

New trends in raising demand for learning among adults at risk of exclusion - The project “Job rotation: Deutsch am Arbeitsplatz” (“Job rotation – German at the workplace”)

Case study for the Grundtvig 4 Project “Supporting the development of new learning pathways for adults”

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Introduction

Disadvantaged groups have been a concern of educational policy, practice and research for quite some time – with varying focuses according to different political, economical and societal developments. Especially from the 1980s, a number of programmes were launched by the Federal government to promote opportunities for groups who were experiencing disadvantages in one form or another, such as young adults with no formal school qualification, unemployed people, migrants and ethnic minorities, women, illiterate people and others. In that period, numerous pilot projects, mostly in the area of vocational training, developed and tested measures to reduce educational disadvantages, promote (re-)integration into the labour market and counteract threatening social exclusion. Comprehensive sets of recommendations were formulated in the context of these projects. They addressed training institutions, administrative and teaching staff, politicians and decision-makers and dealt with questions of curricular development, organisational issues, support structures, funding schemes and others more.

The recommendations thus developed during the last 25 years or so concerning work with (disadvantaged) target groups in adult education, showed a remarkable consistency. Issues that were repeatedly emphasized included for example:

- reduce access barriers and give special attention to outreach and motivation of adults to take up continuing training,
- keep learner groups small,
- avoid deficit approach, take existing skills and competencies as starting point,
- develop individually tailored learning materials,
- build up personalized and participant oriented support services and learner guidance,

- enhance professionalisation and updating of teachers/trainers, especially concerning skills in learner guidance and counselling
- recognize the significance of co-operation and networking of different actors with a view to catering for the needs of disadvantaged groups, etc.

A research project on “**Benachteiligte in der Weiterbildung**“ (Disadvantaged People in Adult and Continuing Education) was led by the DIE between Oct. 1999 and May 2001. This project collected quantitative and qualitative data on different disadvantaged groups in adult education. It investigated existing educational offers for these groups, examined participation patterns and identified factors impacting on participation/non-participation of the various groups. And it also looked at the question to what extent the recommendations formulated by the earlier pilot projects had been implemented into daily educational practice.

It found that this was by far less the case than desirable. The effect of successful results was in most cases limited to the pilot projects themselves. Promising approaches had not been disseminated widely, recommendations had only rarely been put into practice. This seemed not to be just a problem of lack of funds. Rather the problem lay with a lack of dissemination strategies in the projects (since this had not been required by the programmes' funding conditions) and with the completely non-committal nature of the recommendations.

An especially difficult issue proved to be that of co-operation and networking between different players (training institutions, companies, employment offices, ...) the necessity of which had been emphasized in many a set of recommendations. On the one hand, cooperation and networking seemed indispensable for successful and effective work with disadvantage groups. Not only in order to obtain synergy effects and cost minimization but also to improve the understanding in the actors involved in the situation of disadvantaged groups, to optimise activities and measures taken and to improve outreach to target groups. On the other hand co-operation/networking pose difficult challenges: communication and discussion becomes more strenuous and time-consuming, the “clash” of different organisational cultures and rationales may block progress, and different and sometimes conflicting interests need to be taken into account and balanced.

On the whole it appeared that, despite the many efforts taken, disadvantaging conditions in adult education had hardly been reduced for the groups in

questions. In 2001, the Federal Government then launched a huge programme, which was to tackle, amongst other things, these problems. This programme, **Lernende Regionen** (Learning Regions) is running over a period of five years, until 2006. Funds allocated to this programme amount to approx. 118 Mio Euro, 51 Mio of which are provided from the European Social Fund. The programme is designed to support the setting up of regional networks, which are expected to develop and implement innovative measures in adult education and training. The networks shall contribute to the development of new 'learning cultures' at regional level. In particular, they are expected to capitalise on the experiences gained in earlier pilot projects and to transfer these experiences to new contexts and settings.

The eligibility criteria for funding (www.lernende-regionen.info) show a clear focus on the issues of outreach to new target groups. Only networks will be supported that:

- contribute to raising demand for education and training and to enhance customer orientation of the educational offers,
- are specifically targeted to mobilise „new learners“, especially groups who are little used to formal learning settings and are disadvantaged,
- take actively part in large marketing campaigns involving different actors, such as the “Lernfest” (the German Adult Learners Week),
- take part in transregional experience exchange.

Further, networks are required to

- promote equal opportunities of men and women in education/training as well as in the labour market and at the workplace,
- comprise significant training institutions operating at local or regional level as well as other members, especially from the areas of labour market, employment and economic development.
- become sustainable (able to pay for themselves after the public funding period).

The first 50 or so projects/networks were selected and started work in summer 2001. They started with the so-called 'planning phase' which stretches over one year (but can be extended). The planning phase is meant to build up the networks and design innovative measures, which are then tested and implemented in the second, the "implementation" phase which may last up to five years, max. until 2006. At the end of the planning phase networks have to submit a second application in order to receive funding for the implementation phase. The

programme and its impacts are being evaluated by a consortium led by the DIE. This evaluation will essentially focus on five areas:

- the cooperation and networking of key players,
- the profiling and development of the 'educational landscape' at regional level through the activities of the networks,
- the target groups of the networks,
- the impact on the regional labour market and employment situation,
- the transfer potential.

As regards the key issue of target groups, the evaluation will look into the question of how the networking of different actors can contribute to reducing access barriers and attracting new participants, especially those at a disadvantage, to adult education and training. The hypothesis that networking has a crucial impact on the demand side is indeed widely accepted, but so far still lacks sufficient empirical evidence. The question will be whether the networking activities are actually the cause of (or capable of) raising demand in target groups that are disadvantaged and threatened by exclusion. With these and many other research questions the evaluation promises to provide interesting insights into mechanisms relating to demand. At this stage however, it is still too early to give any judgement on the effects of the individual networks or of the 'learning region' programme as a whole. Most of the – now approx. 80 – networks funded under the programme are at this point just embarking on their "implementation phase".

For the purpose of this study another example was therefore selected which started already in 1995. While operating on a smaller scale than the more recent 'learning regions', the "Job-Rotation" project shows just as these a pronounced focus on cooperation, networking and partnership building when it comes to attract disadvantaged groups to learning activities.

Job Rotation – German at the Workplace

"Job Rotation – German at the Workplace" is a project of the Volkshochschulen-Zweckverband Velbert-Heiligenhaus (the Community Adult Education Centre in Velbert-Heiligenhaus, a middle-sized town in the Land of North Rhine-Westphalia). It targets migrant workers with German language needs, offering to

the companies and the workers individually tailored one-week intensive language courses in the context of a job rotation scheme.

Background and Start

Velbert-Heiligenhaus lies in the centre of North-Rhine-Westphalia, a region whose industrial make-up is characterized essentially by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) processing metal and producing, for example, locks for the car-industry. The largest companies in the region employ up to 3.000 people. About half of the companies however have less than 150 employees. In some of these enterprises up to 50 per cent of the workers are migrants, mostly Turkish, the majority of which are un-skilled or semi-skilled workers.

Structural and technological changes in the companies from the beginning of the 1990s brought with them increased language and communicative needs at all levels of the workforce. Not only were workers confronted with changing manufacturing techniques and new machines and must be able to understand instructions or give reports on technical problems in German. At the same time, the introduction of quality management systems in the companies, which involve every group of employees and the introduction of team work required increased communicative ability on the part of the workers at all levels.

The problem in the region is that most SMEs do not have the capacities to offer relevant language courses to their employees with migration background. Moreover, these companies are often reluctant to release their employees from work for training because they cannot do without a single worker. In this situation, the VHS Velbert-Heiligenhaus, together with the local Metal Trade Union, first developed, a "German at the Workplace" course for the attendance of which workers could ask "Bildungsurlaub" (paid educational leave) from their employers. However, since paid educational leave is rather unpopular with most company managers for the above-mentioned reason, this offer was not widely accepted. Talks between VHS staff and company managers revealed that companies were in many cases quite willing to have their foreign employees trained in German and would also pay for the courses provided that the training took place outside the working hours. The VHS developed and then offered a number of such courses under these conditions. However, it became soon clear that the participating employees were often neither able nor motivated to cope with the required

amount of study after an intensive 8 hours working day. So the courses were often ineffective.

In this situation the “Job Rotation – German at the Workplace” project was developed. The project is placed – and co-funded – under the framework “Job-Rotation” programme that started in 1995 and is supported by the Land North-Rhine-Westphalia and the European Social Funds. This programme is aimed at promoting in-service vocational training, taking into account the particular situation of SMEs. It pursues the objectives to encourage the companies to train their employees, to qualify workers through customised training and thirdly, to promote the re-integration of unemployed workers into the labour market. Companies interested in training their staff and willing to give them one-week’s leave, receive special support from the job-rotation programme: Interested employees may attend an intensive forty-hour week course on a vocationally-related issue. During that time they are replaced at work by unemployed workers. During the five days of training, the salary of the trainees is paid by the Society for Innovative Employment Policies (Gesellschaft für innovative Beschäftigungspolitik). The substitutes on the other hand continue to receive their unemployment benefit for the duration of the replacement. For the substitutes, the replacement last four weeks: they start to work at the company two weeks before the actual replacement to get familiar with the workplace and the tasks, and continue for another week afterwards to hand over. The only costs charged to the company are thus – part of - the training fees¹. All this makes it attractive for the companies to take part.

The framework programme “Job-Rotation” is open to all workers and includes any kind of vocational training related to their work. It is not specifically targeted to migrants nor to language course provision. In actual fact, there is no explicit policy in Germany aiming at promoting workplace-based second language competence in adult migrants.

The focus on that particular target group and on second language skills in the “Job Rotation – German at the Workplace” project is due to the commitment of the VHS Velbert-Heiligenhaus to increasing the participation of that group in training as well as to improving their social and vocational integration in general. The

same is true of the local trade union with whom the VHS cooperates closely in this initiative. The particular sensibility of the responsible persons in the VHS and trade union about issues of vocational training and the situation of migrants has made them invest a great deal of energy in developing that type of provision and ensuring the conditions for successful implementation.

The partnership

The partnership embraces:

- the local Centre for AE (Volkshochschul-Zweckverband Velbert-Heiligenhaus)
- companies
- the Society for Innovative Employment Policies (GIB)
- the local employment office
- the local Metal Trade Union

At the VHS Velbert-Heiligenhaus the deputy director, who is also the person in charge of attracting new target groups, is responsible for the co-ordination of the “Job-Rotation” project. In addition, a varying number of free-lance and part-time staff are involved in the project, mainly as teachers, but quite often these colleagues are also engaged in building contacts and persuading company managers to take part in the project. A key role in approaching the companies and winning them over is also played by the trade union with its good contact network. In the companies, the workers’ representative councils (Betriebsräte) form a crucial link to the workforce. They help to approach and recruit potential trainees in the companies. The employment office chooses among the registered unemployed suitable persons to replace the potential trainees at work and recommends them to the companies. As mentioned above, both the employment office and the GIB contribute further to the project by covering the wages of the workers undergoing the training as well as their substitutes.

Development of a “Job Rotation – German at the Workplace” project

Before the course

1 Part of the course fees is covered by the “Job Rotation” programme (20 EURO per participant per day). The cost of a typical five-day-course of 40 hours with up to 10 participants is about 1.600 EURO.

In a first step, the company management is approached by staff of the VHS and persuaded to have workplace related German language course organized for their migrant workers under the job rotation scheme, pointing to the benefits they may gain from workers with improved German language competence. Potential trainees are identified, often with the help of the workers' representative council. They are approached and motivated in talks to take part such a course. If the management agrees, a contract is then signed between company and VHS in which usually the following issues are agreed:

- carrying out of a workplace related language needs analysis in the company (the costs for this analysis are partly covered by the Job Rotation programme),
- place and time of the language course,
- type of the certificate given to participants, project evaluation, possible follow-up trainings.

The companies draw up profiles for the required substitutes and choose among the persons proposed on this basis by the employment centre the most suitable ones. The substitutes start to work in the companies two weeks before the language course takes place.

A language needs analysis is then carried out in the company. According to the number of staff this may take up to three/four days. The trainers of the VHS carry out interviews with the management, the workers' representative council and future learners. With the help of a checklist developed by the German Institute for Adult Education they identify the relevant communicative tasks with which the future learners are confronted at their workplace. They collect authentic written materials (such as job profiles, instructions, information leaflet, forms etc.) and make a video of key situations at the workplace in which the trainees are typically involved. Furthermore, interviews with the potential trainees are carried out to ensure that their perception of training needs are integrated into the analysis as well. These personal talks are also aimed at reducing fears and existing psychological barriers – often due to negative learning experiences in the past. The potential trainees' are encouraged to communicate their expectations and to assess their own language needs. The trainers try also to retrieve some information on the background, learning biography and the level of language competence of the trainees.

The results of the field investigation as a whole will define the course design. On the basis of the analysis the provider negotiates the course content and aims that can be realistically reached with the management and with the workers' representative council.

The Course

The course lasts one week (40 hours) and usually takes place at the VHS. The size of the group is 6-10 trainees. The VHS Velbert-Heiligenhaus has extended experience in working with learners who have limited formal education and may not be used to formal learning arrangements. Great attention is paid by the trainers in counselling those learners during the course. For this, the trainers receive support from the VHS which provides coaching and advice.

Before the course, a learning contract is set up between the VHS and the learners and signed by both parties. It aims at making the provision more transparent for the learners and helping them reflect on the role and responsibility of both parties involved in the learning process: teachers and learners. During the course, the trainees keep records ("learning diaries") of what they have learned. Short learning units and didactical reduction techniques are used to support and maintain the motivation of the learners.

The courses are completely tailor made and customized on the basis of a language needs analysis carried out on site. The curriculum is thus centred around the concrete learning needs concerning the daily requirements at the workplace. Course content and aims include typical communicative tasks and situations at the workplace. They might for example look like this:

- describe own workplace and tasks
- talk to the foreman on the phone
- instruct a new colleague
- report defects (orally / in writing)
- read and understand safety instructions
- participate in a team meeting: express own opinion, ask for explanations, discuss controversial issues etc.

The authentic materials collected during the language needs analysis are employed in the lessons. The video made at the workplace has proved a particular apt tool since the participants recognize themselves in their familiar work

environment and find it easier to describe their workplace, tasks, tools and machines with the help of these pictures.

Course evaluation

Evaluation plays an important part in the course concept and part of it is an interim feedback with the parties involved. During the course there are regular feedback sessions. The learning success is evaluated by means of regular tasks and a final test at the end of the week - which is rather popular with almost all trainees as it again makes them realise what they have achieved. At the end of the course trainees fill in a questionnaire to evaluate the course and there are individual talks with trainees on perspectives for future training. The VHS holds evaluation meetings with the company management and the workers' representative council. Approximately a fortnight after the completion of the course, the management ask the trainees about their experiences. The VHS and teachers evaluate their own work on the basis of the questionnaire and the feedback received in the different sessions and from the different stakeholders.

After the course

The participants receive a certificate issued by the VHS stating the content of the course, the result of the final test as well as a detailed assessment of the individually achieved competences. The assessment does not state any deficits. Rather it tries to advise the trainee about realistic follow-up options and future perspectives.

The contract between the VHS and the company includes a follow-up to the one-week intensive course: every three weeks, the VHS organises a course on Saturday morning, which is open to all participants of the intensive courses. These Saturday sessions are aimed at maintaining the motivation to learn in the participants. They deal with topics of current interest or take up issues dealt with in the intensive courses. Approx. 40% of the participants in the intensive courses make use of this offer. In a few cases it was even possible to motivate trainees from the one week intensive course to enrol on a regular German language course in the VHS programme.

Conclusion

The project which combines a job rotation model with workplace based German language provision opens up access to formal learning settings to a number of low-qualified people which are clearly underrepresented in continuing education and training. With the improved language competence and communicative skills trainees acquire a key qualification for lifelong learning at the same time.

One-week courses are of course too short to impact significantly on the trainees' German competence. Experience has nevertheless shown that it has given many of them a push forward, has strengthened their self-confidence and encouraged them to pursue longer-term plans to improve their German further.

Not only the trainee's benefit from the courses. The "Job Rotation – German at the Workplace" is based upon a partnership, which allows a win-win effect for all parties involved. Companies get better qualified workers, communication problems at the workplace are reduced, work is made more effective. Unemployed people get a chance to find new employment. More than 50% of the substitutes have actually been taken on by the firms after the replacement period. The fears, voiced by some, of substitutes posing a threat to the trainees do not seem to have occurred. Nevertheless the substitutes are the most vulnerable point in the programme. Problems are mostly caused by an early dropout of substitutes. And sometimes, a course has to be cancelled at the very last moment after careful (and extremely time-consuming) preparations, because there are not enough unemployed with the required skills to replace the would-be trainees.

This does not affect the overall success of the "Job Rotation – German at the Workplace" project, for which the VHS Velbert-Heiligenhaus has received much positive feedback from the parties involved. So far approx. 100 trainees participated in workplace related language courses of the VHS. The project will be continued, albeit in slightly different form, since the framework programme "Job rotation" will expire at the end of this year. It will however be possible to preserve the main features of the "Job Rotation – German at the Workplace" initiative beyond that date: a partnership with win-win-effect for all involved and with the potential of motivating educationally disadvantaged people to lifelong learning.

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