



GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE USE OF TERMINOLOGY IN ADULT LITERACY

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Preamble

In 2014, the ELINET network distributed a questionnaire about the use of terminology in adult literacy work. The results of this questionnaire were discussed at an ELINET seminar at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in Hamburg in January 2015. The Hamburg Seminar provided the opportunity for ELINET partners to air challenges and concerns, and share good practice, in describing and referring to adults who may have literacy needs or goals. ELINET can play an important role in guiding the wider population, including politicians, policy-makers and the media, in their use of such terminology. The seminar participants recognised the vital importance of ensuring that in our advocacy, research and practice around adult literacy we are mindful of the impact our use of language can have in shaping impressions of the needs and capabilities of adult literacy learners. We considered the range of terminology used to talk about adult literacy and adult literacy learners and agreed upon seven guiding principles that should inform our choices of language when writing or speaking about adult literacy.

Guidelines

We will aim for terminology which:

1. provides precision appropriate to communicative purpose
2. communicates transparently and simply, as appropriate to audience, purpose and context
3. is respectful
4. is positive; that is, where possible avoids contributing to a deficit model
5. recognises that "people are not at levels, skills are"
6. recognises that 'a beginner reader [or writer] is not a beginner thinker'
7. is appropriate to linguistic and cultural context, as well as to audience and purpose

Our uses of terminology will always be within larger texts, interactions or discourses and we aim for these to:

- recognize the core tension between the desire for precision and the complexity of literacy
- acknowledge the potential need for different terms to be used for different audiences while working towards convergence - part of a wider role of educating the public and policy-makers
- take account of the fact that terms created to describe groups will be applied to individuals - the terms we use will be taken out of context and we should attempt to anticipate this
- recognize that individuals and their skills and practices shift and develop over the lifecourse and across different life domains - literacy development is lifelong and lifewide