expertise transfer, to portray it and to model it. The research methodology is qualitative and based on a case study.

A case study can be briefly defined as a study focusing on some topical activity or phenomenon in its authentic environment and using a variety of research methods (see Yin, 1991).

The expertise transfer model planned and realized by the company we study has gradually taken shape during a development project funded by TEKES, the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation. The aim of the interviews in this study has been to shed light on the prerequisites of success of the operational model. We pose the following research questions:

Which functions were transferred and what kind of expertise did they entail?

Which modes of action and other factors were supportive of the expertise transfer?

4. EXAMINING THE RESULTS

Next we will focus on the factors that - on the basis of the empirical material - have supported expertise transfer between factories in Estonia and Finland. The focus of study, according to the research questions, is the transfer taking place from the Saari factory in Finland into the factory in Estonia.

This presupposes appreciating the cultural and operational context. The essential question is how the transferred knowledge morphs into expertise in the organization and what are the prerequisites for this process.

The researchers interviewed a total of 19 Finnish employees and managers involved in the project and their Estonian equivalents, totalling 11 individuals. The duration of the interviews spanned half an hour to an hour and a half. All interviews were taped and transcribed into text. The texts were read through and perused for material related to the research themes. The discovered material was encoded and analysed.

Successful practices related to expertise transfer in the Finnish and Estonian interviews (chapter 4.1) were classified into categories. Views on successful practices and challenges drawn from both interviews were summed up together. This enabled us to observe the factors that are supportive to expertise transfer from both the Estonian and Finnish viewpoints.

The methods of transfer and the “items” to be transferred (chapter 4.2.) were collected so that the oral descriptions related to the same theme were combined and complemented with interview fragments further illustrating the theme at hand. Results and classifications from earlier studies were utilized here.

It has been a premise of the analysis that the research material is in continuous dialogue with theory (see Ruusuvuori, Nikander & Hyvärinen, 2011). The analysis of the data was both data-driven (content analysis) and theory-based.
4.1. Methods of expertise transfer and the factors supporting transfer

4.1.1. Getting acquainted with the functions – mutual visits to the factories

Getting acquainted with the industrial functions was an essential part of expertise transfer. By this we mean the visits made by Finnish operatives to the Estonian factory and vice versa. Also the Estonian factory planners visited the Finnish factories which enabled observing the wider context of the functions, i.e. why and how a given solution was found valuable in the Finnish factory. Particularly issues related to technical expertise, quality and product development were transferred during the visits to Finnish factories.

4.1.2. Training in expertise transfer

Methods of expertise transfer linked to training were language and cultural training as well as a period of on-the-job learning of Estonian key employees at the Finnish factory. Enthusiasm for the study of Estonian language was scarce among Finns, although some of the interviewees emphasized the significance of language learning as a gesture of willingness of Finns to operate on an equal basis with their Estonian colleagues. Cultural training for the Finns included a lecture on Estonian culture and on operating in a foreign culture in general. Cultural knowledge helped to discern those cultural norms and rules that affected functions in the organization; these concerned e.g. different authority and responsibility relationships.

Assuming that we are in co-operation, then studying and acknowledging the cultural traits of the other party – it has a big importance when we consider that people are working together. You understand why someone acts like this or that, and you avoid insulting the other’s nationality or something of the sort...

Language proficiency and cultural understanding foster interaction, the functioning of which was essential to learn working methods containing so-called tacit knowledge. This was evident during the on-the-job learning period of Estonian employees where future working assignments were tackled under the leadership of Finnish mentors. Furthermore, the period included getting acquainted with work safety procedures of the Saa- rionen company, along with a competence-based test which focused on workplace scenarios. On-the-job learning was model learning in this case, in which one could verbalise the experience-related knowledge behind a particular work performance.

On-the-job learning was a successful way to transfer operationalised knowledge concerning work procedures and the know-how related to different work roles. The usefulness of the transfer of on-the-job knowledge depends also on the activity of the students: Finnish interviewees found the Estonian learners to be committed and proactive in asking questions. More challenging was the absence of Estonian managers from the learning period: the role of a foreman is often emphatic in Estonian working culture. The strict quality standards of the new factory led to an increased need for expertise related to hygiene and work safety: the significance of on-the-job learning became clear.

4.1.3 Work guidance – Finnish employees in Estonia

Finnish employees helped in starting up the factory in Estonia. They gave guidance in various work tasks and familiarized the Estonian employees with hygiene and work safety issues. Working together and observing the work of experts enabled the transferring of expertise, as the experts could explain what they do, and why, in their work.

The presence of the Finnish employees was considered important especially in the starting phase of the factory, as they were understood to possess work experience based on tacit knowledge.

Transferring tacit knowledge is not easy in general, but it comes through agency and that is why I’d say that transfer of tacit knowledge could have played an even bigger role, I think they could have participated even more permanently from Finland in Estonia...

For example the procedures that guaranteed the hygiene and long shelf time had been developed in the company as a result of a long lasting development process; the employees who had not been a part of this process considered these issues challenging to learn.

4.1.4 Action groups and working in pairs

Action groups that were established for the Estonian and Finnish employees in each area of production were planned to be one of the central means of enabling the expertise transfer. These action groups were led by the Estonian managers. According to the interviews, an open atmosphere, listening to the perspectives of the others and the previous co-operation were the aspects that improved the co-operation in the action groups. At their best, the action groups served as a ground for sharing experiences and comparing practices. This enabled reflecting the functionality of various resolutions in the factories. The action groups were especially meaningful when the Finnish practices were adapted to the Estonian context.

Some complications were experienced in these groups, which caused the expertise to be partly transferred through personal relationships between employees. The reason for some action groups’ dysfunctionality was that the Estonians did not always necessarily feel that they needed help from the Finnish employees. This was especially evident in information systems, as they were established in Estonia on the basis of the local needs.

It can be interpreted from the data that having an Estonian leader in the action groups actually did further commitment to the transfer process. Interestingly, the Estonian informants did not mention any challenges with the action groups: the co-operation with the Finnish employees was considered mainly functional. The Finnish informants
called for increasing the feeling of togetherness to improve the co-operation. This can be understood as an important aspect from the point of view of the organizational culture of Saarioinen.

... I guess we have to learn at least that this kind of an internal process in a consolidated corporation, I mean that we should have gotten the Estonian clerical workers here somehow, that we should have enabled more of a kind of togetherness, but I think that some kind of leisure time activities could have defused the (tension) and gotten people to play together even better...“

4.1.5 Leadership and management in the project

The management in the project consisted of managing the entity, planning the transfer process and coordinating the co-operation of the action groups. The CEO of the Estonian factory was responsible for leading the transfer process and starting the new factory. It can be interpreted that due to the pre-existing trust the Estonians were given a significant amount of responsibility in the project. The risks of the transfer process were reduced by the previous co-operation that supported knowledge of the other culture and its habits.

According to the informants, stronger leadership would have been needed in the expertise transfer based on co-operation and working in groups: especially the scheduling and sharing the work tasks and responsibilities should have been planned more thoroughly. The critical notions of the Finnish employees were often verbalized as a wish to have a Finnish leader to start up the factory in Estonia. The need for a Finnish expatriate was rationalized by expressing that a Finnish leader would have been aware of Saarioinen’s procedures and values:

I guess in the end, it would have been good to have a Finn to be the leader of the whole project, s/he would have known the procedures of Saarioinen and been able to establish them there.

The expatriates have often been understood to be the facilitators of the knowledge transfer, and their role in transferring tacit knowledge, the organizational culture (Hocking, Brown & Harzing, 2004) and the knowledge about the leadership practices (Smale & Suutari, 2007) has been viewed as meaningful. The values of Saarioinen as well as the character of a Finnish family company was seen as a more distant aspect to the Estonian employees, as the knowledge shared by the Finnish employees was more connected to learning the work procedures. Some of the Estonian informants stated that the person with the responsibility of the whole project should have been someone with an awareness of the schedules and the phases of the transfer process.

The challenges of the leadership were connected with the lack of vision for the complete picture, which was caused by the lack of coordination of the action groups’ work. A significant amount of the informants noted that there should have been more meetings together. Some Finnish employees drew parallels with the leadership practices at the Estonian factory and the unclear responsibility and power relationships. Although both the Finnish and the Estonian informants stated that the leadership in the transfer process was diffused to some degree, the reasoning varied between the Finnish and the Estonian informants. While the Estonian informants criticized the scheduling and the lack of resources, the Finnish employees concentrated on the flow of information.

4.2 Which functions were transferred and what kind of expertise was attached to the process

The various functions were transferred differently: what was transferred and how depended on the function. There was no one general procedure in the transfer process, due to the varying expertise level in different functions in Estonia. According to previous research, learning at work and the way of learning in the expertise transfer are dependent on the context. Thus, the area of learning is connected to the content and the operational environment (see Heikkilä, 2006; Heikkilä & Tikkamäki, 2005). Furthermore, the expertise was transferred not only from Finland to Estonia, but also from Estonia to Finland. This was to be expected according to previous research conducted in the area (see Karhunen, 2003).

The main means of the expertise transfer were multiple forms of interaction and co-operation. In the transfer of technical knowledge and information “some kind of documentation has played a central role” (CEO’s interview 2.2.10). In the transfer of production technology and the use of processes it has been central to transfer clear instructions from Finland to Estonia. On the contrary, the Estonian expertise has been central in the product design; the Estonians can be argued to be the experts in designing products for Estonians.

The levels of transfer of knowledge, functions and expertise are described in the table below. Karhunen et al. (2003) have presented four dimensions of expertise transfer. This table has been modified following the results of this study. The one-way transfer from Estonia to Finland could not be found in our data and we replaced it with a partial expertise transfer from Finland to Estonia. This was the case with adapting the operation to an Estonian business culture and Human Resources, in which the transfer was not finished at the time when the research was conducted.

When knowledge and its varying forms are studied, it can be seen that knowledge has varying emphases in varying functions. For example, in technical issues and quality systems the main emphasis is in conceptual and encoded knowledge whereas in sales and marketing cultural knowledge was central (see Table 2). Of all the ways of learning the strongest were participating in learning and knowledge acquisition. In sales and marketing, creating a new brand can be viewed as an example of learning as creating new knowledge. Interaction is the most central form of acting, and knowledge was internalized and learned especially in interaction. Thus, this kind of a transfer process can be seen as a possibility of creating completely new...
information and expertise. Next, the results are presented in more detail from the perspective of various functions.

TECHNOLOGY (TRANSFER MAINLY FINLAND ➔ ESTONIA)

In the technology and especially in construction the transfer of expertise was manifested from Finland to Estonia. In Finland, Saarioinen has a long experience of designing and constructing food factories, and this know-how was attempted to be transferred to Estonia by working, planning and negotiating together. The Estonian employees were completely responsible for constructing the factory. All informants were satisfied with the new facility.

According to one Finnish informant, the transfer of technology was launched by gaining basic knowledge about Rapla village. In this phase the company familiarized itself with the laws and statutes of Estonia. In the factory planning phase, the Estonian employees traveled to Finland to see the Finnish Saarioinen factories, and they also documented the processes of the factories by taking photographs.

The informants stated that the Estonian employees familiarizing themselves with the company’s factories in Finland were essential for the project to succeed. Moreover, the transfer of tacit knowledge (see Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2001) was possible during these visits. The transfer process included many challenges. According to the informants, these challenges were solved by working together. One of the challenges was the dysfunctionality of the action groups, which led to working in pairs. Furthermore, it can be interpreted from the data that especially the social interaction was problematic, which inhibited the co-operation. According to an informant, talking and asserting were widely needed.

The amount of speaking bothers me, I mean why do we have to talk so much and explain and argue and argue again, that even if we agree on something, then we have to explain why we agree on something, why can’t we just take the shortcut and say that this is how it is.

For the Estonian employees, the schedule of constructing the new factory was tight, often causing the employees to work over regular working hours. The construction was based on the Finnish employees’ long-term experience of the convenience food factory tradition.

TABLE 2. THE LEVELS OF EXPERTISE TRANSFER IN DIFFERENT FUNCTIONS, THE CHARACTER OF THE TRANSFERRED KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNING.

(cf. Karhunen et al., 2003; Blackler, 1995; Hakkarainen et al., 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One-way expertise transfer: Finland ➔ Estonia</th>
<th>Two-way expertise transfer: Finland ↔ Estonia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical issues: conceptual and encoded knowledge &amp; learning as knowledge acquisition</td>
<td>Sales and marketing: cultural knowledge / learning as creation of new knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality systems: encoded knowledge / learning as knowledge acquisition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production: functional and anchored knowledge / learning as participating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-way partial transfer of expertise: Finland ➔ Estonia</td>
<td>No transfer of expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product development: cultural / learning as knowledge acquisition</td>
<td>Data systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR: mainly organizing the training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE QUALITY SYSTEMS (TRANSFER FINLAND ➔ ESTONIA)

The purpose of the transfer process was to construct a factory that would operate in a similar high-quality manner as the factories in Finland. The certification demands written instructions and standardized processing of the products according to the instructions and orders. The information systems are different in Finland and Estonia, which means that for example informing the other party about the product information will be important in the future.

The expertise was transferred by various documents and instructions. There was a vast amount of interaction, and the employees visited each other in Finland and Estonia. An informant describes the different means of expertise transfer as follows:

By telling how we work, sending materials to them about how we work. By showing them in our intranet where they can find information and by writing them an instruction, in which we told them that by pressing here you get here and this is what happens and so on. I mean, just by talking and giving information when they
During this special day the Finnish employees were well educated and they already had knowledge about the quality issues.

The informants mentioned the product design day, when the Finnish and the Estonian employees actually sat around the same table to share their experiences and to respond to each other’s questions. During this special day the Finnish employees also explained how specific work tasks are performed. This could be interpreted to mean that the transfer of expertise manifested itself in quality systems during that day. Furthermore, the informants expressed their appreciation for meeting the other employees face-to-face.

In the organizational culture, it was questioned who is responsible for and leads the transfer project. Furthermore, the meeting practices appeared to vary between Finland and Estonia in how the decisions were written down. The Estonian employees were not used to documenting the decisions on paper.

A quality system had not been used in Estonia before the transfer process; thus, the Finnish experience and expertise was relied on completely. The training of the employees became central, because the employees had no previous experience. The instructions were easy to translate into Estonian, as the principles of gaining the quality system are identical everywhere.

In order to transfer awareness about the quality systems, the issue was discussed with the employees responsible for the quality systems. The Estonian employees tried to solve some problems by themselves, but the Finnish method proved to be the most modern and it was applied also in Estonia. Altogether, the co-operation was functional and the visits of Estonian employees to Finland were found to be useful:

I have been visiting Sahalahti, always production and also in Huittinen factory. Being in Finland … it was also for me important to get the picture how it works in real life, because when I started the old factory in Tallinn, it was small production … Tallinn we had no quality system at all…

Also the Estonian employees expressed their need for having an explicit responsibility of the project and having a clear distribution of work.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT (PARTIAL TRANSFER FINLAND → ESTONIA)

It was not possible to transfer product development expertise as such because the functions are organized in different ways, as are working practices.

…the Estonian organization being very low, and they do things in the style that we have done in Sahalahti some decades ago, shall we say thirty years ago.

Information was passed into Estonia about the prerequisites of the raw materials and the criteria of using them. Additionally, information was shared on production technique, raw material recommendations of processes, process knowledge, hygiene matters and management of the development process.

…shall we say that we have tried, that their method of working is so different that we can’t take so many things out of it, although the problems are quite the same. But not even with adaptation it won’t… that maybe with time it will change, but not yet.

It was felt that within product development there was too much effort to transfer knowledge: in the beginning of functions there was no capacity to adopt them. As documentation was also not a standard procedure, a lot of information was left unused.

There were various methods of knowledge transfer: in addition to oral information the email was much used, as was the phone and scanning. Recipe copies were also transferred. Estonian employees in charge of production also visited Finland. The group was again not functional: it was rather co-operation among individuals that was more successful.

Management and outlining responsibilities proved challenging in product development because no information was provided on who would take decisions on matters. A wish was expressed for a Finnish manager who would “gradually make him/herself unnecessary.”

Interviews with Estonians reveal that the shift of procedure from making decisions in an informal way concerning a small factory into documentation of a big factory was very challenging. Starting up with a new information system was also demanding.

Finnish product development became a model for operating procedures as it is much more advanced regarding big markets.

The technological processes changed, which we haven’t had in Meleco, the autoclave and others, so we’ve received quite a lot of information to product development from the Finnish factory on how products behave and what kind of materials we should use and such. We really had a good co-operation.

Finding raw materials suitable for new products and using new software in product development were central challenges. Equally demanding for the Estonians was the change in the production rhythm.

Estonians visited Finland before the building of the factory: after operations started Finns actively visited Estonia. Already existing general rules and briefs provided information. Existing operating procedures of Saarioinen were transferred into Estonia. The needed raw materials demanded harmonization to fit Finnish raw materials. There was room for development concerning delivery reliability and foresight in Estonia.

PRODUCTION (TRANSFER FINLAND → ESTONIA)

One topic that emerged in the interviews was transferring to Estonia a whole production line manufacturing goods for the Finnish markets. The prerequisite of this
was making sure especially that expertise, hygiene, work safety, quality and productivity are on par with the company’s Finnish functions.

A training was organized for the employees in Finland, where hygiene matters, quality and self-monitoring were tackled, along with cultural issues. After this the employees worked in pairs in their own designated workplaces for three weeks. The tasks were the same that the employees would later face in Estonia. Also Finnish employees participated in the work guidance and cultural training so as to facilitate their interaction with the Estonians. The guidance was conducted in the following way:

When we went into the workplace, you had to tell them how it happens. Also about how to wash the machines. There was self-monitoring there, like how you have to fry products at a certain temperature and how you rate them, and then there was a bit about product packing, how you store stuff, and all that stuff to make the product safe.

The Estonians coming to Finland for orientation was regarded a good approach. This enabled them to see the big picture of the operation process. An interviewee thought that results would not have been as good at all had the process been reversed. The work mentoring was challenged by a lack of available time and language problems. Three week’s time was found to be very short for the goal of changing a lack of available time and language in the following way:

This enabled them to see the big picture of the operating methods of the company.

They didn’t have any prior experience, they were rather flung into the deep end: It was quite a shock because three weeks was quite a short time to be here and learn all of that.

A revision period supportive to the learning was deemed necessary halfway through the orientation, as new material to be learned kept coming in.

The following mode of action was found successful: Estonian workers first spent time at the Finnish factories after which Finns travelled to Estonia to guide the employees in starting up production. Employees from Finland set out to Estonia to act as mentors when the opening date of the factory drew closer. They worked in the factory all the while being available to the Estonians in need of information and guidance. Finns took the new ovens in use, tested them out and encouraged the Estonians to do likewise. This was deemed an especially useful practice.

I think it was great idea to have some Finnish workers here for help….so they can answer for different machineries and for different quality questions in daily questions and how to solve them. It was good. It was enough hard for me.

A tight schedule was a source of many problems. There was not enough time to teach everything to the personnel and many errors were consequently made in the beginning.

It was too quick. I think it’s too difficult to start with many new things, new place, new layout, new communication, electricity and all those things were not very checked. So we made so many mistakes. Machineries don’t work because of different things and suppliers don’t bring raw materials in right time and it was too much new things.

A storage worker made these comments about the lack of time. A worker in charge of machinery explained that the machines are different; all could not be learned while in Finland. In Estonia the local work mentors were responsible for guiding other employees. When a new worker started he or she was first explained what the job was. After that the individual could try for herself after which there was a control of the work performance. The worker could still ask questions, and the mentor could repeat the work demonstration.

SALES AND MARKETING (TWO-WAY TRANSFER FINLAND ↔ ESTONIA)

Marketing was planned in close co-operation with the Estonians and Finns. The Estonian side did not have significant expertise in building a new brand and marketing it, so Finnish experience and know how was well received. Finns felt that cultural knowledge about Estonia was very important in marketing and brand planning. The interviewees opined that planning would have been impossible without close co-operation with the Estonians.

As a whole, Finns felt they had acted with caution vis-à-vis the Estonian colleagues. All actions aimed at partnership through interaction. Intercultural understanding was essential. Expertise transfer was mutual.

I have felt like a receiving party myself, some things have become clear to me while doing this, I’ve understood something of my own. You have not only worked for their benefit, but also your own thing has developed when you’ve been able to test and try things within the other culture.

The marketing group took into account the possibility of enabling learning through encouraging reflection:

How well we go through and exchange experiences over how this all went in the groups. It could be useful to the members of the groups in that end that a project won’t just end but that things would be discussed with a learning perspective.

Estonians explained that the planning of marketing and branding was begun well ahead of the factory opening. There was enough time, and the co-operation with the Finns was successful as a whole. The group activity was valued very highly: Finns explained their local practices but did not impose these on the Estonians.

Group members met each other frequently in both countries. Brand building was a new experience altogether for the Estonians, and the co-operation was regarded a significant learning opportunity.
INFORMATION SYSTEMS (NO TRANSFER)

Information system development took place in co-operation at first. The initial intention was to find out whether the Finnish system could be transferred into Estonia. This was very soon found to be impossible.

At first the Finns passed on to the Estonians their process-like working method and their expertise and experience. However, the Estonians carried out the development of the information systems of the factory in its entirety, and group work was ruled out as a viable option. The Estonians were very self-reliant in putting the system into place, having very little interaction with information systems experts during the process. Setting up the system was still in progress at the time of writing of this study.

HR (ATTEMPT AT TRANSFER FINLAND → ESTONIA)

Transfer work took place in pairs in HR matters. Action groups were not functional, and a key person was changed right in the beginning of the project. There was much work to be done at first mostly in personnel recruitment.

A central task for HR was to organize training to support expertise transfer. Employees and a part of the management visited Finland to acquaint themselves with the production facilities. Estonian workers were trained to be key persons who would provide training for the new workers.

Action groups could have functioned better in this instance. A clear project plan could have facilitated the project. Participants hoped for more revision and some kind of a halfway summary during the training. The production starting phase could have used clear rules. A multicultural environment demands different modes of action which should be clarified: in which matters does the mother company have a say in, where can we make decisions independently? Retrospective monitoring and common fora for discussion should be made available also in the future.

Furthermore, there was an attempt to transfer HR operating procedures from Finland to the Estonians; these included for example which sections of staff should be trained and how, what equipment is available for recording the training and what kinds of surveys would be undertaken. These matters did not however appear to be topical for the Estonians yet:

I have this feeling that not a lot extra information was understood in there, that maybe now with operations running and when we’ve had a little breather, maybe now we could...

5 DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to understand the modes of action and learning processes related to expertise transfer with the intention of creating a good practice. In addition, the study provides a cross section on whether the transfer process was deemed successful in Estonia and Finland, how it was conducted, what worked and what was difficult. We have assembled central elements from the interviews in the figure below (see Figure 2). The figure displays the different stages in the project in chronological order, and shows also the general picture of the expertise transfer. Management and action groups encompass practically the entire process. Interviews revealed, however, that there were difficulties in the working of the action groups, and much work was conducted with a pair. The following good practice was consequently discovered: an individual from each country was given the responsibility to execute the transfer of a given area. Hence it is useful to reflect when it is prudent to use a working pair and when a group. Another good practice was the discussion forum of the product development day: the forum enabled communication between operatives in different production facilities.

Project management and responsibility of the project’s progress are important preconditions for success. Previous experience (Wang et al., 2009; Smale et al., 2009) advises to send an expatriate to carry the responsibility for the project’s progress. This project used a different approach, which presented many challenges and difficulties, as testified to by the interviews. Clear allocation of responsibilities among different actors is generally necessary.

The general cultural environment of the countries and, especially acknowledging work culture in expertise transfer is the most central part of our model (see Vanhala et al., 2009). Language and cultural training in the case company aimed to achieve exactly this cultural sensitivity. The departure point for all communication is cultural understanding. Different work and managerial cultures complicated the work of the action groups as well as management in general. Managerial and service cultures were found to be divergent in both studied countries. The study observed that an authoritative managerial culture is prevalent in Estonia and the fact that, for example, meetings often go undocumented (compare Heliste et al., 2007). Furthermore, the work culture at the Estonian factory changed significantly from a handicraft-style production method into process production.

A central finding of our study is that different methods of transfer worked differently in different operational contexts (technology etc.). This means they are contextual by nature (see Figure 2), i.e. they are dependent on the content to be transferred, the nature of the expertise and the operational environment (see Heikkilä, 2006). What is transferred and how are matters of negotiation and are connected to the culture of each given country and its operational environment (Karhunen et al., 2003). Different methods of knowledge transfer differ from each other also from a learning point of view (see Paavola, 2007). Acquisition of knowledge is almost always included in transfer but especially in the first stages of the transfer project acquisition was typical in both
Learning as participation (Wenger, 2003) was the most central and important mode of transfer, especially for the transfer of tacit knowledge. This type of transfer was most used in on-the-job learning and in guidance and mentoring. During the on-the-job learning period the Estonian employees performed work duties in Finland, the Finns doing likewise in Estonia by guiding the workers through the start up phase of the factory. Everyone involved found this arrangement to be successful.

The spiral shape of Figure 2 symbolises the transfer of knowledge from one culture to another in continuous interaction and through technological and written rules, memos and social communication. It is not sufficient to just transfer explicit knowledge: tacit knowledge (values, attitudes) have to be passed on, too (Nonaka et.al., 2001; Erkkilä et.al., 2005). Figure 2 displays in blue those phases of transfer that focus on tacit knowledge: green symbolizes those phases that have to do with explicit knowledge. It is essential to evaluate learning in different stages of the process: in the case under study this was done through a competence-based test during the on-the-job learning period. Evaluations should be carried out throughout the process, i.e. in each loop of the spiral where possible.

All work-related learning is contextual by nature: It is tied to its operational environment. Factors like the organization of work, the sociocultural environment, personal traits of individuals and the content to be learned have an influence on work-related learning (Heikkilä, 2006). Learning was creative in some parts of the functions: this means that instead of tackling on particular skills the focus was on comprehending the bigger picture in a novel way (see Paavola, 2007). This kind of learning was achieved in sales and marketing where interaction was open and different ways of thinking converged actively. Cultural interaction can bring about new innovations altogether. By a way of conclusion we can state that process of expertise transfer requires versatile learning and fostering good conditions for that learning.
REFERENCES


**KIRSI HEIKKILÄ-TAMMI**
Kirsi Heikkilä-Tammi, PhD (adult education) is programme leader at Research and Education Centre Synergos of the School of Management of Tampere University, Finland. Her fields of expertise are wellbeing at work, learning at work and learning as creating something new.

**CONTACT**
Kirsi Heikkilä-Tammi
Research and Education Centre Synergos
33014 Tampereen yliopisto
Finland
Tel. -358 3 35518546
Email: kirsi.heikkila-tammi@uta.fi

**MARJA-LIISA MANKA**
Marja-Liisa Manka, PhD is Professor of work wellbeing at the School of Management of Tampere University.

**CONTACT**
Email: marja-liisa.manka@docendum.fi

**SANNA NUUTINEN**
Sanna Nuutinen, (MA)(education sciences) is a researcher at Research and Education Centre Synergos in Tampere University. Her special interests include themes of wellbeing at work, management and organizational creativity.

**CONTACT**
Email: sanna.nuutinen@uta.fi

**MARJUT MÄENPÄÄ**
Marjut Maenpää, (MA, B.Ed.) is a researcher at Research and Education Centre Synergos in Tampere University. She is interested in interpersonal interaction and positive psychology.

**CONTACT**
Email: marjut.maanpaa@uta.fi
“Educators cannot remain neutral”: Perspectives from four continents


INTRODUCTIONS - TO BIRKBECK AND THE EDITOR

The editor of *Innovations in Lifelong Learning*, Sue Jackson, is Professor of Lifelong Learning and Gender at Birkbeck, University of London, and it’s relevant to say a few words about Birkbeck itself - or rather “himself”: unlike most universities, Birkbeck is named after its founder, not its location.

George Birkbeck was an exceptional pioneer of learning opportunities. In 1823, he launched a college in London intended to give working people chances to learn. As early as 1830 it admitted women as students, and it was so effective that increasing numbers of mature Londoners, both men and women, were even able to study for degrees. By 1858 it was London University’s special college for people who could not afford to study full time. It has five schools and 19 departments, and an outstanding reputation worldwide. Its purpose is still to provide degree study opportunities in the evenings for people with “day jobs”.

Before taking charge as the highly qualified editor, Jackson opens the Introduction with a personal story, in the style of broadcast programmes for small children familiar to many British parents (and grandparents).

“So are you sitting comfortably? Then I’ll begin... Once upon a time a girl-child was born to a working-class, Jewish family living in the East End of London”.

As the story continues, the girl leaves school at 15 to do a secretarial course at a local college. Then she marries and has two children. Many women will identify with the storyteller when she admits to being “restless, dissatisfied, bored, frustrated, despite loving her family dearly”. She tells how she studied at a local college and then on to the Open University - and that was just another stepping stone to further qualifications.

This story conveys the deeply personal way with which Jackson identifies with learners, students and the themes of this book.

THE CONTRIBUTORS AND THEIR THEMES

Jackson involved 16 academics based in the USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK. Her Introduction to Innovations has three main themes: Politics; Power; and Pedagogic challenge. These prepare the way for 12 more detailed chapters in three parts: Part 1 - Learning Communities (including an article co-authored by Jackson herself); 2 - Participation and non-participation. 3 - Work-based learning and learning through work.

These key themes overlap a good deal, but Jackson structures them with comments at the end of each Part before introducing the next. She does this very clearly. Her Introduction to Part 2, for example, explains that it focuses on “debates about participation and non-participation for marginalized groups... including women of colour and otherwise marginalized women, older learners, and those who have been otherwise distanced from learning”. Details follow about each of the chapters; the contribution, for instance, of two Americans, one White and one Black (Lisa Baumgartner and Juanita Johnson-Bailey), who examine the persistence of racism in American universities (their chapter has a particularly vivid, non-academic title: “A field of flowers and broken glass”).

In a historically-aware chapter (also in Part 2) on adult literacy and numeracy, Yvonne Hillier (Professor of Education, University of Brighton) relates her main theme to the wider context, explaining how the larger system was developing. She notes that “by the time you read anything about policy in education, it will be out of date because government machinery constantly tinkers with the system, resulting in initiatives overload”. This has led “over time to a vocationally oriented, economically focused provision, which leads to qualifications as a proxy for identifying learning and skills” (my italics).

Hillier also records the important role played by broadcasting in getting literacy on the agenda of policy and practice. In 1970, the general public was unaware that so many of us had not developed basic literacy skills. The BBC then co-operated on a “Right to Read” campaign with the British Association of Settlements. A series of 26 ten-minute programmes called On the Move (it was a very watchable series about two lorry drivers) accompanied by innovation - the first broadcast helpline. The service was “swamped” by people offering to become volunteers and others “finally finding somewhere they could turn for help”.

One of the most stimulating articles relates the concepts of lifelong learning and education to African traditions, focusing on the practices of Yoruba and Gu people in Nigeria. The author, Mjaji Avoseh (he is Gu but was raised in both cultures) is currently an Associate Professor at the University of South Dakota, but he was awarded his PhD and MSc by the University of Ibadan. He hopes “views from ‘outside’ the mainstream... may have some import” for current innovatory efforts. Its approach is holistic - hard to embody in...
societies internally divided in so many ways. There is, for example, “a constant intercourse between the knower and the known and the context, between the process and the product” especially in special festivals, “between the dancer, the music and the drum”. A good deal of current developments in other societies do benefit, or could benefit more, from “this aesthetic continuum” in celebrations to foster community learning.

Community learning, conceptual and practical, also relates to Men’s Sheds in Australia. They exemplify Barry Golding’s theme in Part 1 - “Men’s informal learning and wellbeing beyond the workplace” (he’s an Associate Professor at the University of Ballarat). Unlike personal back-yard sheds these are found in community settings, enabling men who find they work better in a workshop with tools and equipment, in the company of others. They are producing objects which are “socially useful”. Golding says “the impact of these projects on the men who participate is remarkable”. They are still a relatively new development, but there are already more than 250 of them in Australia and the idea spread recently to New Zealand (See also Golding’s article on Men’s Sheds in LLinE 2/2011).

VOCATIONAL LEARNING

The tools and equipment used in leisure time in Men’s Sheds are of course also used in some forms of employment. Part 3 focuses on vocational learning (in Aotearoa/New Zealand mainly on recent phases in industrial training); the UK changes due to flexible e-learning); the USA - where many women from the Diaspora need transcultural learning opportunities; and Australia. I’ll end this review with a few words about the last of these informative chapters: Its author, Jacqueline McManus was a Chartered Accountant and tax consultant before she became an academic at the University of New South Wales. She uses her earlier experience to make sure her academic work relates to the ‘real world’.

McManus is aware for instance of significant differences in how employment is organised. Some workers (many workers?) “tend to see their responsibilities limited to the job and not to the purpose of the organisation for which they work”. That surely relates to the fundamental difference between a firm aiming at profits for owners and shareholders, and, say co-operative societies, or social enterprises which benefit all workers and who then need to see how all the jobs complement each other.

CONCLUSIONS (EDITOR’S AND REVIEWER’S)

Innovations is readable, informative and useful, but, as a reference to Chris Duke reminds us, the concept of lifelong learning is not just ambiguous: it is “a conceptual morass”. Remembering McManus’s awareness of the “real world” I often felt the need to relate abstractions to more specific, concrete examples of actual learning - such as adapting to specific forms of technological progress, or even, say, learning to play the piano - that gets a mention in brackets but nothing more!

Bearing in mind Hillier on Right to Read, that concreteness can be well achieved through broadcasting. One major example: countless people in several countries have become better aware and informed about wild life, animals, plants and the environment, thanks to (Sir) David Attenborough’s programmes (and support literature).

I welcome the way Jackson ends the book, with basic questions about where innovations in lifelong learning are most needed. As she tells us, she was writing the conclusion as the world was shaking in varying degrees through the economic crisis. Yet it could not be just economic learning that’s needed. What about social equity and justice? They are essential and prompt her to remember Guo and Jamal (chapter 1). They saw “the need to work against the grain” of certain “discourses in developing lifelong learning… educators cannot remain neutral”.

BRIAN GROOMBRIDGE


Brian Groombridge has worked in different forms of adult education ever since he graduated at Cambridge: as a tutor, adult education centre principal, researcher and writer, educational broadcaster, academic, and co-founder of the UK University of the Third Age. He is now active as a writer and speaker in retirement.