ENCOURAGING LEARNER AUTONOMY: PORTFOLIO WORK WITH ILLITERATE IMMIGRANTS IN GERMANY
Outline

- The Situation in Germany
- Why Learner Autonomy
- Working with the Alphaportfolio
- Three Steps to Learner Autonomy
The Situation in Germany
# Illiteracy in Germany

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Alpha Level</th>
<th>Proportion of the 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>Sub-total</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.5%</td>
<td>7.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor writing skills</td>
<td>α 4</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>13.3 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total*</td>
<td>&gt; α 4</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>30.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.1%</td>
<td>51.6 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: functional illiteracy and poor writing skills in the German-speaking adult population (18-64 years of age)

* (Difference in the totals of 100 percent due to inaccuracies from rounding up and down)

(Grotlüschen & Riekmann 2011)
Languages and Illiteracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion</th>
<th>Functional illiteracy</th>
<th>Poor writing skills</th>
<th>Proportion of random sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>α 1</td>
<td>α 2</td>
<td>α 3 Total α 1 - α 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha Level</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>49.4%</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of first language German</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of other language</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>50.4%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.4%</td>
<td>99.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: first language analysed for functional illiteracy and poor writing skills in the adult German-speaking population (18 - 64 years)

(Grotlüschen & Riekmann 2011)
## Employment and Illiteracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion</th>
<th>Functional illiteracy</th>
<th>Poor writing skills</th>
<th>Proportion of random sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>α 1</td>
<td>α 2</td>
<td>α 3 (Total: α 1 - α 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha Level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>58.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfit to work</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewives/house husbands, parental leave</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In vocational training</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: professional status according to functional illiteracy and poor writing skills in the German-speaking adult population (18 - 64 years)

(Grotlüschen & Riekmann 2011)
Why Learner autonomy?
How fair is our teaching?

In order to conduct a fair test the exercise will be the same for you all: climb up the tree.

Heterogeneity as normal situation

→ Starting conditions are not equal for every learner
Heterogeneity as normal situation

A fair test is only possible, if the learners are comparable after a period of time.
Comparability within heterogeneous learner groups

Tests

Portfolio

comparison to others

comparison to yourself
Learner autonomy

„The basis of learner autonomy is that the learner accepts responsibility for his or her learning. This acceptance of responsibility has both socio-affective and cognitive implications: it entails at once a positive attitude to learning and the development of a capacity to reflect on the content and process of learning with a view to bringing them as far as possible under conscious control“

(Little 1995, p. 175)
(see also Oxford 2003)
[emphasis added by A.F.]
Learning autonomy as a goal

- Learner autonomy is not just a instrument to be used to achieve „real“ goals (e.g. grammar)
  - Learner autonomy is a competence and gradual (Kohonen 2012)

- Learning autonomy is a goal by itself:
  - Which contents can you teach?
  - When do you teach this contents?
  - How long do you need for these contents?
  - How do you test learning autonomy?
Die inhaltlichen Schwerpunkte verteilen sich etwa wie folgt:

- sprachliche Förderung: ca. 25-30%
- schriftsprachliche Förderung: ca. 25-30%
- Förderung der Lernerautonomie: ca. 25-30%
- Herstellung teilnehmerorientierter Unterrichtsmaterialien: ca. 5-10%
- Weiteres, etwa Förderung der interkulturellen Kompetenz oder der Medienkompetenz: ca. 5-10%

Die Gewichtung ist der jeweiligen Kurssituation anzupassen.

National Concept for Literacy Courses, Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 2009, p. 14

→ i.e. 300-400 hours for learner autonomy in a 1200 hours course
Working with the “Alphaportfolio”
Genuinely successful teachers have always been autonomous in the sense of having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising via continuous reflection and analysis the highest possible degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploiting the freedom that this confers. If, as I have argued, learner autonomy and teacher autonomy are interdependent then the promotion of learner autonomy depends on the promotion of teacher autonomy.

(Little 1995, p. 179)
Dealing with different „concepts“ in your class

Concept for learning and teaching
(Feldmeier 2010; La Ganza 2008; Little 1995)

- in the curriculum (e.g. of the government)
- in the „philosophy“ of your school (e.g. own school curriculum)
- in the teaching materials (i.e. of the developer of a book)
- in the tests (e.g. a standardized B1-Test)
- of the teacher
- of the learner
- of the colleagues?
- of the parents?
- of the family?
Conflicting concepts?
(Feldmeier 2010)
Learner autonomy as a collective effort
Learner autonomy as a collective effort

Source: www.rudern-hamburg.de

- parents
- colleagues
- etc.
- learner(s)
- teacher
- curricula
- school’s philosophy
- teaching materials
- teaching methods
- tests
- etc.
- principal

Source: www.rudern-hamburg.de
Three Steps to Learner Autonomy
Three Steps to Learner Autonomy

portfolio
Workplace oriented portfolio A1

My Languages

My Course

My Learning

My Job

My Goals

Dossier
Learner's portfolios
Three Steps to Learner Autonomy

- **portfolio**
- **learning agreement**
## Learning Agreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Datum</th>
<th>Station</th>
<th>Aufgabenebene</th>
<th>Fertigkeit</th>
<th>Stufe</th>
<th>Aufgabe</th>
<th>Wie lange?</th>
<th>Leicht oder schwer?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. 2. 2013</td>
<td>garten GeRet</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>10 Minuten</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Date:** 10. 2. 2013
- **Class:** Garten GeRet
- **Tasks:**
  - Phonemes
  - Syllables
  - Words
  - Sentences
  - Texts
  - Grammar
  - Lexic
  - Games
- **Difficulty:** Easy
- **Time Needed:** 10 Minutes
- **Self Estimation:** Was it easy?
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Datum</th>
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<th>Wie lange?</th>
<th>Leicht oder schwer?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. 2. 2013</td>
<td>gartn</td>
<td>GeRet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 Minuten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. 2. 2013</td>
<td>gartn</td>
<td>GeRet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10 Minuten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. 2. 2013</td>
<td>garten</td>
<td>GeRet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15 Minuten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. 2. 2013</td>
<td>gartn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20 Minuten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. 2. 2013</td>
<td>gartn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20 Minuten</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Three Steps to Learner Autonomy

- portfolio
- learning agreement
- working „stations“
The materials
4. Texte schreiben

4.1 Schreiben Sie die Wörter in die Lücken!

Bügelplatz, Nähplatz
Wir

4.2 Ordnen Sie die Wörter in die Lücken!

Legen Sie neben die Nähmaschine dein Werkzeug?

Ich lege neben die Nähmaschine das Bürsten für den Bügelplatz?

Ja, ich brauche ein für den Bügelplatz?

Ja, ich brauche eine Nähmaschine für den Nähplatz?
Three Steps to Learner Autonomy

1. Portfolio
2. Learning Agreement
3. Working „stations“
Three Steps to Learner Autonomy

portfolio

learning agreement

working „stations“
Three Steps to Learner Autonomy

- Portfolio
- Learning Agreement
- Working „stations“
Three Steps to Learner Autonomy

- Portfolio
- Learning Agreement
- Working "stations"
Three Steps to Learner Autonomy

1. Portfolio
2. Learning Agreement
3. Working "stations"
Research Design and First Results
Goals of the Project

- explorative, qualitative (and quantitative)
- hypothesis generating
- triangulation

Goal 1: Development (based on theory), test and improvement (based on empirical data) of a

- workplace oriented portfolio for literacy, German as second language
- teaching materials needed to follow up the portfolio (learning agreements and stations)
- didactic descriptions (how to work with the portfolio and the materials)

Goal 2: research on the important factors for individualized teaching

- factor „teacher“ → „teacher autonomy“ (Interviews, observations, video)
- factor „learners“ → learner autonomy (Interviews, observations, videos, portfolios)
The Data

- Development of the materials for learner autonomy (based on theory)
- Interviews with cooperating teachers (before the courses: 2xA1, 2xA2, 2xA2/B1)
- Train the Trainer Workshop on using the materials
- „Portfolio-experts“ go along with the teachers and help them
- Interviews with the cooperating teachers (after the beginning of the course: 2xA1, 2xA2, 2xA2/B1)
- Observation of the classes (until now only 2xA1)
- Final Interview of the teachers (in a group)
Observations
Course 1 (A1) and Course 2 (A1)

Course 1 (A1)

2. month
- Materials are used in a "classic" teaching setting
- Some learners seem to be challenged, others are bored

7. month
- Learning Agreement (LA) is used as a documentation
- Working with the Learning Agreement (LA) is not understood

9. month
- First observations that the LA is used properly
- Auto corrections

10. month
- Independent use of the LA is still not observable
- No reflective learning
- High motivation of the learners

11. month
- Learners decide not to use the materials

12. month
- Reflective learning together with other learners
- Learners begin to develop own learning strategies
- High motivation of the learners

Course 2 (A1)

1. month
- Materials are used in a "classic" teaching setting
- Learners learn by their own

2. month
- Learners refuse working with the portfolio
- Learners mark items in the portfolio without reflection

4. month
- Working with the Learning Agreement (LA) is not understood
- "Abstract" exercises are difficult for learners

5. month
- Working with the stations is not clear for the learners

6. month
- Independent use of the LA and the stations
- First observations of self reflective learning
- Teacher still needs to clarify some exercises
- Learners help each other

7. month
- Self reflections and development of approaches to solve problems
- Learners begin to develop own learning strategies
Analysing the Portfolios

Course 1:
Language activities in the exercises

- Writing: 46%
- Listening: 17%
- Speaking: 14%
- Reading: 23%

Course 2:
Language activities in the exercises

- Writing: 27%
- Listening: 27%
- Speaking: 20%
- Reading: 26%
Analysing the Portfolios

Working with the Portfolio in Curse 1 and 2

- My Goals (17%)
- My Course (5%)
- My Languages (31%)
- My Learning (18%)
- My Job (21%)

Bar chart showing:
- Ich (16%)
- Mein Kurs (8%)
- Meine Sprachen (37%)
- Mein Lernen (25%)
- Meine Arbeit (35%)
- Meine Ziele (9%)

Legend:
- Kurs 193
- Kurs 203
THANK YOU
DANK JE WEL
The „Alphaportfolio“ project

- www.uni-muenster.de/germanistik/alphaportfolio
- E-Mail: alexis.feldmeier@uni-muenster.de
References


