



EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK OF GOOD PRACTICE

in Raising Literacy Levels of Children, Adolescents and Adults

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction**..... 4
 - 1.1 Purpose and background of the framework..... 4
 - 1.2 What do we consider as “good practice”?..... 5
 - 1.3 Structure of the Framework: age groups and literacy policy areas 7
- 2 Creating a more literate environment**..... 8
 - 2.1 Family Literacy programmes 8
 - 2.2 Book Gifting Programmes..... 9
 - 2.3 Emergent Literacy..... 10
 - 2.4 Reading (and writing) promotion programmes for children and adolescents 11
 - 2.5 Features of a positive literate environment for adults..... 12
- 3 Improving the quality of teaching** 14
 - 3.1 Comprehensive literacy programmes..... 14
 - 3.2 Programmes fostering digital literacy and multi-literacy skills 16
 - 3.3 Literacy curricula 18
 - 3.4 Screenings/assessment tools for identifying literacy learners’ needs..... 21
 - 3.5 Literacy instruction in schools 24
 - 3.6 Teacher education and professional development..... 26
- 4 Increasing participation, inclusion and equity**..... 30
 - 4.1 Programmes offering provision of literacy learning opportunities to disadvantaged groups 30
- 5 Conclusion**..... 33
- References..... 34

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and background of the Framework

Literacy is fundamental to human development. It enables people to live full and meaningful lives and to contribute towards the enrichment of the communities in which we all live. By literacy we mean the ability to read and write at a level whereby individuals can effectively understand and use written communication, be it in print or digital media.

Literacy is an essential prerequisite for all forms of learning. In the knowledge-based societies of the 21st Century, with the rapid spread of new technologies and a constantly changing work environment, literacy learning is no longer limited to childhood and adolescence but must be recognised as a lifelong need and requirement.¹

The European literacy challenge

In Europe one in five 15-year-olds and nearly 55 million adults lack basic literacy skills. This increases their risk of poverty and social exclusion, limiting opportunities for employment, cultural and civil participation, lifelong learning and personal growth.

The European Commission recognises that, since the alarming results of the first PISA study (OECD 2001), there has been little improvement in literacy. Yet, with the right support in place, children, young people and adults can develop the literacy skills that they need to function effectively and independently in society.

Against this background the European Literacy Policy Network ELINET was established by the European Commission in February 2014 to complete an ambitious two-year work programme. ELINET had 78 members in 28 European countries representing a wide range of players in the field of literacy: literacy networks, education ministries, national agencies, transnational and international organisations, foundations, NGOs, universities, research centres, teacher training institutions, volunteer organisations and other stakeholder groups².

ELINET brought together researchers, practitioners, professionals and volunteers who work across age-groups and sectors, covering family literacy, pre-primary and primary children, adolescents and adults; informal, non-formal and formal learning; digital literacy and reading for pleasure, and much more.

ELINET aims to improve literacy policies in its members' countries in order to reduce the number of children, young people and adults with poor literacy skills. The ambitious aim that inspires all of ELINET's work has been formulated in the **European Declaration of the Right to Literacy**, which was launched at the European Literacy Conference in Amsterdam in January 2016:

“Everyone in Europe has the right to acquire literacy. EU Member States should ensure that people of all ages, regardless of social class, religion, ethnicity, origin and gender, are provided with the necessary resources and opportunities to develop sufficient

¹ European Declaration of the Right to Literacy, ELINET 2016, Introduction.

² Find out more about ELINET on our website: www.eli-net.eu - in the section “About Us” you will find a detailed description of all ELINET member organisations.

and sustainable literacy skills in order to effectively understand and use written communication, be it in handwritten, print or digital form.”

While the **European Declaration of the Right to Literacy** is targeted primarily at policy-makers and education authorities across Europe, the **European Framework of Good Practice** addresses practitioners as well: literacy professionals and volunteers working in the multiple areas which affect children's, adolescents' and adults' literacy development. The Framework is intended to provide guidance for all those who are involved in designing projects or programmes that support children, young people and adults in improving their literacy.

The European Framework of Good Practice is the result of collaboration among more than 100 literacy experts, researchers, and practitioners. We hope that it will inspire the development and improvement of European literacy policies.

1.2 What do we consider as “good practice”?

We focused our work on two major objectives defined by the Call from the European Commission (2013):

- 1) **“Develop country-specific knowledge** in order to analyse and report on Member States' current policies, statistical information, good practices and initiatives on literacy performance”;
- 2) **“Identify good policy practices in raising literacy levels** among children, young people and adults, particularly focusing on low achieving students and adults with inadequate levels of functional literacy.”

Related to those two objectives we defined four major outcomes in our project proposal:

- A set of 30 Country Reports on literacy policy and performance of all age groups in each of the ELINET countries³
- A foundational “Frame of Reference” for the country reports which explains our common (cross-age groups) theoretical approach⁴
- A European Framework of Good Practice in Literacy Policies (EFGP) covering all age groups and relevant policy areas that can be applied in all European countries, and
- A collection of Examples of Good Practice from ELINET member countries covering all areas and age groups⁵.

The Framework presented here is “based on international research results concerning the requirements of literacy development in the different age groups, the most urgent needs of support for low literacy achievers and the most successful measures to address these needs” (ELINET Application, August 2013).

We took an **iterative approach** to developing the Framework of Good Practice and selecting examples of good practice. We began **‘top-down’**, drawing on international research and the common framework of the country reports to define the structure of the framework and preliminary features of

³ We had to produce 30 reports for our 28 member countries, as for Belgium-Flanders and Belgium-Wallonie we needed two separate reports as well as for GB-England and GB-Scotland.

⁴ The ELINET Country Reports’ “Frame of Reference” as well as the completed country reports are to be found on the ELINET website www.eli-net.eu in section “Research”.

⁵ Those examples are to be found on the ELINET website in the Good Practice section.

good practice for the different literacy policy areas. Based on those features we collected and analysed about 150 good practice examples covering all areas and age-groups. In our Second Network Conference in April 2015 in Budapest, the teams working on children and adolescents agreed on a common procedure of reviewing the submitted examples and developed 8 general criteria to apply to the reviews of those examples:

- 1) A clear focus on struggling readers/writers
- 2) A clear and sound conceptual basis
- 3) A clear definition of objectives
- 4) Clear documentation concerning the implementation of the programme
- 5) Transparent documentation of the evaluation (if applicable)
- 6) Transferability of the project / programme
- 7) Transparent information on and documentation of outcomes (if applicable)
- 8) Sustainability of project results.

The team leaders of both teams (children / adolescents) appointed about 50 ELINET members as *reviewers* for the different topics, according to their expertise. About 20 of those reviewers were appointed to coordinate the reviews within one topic / one age-group. Furthermore, we agreed on a transparent review process: Each submitted example (in teams 2 and 3) should be reviewed by one or two independent ELINET reviewers, one *topic coordinator* and the relevant *team leader* (children / adolescents) for final approval or – in the event of disagreement between reviewers – for appointing one more reviewer.

Based on the 8 general criteria of good practice which we defined at the Budapest conference, a review template was developed which all reviewers were required to use for submitting their reviews. We carried out pilot-reviews of two examples, in order to pilot our criteria and our review template and used the results of this piloting to improve the usability of the review template.

Working within a much smaller field, the team working on adults chose a different approach. Alongside the open call, which produced very few adult-specific examples, we drew on the expertise and knowledge of the network to identify examples of good practice in each of the literacy policy areas, which we felt met the eight criteria outlined above.

All review coordinators and the three team leaders were finally invited to a Good Practice Workshop in Cologne in November 2015, where the preliminary draft of the **Good Practice Framework** was revised and refined, based on the '**bottom-up**' analysis of the features of good practice as identified in the multiple examples which had been reviewed so far. One result of the workshop was to move away from the 8 preliminary criteria of good practice mentioned above, as we found them too general and not applicable to all examples; instead the contributors to this Framework agreed to work out more **specific features of good practice** for the different policy areas and practice fields covered by this framework. All authors, however, are well aware that this framework is a "**living document**" and thus open to change in response to the development of good practices themselves.

1.3 Structure of the Framework: age groups and literacy policy areas

The Final Report of the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (2012) concluded that for EU Member States to find the most efficient, effective ways of addressing the literacy needs of all their citizens there were **three key issues** that all Member States should focus on:

- Creating a more literate environment
- Improving the quality of teaching
- Increasing participation and inclusion⁶.

In our framework, we built upon those three issues and defined the “policy areas” covered by this framework by subdividing those general topics as follows:

1) Creating a more literate environment

- Family literacy programmes
- Book-gifting programmes
- Emergent literacy
- Reading (and writing) promotion programmes
- Creating a positive literate environment for adults

2) Improving the quality of teaching

- Comprehensive literacy programmes (including adult literacy provision)
- Programmes fostering digital literacy and multi-literacies
- Literacy curricula
- Screenings/assessment tools for identifying literacy learners needs
- Literacy instruction in schools including programmes for struggling literacy learners
- Teacher education and professional development

3) Increasing participation, inclusion and equity

- Programmes offering provision of literacy learning opportunities to disadvantaged groups.

The framework is structured to address these three key issues, considering what good practice is for **three age groups**:

- children (0 – 10/12 years), with differentiation between pre-primary and primary,
- adolescents (10/12 – 18 years)
- adults (16 – 65 years and beyond).

⁶ EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, Final Report, 2012, p. 38. However, ELINET complemented the third issue by adding „equity“.

2 Creating a more literate environment

In contemporary societies demands on literacy are becoming more and more complex for everybody in all sectors of private and public life. Children, young people and adults therefore need to be provided with a rich and inspiring “literate environment” in order to develop the necessary skills and attitudes to deal with these increasingly complex literacy demands:

“It all starts with motivation. So the primary objective of a literate environment is to increase literacy motivation and engagement by encouraging and supporting reading and writing for pleasure. This means cultivating a culture of reading⁷, increasing the visibility and availability of reading materials and promoting reading in all its forms, through diverse materials, online and offline”

(EU High Level Group 2012: 39).

In a rich literate environment books and other reading materials, in print or digital, are easily available at home, in schools, libraries and beyond. Motivation and support for engaging with literacy starts in the family and in pre-school institutions. Schools and public libraries offer inspiring programmes and opportunities for students to access appealing reading materials and to engage in reading and writing for pleasure.

2.1 Family Literacy programmes

Parents play a central role in children’s emergent literacy development. They are children’s first teachers, and shape children’s oral language and communication abilities as well as their attitudes to reading by being good literacy role models, providing reading materials, and reading to the child. Family literacy programmes address parents or other adult caretakers and may have different aims:

- to improve young children’s language and literacy development
- to improve the literacy skills of children and parents (“dual track”)
- to support parents to enhance their children’s early literacy development.

While some family literacy programmes focus only on measurable literacy skills (e.g. as assessed in test scores), other programmes take a more holistic approach by improving parents’ literacy and parenting skills. Programmes may, for example, complement a focus on literacy skills with an emphasis on child or parent non-cognitive skills, e.g. self-regulation or good parenting practices.

Although the ultimate target of family literacy programmes is children and their parents, the main actors are professionals involved in child care and education (e.g., health professionals, educators/teachers, public librarians, social workers, others).

Family literacy programmes may also differ with regard to the family members that are involved at various stages of the implementation process. Many programmes focus mainly on literacy or emergent literacy development by bringing children and parents together for shared reading or joint instruction in a classroom-like setting. In dual track programmes, this approach may be supplemented by sessions in which parents receive specialist instruction from an adult literacy expert, while children receive

⁷ Although “literacy” refers to “written language” and thus comprises reading and writing, our focus here and in the submitted examples as well is on reading. Most of the examples were related to reading promotion programmes targeted at fostering “reading for pleasure” and stable reading habits.

specialist instruction from a child literacy expert. Other implementation strategies include approaches in which only parents have direct contact with instructors. In some mother-child education programmes, for example, instructors work with mothers; these mothers then work with their children at home to apply the lessons learned.

Features of successful family literacy programmes

There is a wide range of family literacy programme types and objectives, but some features of successful programmes can be identified. Such programmes are informed by understanding of the literacy needs of all participants, children and adults, and emphasise the importance of reading for pleasure and the parent-child bonds that are strengthened through shared reading.

In successful family literacy programmes:

- Health care professionals are involved in programme design and implementation. These professionals are in touch with the family from the first months of life, are usually trusted by parents, and help to facilitate universality and continuity.
- Information is provided for parents about the importance of reading to their children a variety of books and other texts, appropriate for each developmental stage.
- Language courses are provided for migrant parents who do not speak the language of the host country.
- Support is available for migrant families in creating a culture of reading for pleasure by using "silent books" (i.e. picture books without text so that parents can tell the story based on illustrations) in the first phases of the programme.
- Strong working partnerships are built across a number of policy areas. In successful programmes, there is an emphasis on reaching out to families through a broad range of family services. Programmes may thus involve paediatricians, nurses, libraries, and early childhood education and care centres, among others. This is likely to require multisector involvement and multidisciplinary in family literacy promotion through the establishment of formal agreements among various agencies and professionals involved in providing services for children, and through the offer of multidisciplinary training courses for all professionals involved.
- Policy-makers commit publicly to the importance of literacy education in the family, and to the inclusion of family literacy programmes among policy priorities.
- An evidence-based approach to family literacy programmes is taken to provide policymakers and partners with evidence of their impact.
- Support is provided for the establishment and expansion of book-gifting programmes.

2.2 Book-gifting programmes

Book-gifting programmes promote reading in the home through the distribution of free books for children and their families. In most cases, book-gifting programmes are directed towards families with children 0-3 years though there are examples of schemes for older children. Programmes range from simple book distribution schemes to those that combine guidance, additional resources and added value activities.

Book-gifting programmes are funded through governmental bodies, charities and commercial organisations and generally involve a number of partners such as publishers, health services, libraries and early years/kindergarten. Book ownership, as part of a broader literacy environment, is associated

with language and literacy development and later attainment; receiving books as gifts and visiting libraries and bookshops are positively associated with reading attainment. Book-gifting schemes are most effective when book-gifting intersects with the broad range of provision for early years development.

Features of successful book-gifting programmes

- Books are chosen that are accessible in terms of age, interest and culture
- Evidence-based messages for parents in book packs encourage shared reading in the home
- Added-value activities are provided by local partners to encourage parents and children to participate in fun book-related events, and access points for referrals to family literacy programmes
- Library joining is actively promoted and encouraged
- Partnerships with health, early years and other professionals encourage access to and participation in book-gifting programmes among all families
- Government funding and publisher support contribute to cost-effective and long-term sustainable programmes.

2.3 Emergent literacy

Emergent Literacy covers all activities, projects and programmes in pre-school institutions with the aim of preparing young children for the formal teaching of literacy, especially to build motivation for literacy acquisition in school. Learning to read and write is a developmental process that starts very early in life and is characterized by the child's growing insights into the function and features of written language and the relationship between written and oral language. Long before children are taught formally to read and write in school, in interaction with adults, and from their experiences with books and other literacy activities, they develop emergent literacy skills, knowledge and understanding, i.e. initial understanding of the relations between elements of speech and elements of written language, or first concepts about books and print.

In pre-school, children can be prepared for formal instruction in school. Pre-school teachers should provide a literacy environment in which children learn and engage in the communicative functions of reading and writing with the aim of developing curiosity and motivation to learn to read and write in school (Tafa 2008). Pre-school programmes should focus on developing children's emergent literacy skills through playful experience, not by systematic training in phonics and teaching the alphabet. There is no evidence that systematic instruction of reading in pre-school has any benefit for future learning.

Features of successful activities and programmes to foster emergent literacy

The following features are regarded as important and should be components of a literacy curriculum or of activities in pre-school institutions:

- Children are encouraged to develop oral language skills with the aim of improving their clarity of speech (volume and enunciation, both of which depend on and reinforce self-confidence) and broadening their vocabulary, grammatical accuracy and range as well as their communicative abilities.
- Children are offered opportunities to develop listening and narrative skills

- Children experience different functions of language in social play, role play, in conflict situations and problem-solving.
- Children are often read to with the aim of familiarizing them with decontextualized language and the tighter syntax of written text as well as increasing interest and motivation to read.
- Children are motivated to engage in writing activities: preparing picture books, using writing in communicative contexts and for different purposes, exploring different materials for painting, drawing, or emergent writing. These activities also help children develop their fine motor control, which is needed for good handwriting and use of the keyboard.
- Children are encouraged to develop metalinguistic skills. The ability to shift attention from content to form may be fostered in language games, by using rhymes, tongue-twisters and poems, by singing and clapping syllables and by identifying relations in morphologically related words.
- With specific tasks, embedded in playful contexts, children can be prepared for phonemic awareness, the ability to analyse words into sounds and to synthesize sounds into words, which is an essential part of word recognition (“I spy with my little eye something beginning with... [initial sound]”).
- Children are actively engaged in literacy activities in print-rich classrooms intended to help them understand the communicative nature of reading and writing: writing is for sharing thoughts, sending messages, remembering something important, while reading is for understanding others’ thoughts and feelings, getting information and pleasure.
- Children are engaged in literacy activities intended to help them understand that print carries meaning, as well as the “technical language” of books (e.g. page, line, word, sentence, cover of the book).
- Children are actively engaged in reading meanings into picture books and illustrated informational books.

2.4 Reading (and writing) promotion programmes for children and adolescents

Reading promotion programmes make an important contribution to reading motivation and in helping to create a positive culture for reading. Such programmes or ‘promotions’ stimulate and motivate readers, put authors, publishers, bookshops and libraries in touch with readers, and make the enjoyment of reading visible to the wider public. The rich variety of reading promotion programmes and the extent to which they are received by the public at large are important indicators of the culture of reading of a particular region or nation. Increasingly, programmes should concentrate not only on reading but on writing as well, as there is no writing without reading and because both activities are often combined in literacy practices: reading and writing are separate activities but also offer, for the literate person, complementary ways of communicating.

Reading and writing promotion programmes are particularly effective in generating positive images of literacy in the media and therefore in public perception, which reinforces the messages, of professionals in classrooms and elsewhere, of the fundamental importance of literacy.

Empirical research up to now has focused on reading (and writing) for pleasure and indicates that regular reading for pleasure improves the literacy skills of children, young people and adults, which can lead to greater participation in society and wider employment opportunities. This includes access to appropriate learning environments in and outside schools as well as committed and well-trained educators who support students’ engagement in reading and writing for pleasure, with access to

books and other reading materials in all formats, including digital media. Support is needed from parents, teachers and the wider community, including publishers and booksellers, schools and public libraries, and health and early years professionals. Of special importance are those programmes that address struggling readers and writers and bring diverse cultural backgrounds or generations into meaningful exchange.

Features of successful programmes

There is a myriad of innovative approaches to reading promotion, some long-term national programmes or schemes, alongside programmes focused specifically on particular groups or in particular localities. The common factor is that they all aim to motivate and enthuse the target audience for reading (and/or writing), encouraging participation, and/or enabling an exchange of views or other forms of personal expression.

- There are regular promotions, with activities that happen in a special place and include lively encounters with innovative fictional characters and the ‘real people’ behind them.
- Attractive materials such as stickers, cards, bookmarks, are made available and serve as motivation to participate.
- Children, even those who are less confident in reading or struggle with writing, are engaged in reaching special literacy goals, through fun competitions and other novel approaches such as:
 - Multi-media approaches including digital links
 - Integrated cultural experiences: painting, performance, sports or music linked to reading and writing in order to address disadvantaged groups and promote social inclusion
 - An interactional component: tasks that combine reading and writing as social practice.
- Institutional cooperation exists between schools, kindergartens, libraries etc. to combine expertise and strengthen promotion.

The success of reading and writing promotion programmes is often measured by the scale of participation, but the real value of such programmes is the extent to which they succeed in stimulating participants to actively engage in reading or writing and come to value the relevance – and power – of literacy in their own lives.

2.5 Features of a positive literate environment for adults

Adults’ reading and writing skills and practices respond to and are shaped by the demands on their reading and writing in any particular domain, and on the support they receive to improve their literacy levels. Accordingly, consideration should be given to the literacy opportunities and support available to adults in all areas of their lives. It is important to offer a broad range of reading and writing opportunities so that adults are both enabled and motivated to make use of their literacy skills and knowledge across many domains in their lives, for pleasure, relaxation, work and practical purposes. As adults read in many domains it is clear that the literate environment involves different institutions, and so systematic cooperation between policy-makers is of great importance.

Adults engage with written texts in the workplace and the home, when accessing government services and responding to government demands for information, when using public transport and healthcare services, when dealing with their children’s schools, and of course through the marketing of goods and services, which generate a great deal of the written text that adults encounter. They also engage in

reading for pleasure and for a wider understanding of themselves and the world in which they live. The texts that they read may be in print or on a screen, with digital texts representing an increasing proportion of the texts encountered. Consideration of the uses of written texts in each of these domains, both in print and digital form, is vital for the creation of a positive literate environment.

A positive literate environment is one in which:

- adults are encouraged and supported in engaging with written material;
- care is taken in workplaces and other public spaces to ensure that written communication is accessible and that employees are supported in using reading and writing as part of their working practices;
- guidelines on clarity of written communication are agreed and followed by organisations, both public and private, that engage in written communication with the public;
- examples of poor written communication are identified, tactful support is offered where needed, and good practice is promoted and celebrated;
- national communication campaigns increase awareness of issues around adult literacy and contribute to de-stigmatisation of poor literacy among adults;
- adults with poor literacy are encouraged to join flexible programmes of adult literacy education;
- there is a comprehensive and coherent national infrastructure for adult literacy provision;
- reading and writing for pleasure are promoted and celebrated as of central importance to national culture;
- there is a vibrant and varied culture of national and local publishing and a well-resourced network of public libraries that are accessible by public transport.

3 Improving the quality of teaching

“Access to education means little without high-quality provision and specialised support targeted at those who most need it.”

(EU High Level Group 2012: 46)

The quality of *teaching* is a key determinant of students’ educational success. To improve the quality of teaching for all ages, important aspects need to be considered: coherent literacy curricula, high-quality literacy instruction, well-qualified teachers, and creative and coherent print and digital material. In schools there is a need for regular screening and assessments to identify struggling literacy learners, in order to provide early intervention and support for those with literacy difficulties. In adult provision accurate screening to place learners in appropriate provision and ongoing assessment to monitor their progress are of great importance.

3.1 Comprehensive literacy programmes

The term ‘comprehensive literacy programmes’ is used to describe programmes and practices that cut across different levels of education and usually include actors from different institutions (e.g. in and outside schools). Comprehensive literacy programmes are designed for specific target populations, whether for individual students, for whole class, school, regional or national schemes and for all age groups as well. The main objective of comprehensive literacy programmes is to support the reading and writing performance *and* motivation of all students in all educational institutions.

Features of good practice for all age groups:

- Literacy is approached as a life-wide and life-long learning process that cuts across all individual, social and cultural contexts throughout life.
- The support for the development of motivation and achievement in literacy is long-lasting or sufficiently intensive to make a lasting difference.

Features of good practice for children and adolescents:

- In schools, literacy is the focus of comprehensive school development programmes engaging all teachers, parents, librarians, other staff and volunteers.
- In programmes focusing on schools and developing the teaching of literacy, training for teachers or professional development activities are provided.
- School programmes use a range of research-supported materials and methods combined with explicit teaching of literacy.
- As well as active engagement and participation of teachers and staff for such programmes, commitment and support is given by families, communities and senior leadership team members.

Features of good practice for adults⁸

Provision of adult literacy education refers to formal or non-formal classes and other learning opportunities aimed at improving the reading and writing skills of adults. In describing the system of adult literacy provision we should consider the broadest possible spectrum of opportunities available to adults and understand that a diversity of providers and types of provision is required. These may take the form of formal courses leading to accreditation, but they may equally be non-formal, with the main aim being to build confidence and to engage adults who may have had negative prior experiences of learning and/or for whom a formal course is inappropriate. Such non-formal provision may be delivered in a class with a teacher, but it may also, for example, take the form of a reading circle or one-to-one support in a workshop.

Such provision should be relevant to a range of adult learners. It should be inclusive, eliminating barriers for disadvantaged or marginalized groups and it should support life-wide (extending across all domains of adult life, including family life, work and leisure) and lifelong learning within a sector-wide and inter-sectoral approach (see for example EU High Level Group 2012: 93, UIL 2010: 7). Adult literacy learning should be embedded in everyday adult life, in workplaces, the community, the home and other arenas of family life (EU High Level Group 2012: 93).

Adult literacy provision should be accessible to all learners, whatever their financial means, and adults should receive appropriate guidance on how to access such educational opportunities. Furthermore, adult literacy provision should offer learners the opportunity to continue their educational pathways throughout their lives (UIL 2013:35), offering pathways on to other forms of education, whether academic, vocational or for pleasure and personal growth. Features of good practice in adult literacy provision:

Adult literacy provision should be:

Available

- Local communities are obliged and facilitated by national government to open centres for adult literacy education.
- Potential learners are actively motivated and supported to (re-)enter learning.
- National and local media are stimulated to assist in the promotion of participation.
- Participation is free of charge.

Accessible

- Every learner irrespective of gender, age or ethnic background is welcome.
- The learning place is easy to reach for the learner - there are no physical or social obstacles to joining the learning
- Learning hours are suited to the needs of the learners
- Adult literacy education is available also for those who live in institutions and are under state care (detention facilities, psychiatric hospitals, etc.)

Acceptable

- Learning goals in such programmes are clear and responsive to the learners; needs
- The quality of teaching is assured
- Learners and teachers demonstrate respect for different political and/or religious convictions

⁸ Adapted from "Right to Education Project" see www.right-to-education.org.

Adaptable

High quality adult literacy education is:

- flexible, taking account of the specific circumstances of the learner and his/her environment;
- taught by well-qualified and well-supported adult literacy professionals
- organised around a national curriculum framework that supports the full spectrum of adult literacy learners
- quality assured through a monitoring and evaluation system linked to national standards
- informed by regular surveys that are conducted to assess adult literacy needs and levels of provision

3.2 Programmes fostering digital literacy and multi-literacy skills

3.2.1 Children and adolescents

Digital media are now the norm for everyday literacy practices – the rise and spread of digital technologies have significantly altered what it means to be literate in the 21st-century, with profoundly enabling (or disabling) implications for interpersonal, community and individual communication. The digital, interconnected and mobile character of media not only alters the ways of accessing knowledge and sense-making but also the forms of communication. Thus, diverse competences in literacy and media literacy are needed, and the term “multi-literacy” is used to refer to the range of practices that characterise contemporary literacy.

Yet we know that, across all age groups, there is wide disparity in access to digital devices and in the skills and competences necessary to use them effectively. Currently, there are significant gaps in programmes to support digital literacies across the countries of Europe, with divergences in approaches. This is therefore an area that urgently requires the development of research-informed policy nationally and cross-nationally, to ensure that regardless of age, European citizens are more able to be included equitably in the digital society.

Most current digital literacy programmes that offer good or promising examples of practice have been developed at regional rather than national level, and include the following features.

Features of successful programmes for digital and multi-literacy skills for children and young people:

Pedagogical objectives vary according to the age-range of the target group, but most successful programmes share the following features, in that they:

- provide equitable access to mobile digital technologies to all, in order to provide opportunities to learn about and with new media
- develop linguistic, literate (reading and writing), social and civic competences and potentialities through the inclusion of digital media in education
- consolidate personal autonomy, identity and initiative with digital media
- support children and young people in valuing multi-literacy and acquiring increasingly critical, creative and complex digital literacy skills and competences
- encourage children and adolescents to contribute their out-of-school and multi-literate digital skills and knowledge to classroom learning
- promote and support the development of effective pedagogy to stimulate students’ motivation and interest to learn through diverse digital platforms

- foster creative and critical competences with digital media, including promoting schools as places where teachers and students share creative thinking and knowledge, innovation, responsibility and enterprising initiatives
- promote learning through enquiry and project-based work, including working in multiple media, such as radio podcasts, live broadcasts (e.g. school radio), the creation and broadcasting of audio and/or audio-visual content via the Internet, digital publishing, blogs and web content
- enhance the development of multi-literacy communicative repertoires of children and young people to enable their own and their country's successful participation in the global economy
- involve the wider family in children's engagement with digital media, including parents and grandparents
- promote wider community access to digital media, such as resources to ensure more active engagement of public libraries in digital education.

3.2.2 Adults

The EU High Level Group (2012) highlighted the fact that in Europe the digital gap affects increasing numbers of adults. Given that the use of digital media by adult learners after suitable training can help sustain and enhance their literacy skills, the EU High Level Group recommended making use of digital practices in education and learning, both in and outside the classroom, as well as specific measures aimed at closing the digital gap. Policies that regulate access to and use of digital media, and adult literacy education policies are linked in this regard. Careful planning is required to ensure that no groups are excluded from experiencing a range of digital practices, and to examine whether instances of exclusion are primarily driven by lack of skills/knowledge, lack of interest/involvement in certain life or literacy practices, or by finances (i.e. someone may have the skills to use a laptop but may not be able to afford one).

There are three important reasons for incorporating digital technology into strategies for the development of adult literacy. Firstly, many adults now engage in online literacy practices and so any literacy education initiative that does not incorporate technology risks failing to equip adults with the digital literacy skills and knowledge necessary for them to respond to the demands placed on them by their individual literate environments. Secondly, adults often have busy lives with little time to spare to join formal or non-formal adult literacy education programmes. Technology can facilitate their engagement by making learning resources and support available that adults can access when and where they have time. Thirdly, technology provides the possibility of including multimedia and interactive resources that can make adult literacy learning more attractive and realistic, encouraging and even inspiring adults to develop their reading and writing practices.

Technology may be used to deliver part of an adult literacy learning programme in combination with traditional face-to-face learning (blended learning) or to provide stand-alone online learning. In some cases it may enable cost-effective expansion of the learning offer.

Features of successful programmes for digital and multi-literacy skills for adults:

- support is available to adults in acquiring the digital skills necessary to engage with a range of learning resources and opportunities;
- literacy education programmes are sensitive to the different digital skills of learners, and to any differences in experiences and attitudes between different learners of all ages;

- adults are engaged in learning that is tailored to their individual needs and that is situated in real world practices;
- within learning programmes, adults' learning is effectively scaffolded, collaboration is encouraged between students, tailored feedback and reinforcement are provided.
- those teaching digital literacy receive training to develop their skills, knowledge and attitudes

3.3 Literacy curricula

3.3.1 Children and adolescents

Curricula provide a framework for teachers with guidelines for their teaching aims, methods, materials and activities. Good literacy curricula are based on clear educational standards and embedding literacy instruction and promotion systematically across all school subjects and all year groups in education. (In pre-school we focus on language and emergent literacy programmes (see section 2.3 "Emergent literacy" above). However, one should keep in mind that there is a difference between the intended curriculum, as outlined in official documents, and the implemented curriculum – what actually happens in schools.

Primary schools:

The Eurydice report "Teaching Reading in Europe" (EACEA/Eurydice: 2011) offers a broad range of information about the content of literacy curricula and official guidelines. In order not to duplicate this work we highlight only two aspects here, the importance of which might not yet be acknowledged and therefore might be missing in literacy curricula and official guidelines for primary schools, namely explicit teaching of grapheme-phoneme correspondences (phonics) and of reading strategies.

Features of good literacy curricula in primary schools:

In primary education code-based skills are needed alongside the development of creative and critical literacy competences, along with the fostering of a wide range of comprehension strategies. Learners with different levels of ability need explicit and responsive instruction in diverse comprehension strategies to improve reading comprehension.

These strategies include:

- Making inferences or interpretations while reading text and graphic data
- Summarising text and focusing selectively on the most important information
- Making connections between different parts of a text
- Using background knowledge
- Checking/monitoring own comprehension
- Constructing visual representations
- Pupils reflecting on their own reading process (Eurydice 2011, p. 55).

We consider the following components as important for literacy curricula in primary schools

- Explicit instruction in grapheme-phoneme correspondences (phonics) not only in the first year but also in the higher grades
- Explicit teaching of strategies for reading comprehension and writing composition for all ages (see 3.5: Literacy instruction in schools)
- Balance between the two dimensions: word reading and comprehension (for reading), transcription and composition (for writing)

- Integration of the two dimensions – the technical (spelling, handwriting, decoding, phonics, etc.) and meaning-making (comprehension and composition) – for both reading and writing and with other language skills
- Demonstration of the interdependence of reading and writing
- Teaching of reading and writing across all subjects.
- Opportunities for both individual and cooperative learning (collaborative learning, peer-assisted learning)
- Opportunity and freedom for teachers to choose among a wide range of reading materials and teaching methods, so they can deliver the curriculum in ways that best suit the particular students in their class
- Clear guidelines for assessment and instructional methods
- Information concerning early diagnosis of reading and writing difficulties and support for struggling readers/writers.

Features of good literacy curricula in secondary schools:

Since literacy is crucial to support students' acquisition of knowledge across all school subjects and in a lifelong and life-wide learning perspective, high quality comprehensive literacy curricula not only in the language subjects, but across all "content areas" are urgently needed. Such curricula should play a significant role in the design of school curricula, by demonstrating how reading and writing can contribute to learning, and how to integrate literacy skills into each school subject and across the curriculum.

We consider the following components essential to ensure high-quality national literacy curricula in secondary education:

- Explicit incorporation of content-specific (disciplinary) and cross-curricular literacy instruction in all school subjects and year groups
- An integrative approach to reading and writing for learning (as basic learning techniques) including print and digital media
- Explicit teaching of increasingly sophisticated reading comprehension strategies for mastery of advanced print and multimodal texts in diverse media
- Recognition of a diversity of purposes for reading and writing and awareness of students' individual motivation, strengths and needs
- High expectations for creative and critical literacy use both in school and out-of-school environments
- Opportunities for individual and cooperative text-based learning (collaborative learning, peer-assisted learning)
- Freedom for teachers and students to jointly choose between a wide range of diverse and engaging reading materials and teaching methods
- Guidelines for diagnostic, formative and summative assessment of literacy levels
- Guidelines for early diagnosis of reading and writing difficulties and support for struggling readers/writers
- Differentiated instruction according to students readiness level and skills as important component of any literacy curriculum
- Coherence between literacy curriculum goals and national assessments.

3.3.2 Adults

Features of good literacy curricula for adults:

A distinction is made between a curriculum framework, which outlines the overall approach to adult literacy education, but does not specify the content of such programmes, and a curriculum, which specifies the content of adult literacy courses. Both are important elements of any valid literacy policy and provide valuable support for adult literacy practitioners.

Good adult literacy provision is responsive to the needs of adults and so, while an adult literacy curriculum may specify possible content of adult literacy programmes in terms of skills and knowledge, it should be used by practitioners as a guide rather than a prescription.

A number of features of good practice in this area can be identified.

- The curriculum for adult literacy allows for the heterogeneity of educational settings in which adult literacy provision takes place and for the varied learning needs of participants. From a lifelong learning perspective, a curriculum for adult literacy education focuses on literacy activities that are relevant for adults and adult lives. The Eur-Alpha Manifesto, developed by a trans-national group of adult literacy learners (Eur-Alpha 2011: 6) lists some of these: dealing with administrative tasks, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), education, travel, safety, work, and civil rights.
- In developing an adult literacy curriculum thought is given to the breadth of what literacy means or involves for different adults and the ever-present question of who or what determines literacy curricula and who decides what is relevant for adults and their lives.
- The adult literacy curriculum is based on standards that identify the range of reading and writing skills and capabilities that adults are expected to need in order to function and progress at work and in society, reality-checked by observational studies of what skills are actually needed.
- These standards form the basis of national qualification of teachers for adult literacy and the curriculum specifies what teachers should teach to enable learners to reach those standards at each level and across the skills of reading and writing.
- The adult literacy curriculum, and the standards on which it is based, cover reading and writing skills and describe the content required at each relevant level at word, sentence and text level.
- The adult literacy curriculum supports practitioners in developing diagnostic assessment to identify learners' existing skills and knowledge as well as those they need to develop as part of their learning programme.
- There are many way of teaching of adult literacy. Practitioners learn about these formally through teacher education programmes and informally through engagement with other practitioners.
- Training is available for all those involved in adult literacy provision, and should be developed and provided as a part of the development of an adult literacy curriculum.

3.4 Screening/assessment tools for identifying literacy learners' needs

In order to design appropriate educational programmes it is important to understand fully students' existing literacy skills and practices; their prior knowledge should be recognized, and their learning motivations and needs identified. In this process it is paramount that learners are treated with respect.

The programmes and practices included in this area aim to enable teachers to identify struggling literacy learners in order to support their literacy development. They may also be targeted directly at students, offering them tools for self-assessment of their literacy progress and better self-regulation of their learning processes. The term 'assessment' describes the purposeful, systematic and ongoing collection of information about student achievement in the related content domain. Summative assessment, such as end of unit or semester tests, offers a summary measurement of student learning, and can be used as a screening instrument to identify learners with low literacy achievement. To gain more information about the specific difficulties of struggling literacy learners formative assessments are needed. They help teachers to identify, understand and describe students' current needs and abilities and provide teachers with knowledge about how best to improve and support learning for students and help learners to gain self-knowledge that will allow them to become more reflective, active, and purposeful readers and writers (cf. Brozo, Holle & Schmill 2013).

3.4.1 Features of good practice for the assessment of pre-school children

- Comprehensive support is available to ensure that young children's hearing, eyesight and speech are tested at the appropriate ages, and that any difficulties are addressed as early and as effectively as possible.
- Early screening for potential language and emergent literacy delay is provided to identify those who may risk lagging behind or being excluded. Effective and high-quality learning support is provided for them.
- Further formal testing of this young age group is not appropriate, but ongoing formative assessments should be made regularly by well-qualified early years practitioners to ensure all young learners are included in and benefit from the multiple learning opportunities available in early education.

3.4.2 Features of good practice for the assessment of children and adolescents

- Assessments are based on clear learning objectives or standards for literacy performance defined in national curricula or other steering documents.
- Pupils' progress in reading and writing is regularly assessed at classroom, school, regional and/or national level in order to identify struggling literacy learners.
- The goals of assessments – supporting/guiding learning; demonstrating the path to the accomplishment of the appropriate standards – are clearly understood and accepted by teachers, parents and students.
- Teachers and head teachers are well trained to carry out assessments, to interpret results and draw adequate conclusions about how to support struggling learners.
- Summative and formative assessment tools are provided by education authorities without of charge to schools.
- Assessment tools are also used by teachers to follow individual learners' progress in order to adjust the teaching and learning process to achieve curriculum goals.

- Assessment goes hand-in-hand with support for struggling literacy learners.
- Struggling literacy learners are identified as soon as possible and receive tailored support.
- Assessment tools are based on research evidence, valid and highly effective (cost- effective, not time-consuming, and productive of information that can inform planning for learning).

3.4.3 Features of good practice for the assessment of adults

For children and adolescents the key role in screening and assessment is played by teachers in schools. However, for adults this is clearly not the case. Data from PIAAC and other surveys suggest that as many as 1 in 5 adults in our societies have poor literacy, and yet just a small proportion of those are engaged in formal literacy learning programmes in which they can benefit from processes of formative and summative assessment.

We see literacy as a spectrum rather than a binary system of literate/illiterate. Accordingly, we do not speak of 'illiterate' adults – everyone has a degree of knowledge of literacy practices in their social context and is therefore literate to a degree. However, adults with low literacy levels often feel ashamed that they find reading and writing difficult. They may have had negative experiences with education, and/or may be vulnerable because they belong to minority or marginalized groups.

Literacy skills and knowledge are part of people's linguistic repertoire, which, in today's multilingual and multicultural societies, can be diverse and multiple. For example, adults with low literacy levels in the official language of their place of residence may be literate in one or more other languages, or they may use a variety of the official language other than the 'standard' form.

In order to design appropriate educational programmes it is important to understand fully adults' existing literacy skills and practices; their prior knowledge should be recognized, and their learning motivations and needs identified. In this process it is paramount that adult learners are treated with respect.

In the adult context, screening, assessment and support may be distinct, with a preliminary stage of identification of literacy needs and referral to appropriate provision required before the work of the teacher can begin. A learner may then undertake an initial assessment to be placed in appropriate provision, and on-going formative assessment as they proceed with their literacy learning.

Signposting/referral

- Information about adult literacy learning provision is made widely available to adults through public information campaigns.
- For adults, recognising that they have a literacy need and engaging with literacy learning is often a difficult step and may require action and encouragement by a number of different individuals and agencies. Here we have separated Signposting/referral and Screening, but in reality these two stages may be merged, or learners may be referred directly to learning provision for initial assessment without the need for screening.
- Health, employment, housing and other local, regional and national government officers as well as NGOs who have regular contact with the general public are given training in identifying signs of poor literacy and information about where to refer potential learners.
- Learning providers work proactively with organisations which have regular contact with the general public to raise awareness of adult literacy learning opportunities in the local area and set up simple referral processes.

Screening

- Learning providers, employment services, employers and others have processes in place to assess whether individuals have a literacy need.
- Screening involves completion of a short series of authentic literacy tasks to establish whether the adult has a literacy need.
- Screening is private and confidential and is carried out in a non-threatening and supportive environment.
- Those who carry out screening receive adequate training and are aware of the sensitive nature of assessment of adult skills.
- On identification of literacy need, adults are referred on to appropriate learning providers.

Initial assessment

- Learning providers have in place processes of initial assessment that identify a learner's skills against a level, or levels, within the national standards.
- The initial assessment is used to place learners in appropriate learning programmes at an appropriate level.
- Initial assessment is carried out on learners' reading and writing.
- Initial assessment is carried out in a non-threatening and supportive environment.
- Initial assessment includes an interview to enable the learning provider to understand the full range of learning needs of the individual as well as any family, work or health issues that may impact on learning.
- Those who carry out screening are aware of the sensitive nature of assessment of adult literacy

Diagnostic assessment

- A full diagnostic assessment is carried out by the classroom teacher once the learner has been placed on a learning programme.
- The diagnostic assessment is carried out over a period of time as part of a learner's learning programme
- The diagnostic assessment identifies a learner's strengths and weaknesses and highlights gaps in their knowledge and understanding.
- The diagnostic assessment provides a detailed profile which is used to inform and structure the ongoing learning programme.

Formative assessment

- Teachers are trained in the use of formative assessment techniques such as giving feedback through marking; effective use of questioning and dialogue; use of peer- and self-assessment; encouraging learner talk; and incorporating these in their everyday teaching.
- Results of formative assessment are recorded by teachers and used to inform the development of individual and group learning goals.
- The goals of formative assessments are clearly understood and accepted by teachers and learners.

Summative assessment

- Summative assessments are available for adult learners to take on demand and:
 - are based on nationally agreed standards;
 - cover both reading and writing;
 - assess functional literacy – i.e. adults' ability to use their literacy skills to meet the literacy demands of their daily lives
 - facilitate progression along a coherent learning pathway: through further adult literacy learning; onto vocational education and training; onto higher education; or into work.
- Adult learners' success in summative assessments is celebrated.

3.5 Literacy instruction in schools

By "literacy instruction" we understand programmes targeted at improving literacy skills and strategies of all students. We limit this aspect to children and adolescents as there are no such programmes targeting adult learners.

There is a vast body of academic research literature on reading and writing instruction (for further references cf. EACEA/Eurydice 2011). In this academic literature there is a remarkable consensus about the most effective methods of literacy instruction which are particularly helpful for all learners, particularly those who are struggling literacy learners:

The **early foundation phase of reading and writing development** is crucial in pupils' literacy learning. Explicit teaching of grapheme-phoneme correspondences (or phonics knowledge) is essential so that children grasp the symbol-sound relationships between the oral and written forms of language, and use them in decoding words when reading and in analysing words into phonemes when writing. Initial literacy instruction should use a *balanced* approach: reading for meaning and understanding should not be taught separately from direct instruction about grapheme-phoneme relationships, and learning to read and to write should be parallel and interactive activities.

Fostering creative writing or inventive spellings in initial literacy instruction: Children who are encouraged to write spontaneously have fewer difficulties in understanding the alphabetic code. Through spontaneous writing children experience the communicative function of written language. In literacy learning programmes reading and writing should be integrated.

Developing reading comprehension: Learners need explicit instruction in the application of comprehension strategies; such explicit teaching should also be directed towards improving reading comprehension among readers with different levels of ability.

Instruction engaging students in learning: PIRLS 2011 demonstrated that students whose teachers used instructional practices to engage students' in learning in most lessons had higher scores in reading than when such practices were used in only about half the lessons or less.

Cooperative and collaborative learning motivates students to become actively and constructively involved in the task and has positive results such as deeper understanding of content, higher motivation to remain on task and improved self-esteem.

Features of good practice for children and adolescents:

- Literacy instruction takes into account the developmental level of the literacy learners: reading instruction, for example, includes in different phases phoneme-grapheme correspondences, supported reading, independent reading, manipulating morphemes and building word families.
- Other important aspects of literacy instruction are vocabulary development, fluency of word decoding, and the development of an appreciation of the literary and aesthetic dimensions of language and content vocabulary related to subject disciplines.
- Literacy instruction includes formative assessment which enables teachers to understand the specific problems of literacy learners in every stage of their acquisition process, and to provide them with targeted support (see section 3.4).
- Literacy instruction takes into account the individual needs of learners and provides constant and effective feedback to students,
- Literacy instruction sets clear learning goals together with students and recommends specific actions for achieving them.
- Literacy instruction is inclusive and offers tailored support for learners with diverse needs.
- Literacy instruction programmes offer diverse and engaging reading materials, both in print and digital form, which take into account different individual interests as well as gender and cultural differences.
- Literacy instruction provides cognitively enhancing literacy teaching by using higher-level comprehension strategies to construct meaning and monitor comprehension.
- Instruction in reading comprehension always includes critical reading as well.
- Literacy instruction is more than a set of teaching strategies and techniques: it is essential to foster students' motivation to read, write and communicate, and to engage each and every student in literacy learning across all school subjects.
- Literacy instruction provides opportunities for cooperative and collaborative learning.

Concerning **struggling literacy learners**, early identification of literacy difficulties and tailored support are crucial to prevent, reduce and eliminate literacy problems. All persons should receive tailored support and remedial teaching when needed, and opportunities to engage with diverse and interesting reading materials to motivate and encourage them to read and write more and improve their skills.

Features of good practice for struggling literacy learners:

- National or federal legislation ensures a legal right to support for struggling literacy learners.
- Support for struggling literacy learners is based on high-quality screening and assessment tools.
 - A teacher specialising in literacy is easily available for guaranteed, early, in-class support.
 - Programmes for struggling learners are tailored according to their needs and may include explicit training in phonics, a strong focus on phonological decoding and word-level work as well as reading comprehension, and supported and independent reading and writing of progressively more difficult texts.
 - Support for struggling readers must be engaging and motivating for all learners.
 - Systematic teaching of diverse comprehension strategies and meta-cognitive reflection continue throughout secondary education.

- Support provided for struggling literacy learners is sufficiently long-lasting and intensive including, if needed, individual or small-group intensive and targeted interventions.
- Support for struggling literacy learners is delivered by well trained professionals, such as teachers, special needs experts or literacy experts.
- Struggling readers are given (free) access to easy-to-read materials linked to their interests in all areas of the curriculum.

3.6 Teacher education and professional development

The European Commission has highlighted the quality of teaching staff as one of the main determinants of students' academic success. As well as identifying and supporting struggling readers and writers, teachers of all school subjects and grades and teachers of adult literacy need to be proficient in facilitating and supporting the literacy learning of all their diverse students. The following quotation from the EURYDICE report on "Teaching Reading in Europe" encapsulates the range and depth required of teacher education in reading.

"...the teaching of reading is a particularly complex task. Teaching how to read and improving a child's reading skills require a profound understanding of reading development and a sound knowledge of teaching theory and practice including teaching methods, class management and knowledge of appropriate materials. In addition, it is important for teachers to keep up-to-date with research related to effective teaching strategies. In short, the teaching of reading requires a broad range of skills, which should be acquired during initial teacher education and further improved through continuing professional development."

(Eurydice 2011, p. 83)

The teaching of writing makes similarly complex demands on the prospective teacher and requires similar extension during the teacher's career. However, as Risko et al. demonstrate in their survey of initial teacher education: "Learning to teach is much more complex than providing propositional knowledge." (Risko et al., 2008, p. 281)

Prospective teachers, as well as those in in-service training, whether working in pre-school, primary, secondary or adult education, all need to develop and extend their knowledge and understanding of what literacy is and how it can be used, of the various ways in which their students learn, of how they can be helped to do so most effectively, and of what children, adolescents and adults are able to achieve at different stages of their individual learning journeys. They also need substantial experience of working with students in the target age group in appropriate contexts.

At all age levels, this implies for **initial teacher education (ITE)** the need for selective recruitment policies and substantial, well-designed and well-taught courses. European countries differ widely in the minimum required level to become a qualified teacher and the length of initial teacher training, particularly for teachers of Early Childhood Education and Care. However, it is clear that the most effective education, from pre-school to adult, is staffed by professionals with substantial training, and a deep understanding both of what is involved in becoming literate and of how children, young people and/or adults learn most effectively.

It also implies that continuing professional development (CPD) is an important part of lifelong learning for all professionals engaged in literacy promotion and instruction of children, adolescents and adults.

While much can be achieved in excellent Initial Teacher Education, regular and high quality CPD is essential if teachers and other professionals are to profit from research-informed advances in understanding of what literacy learning involves and how it can best be facilitated.

Good practice means that CPD attendance is encouraged by employers and supported by favourable legislation and financing at national, regional and institutional levels.

Quality matters: high standards concerning the qualification of trainers and the quality of programmes offered are assured by means, for example, of accreditation and regular monitoring of quality. Such high-quality CPD is concerned to develop teachers' knowledge, understanding, skills and dispositions towards key areas of literacy learning and practice, as described below. Through interlinking theory and research-based knowledge with practical classroom experience and encouraging shared reflection on how such new knowledge and understanding relates to participants' own first-hand experiences, such CPD courses enable teachers (and other professionals) to change their everyday classroom practice. In addition, teachers may be given active experience of reading and writing at their own level, following their own interests, to engage (or re-engage) them in the literacy they teach.

For good practice in professional development it is essential to offer medium or long-term courses (avoiding "one-shot approaches") in order to overcome the knowledge-action gap. Furthermore, a national, federal or regional policy should be developed to encourage a whole-staff approach in raising literacy expertise among teachers, librarians and other staff in order to establish literacy promotion and instruction as an important focus of institutional development.

Course content varies according to the age range of those the target group is teaching or aiming to teach, but most successful programmes share certain features. The main aim is that teachers are stimulated and supported to become:

- more critically familiar with relevant research findings
- more experienced in advancing students' proficiency in literacy
- more practised in making connections with their own first-hand experience of literacy
- more reflective and enquiry-oriented in their professional stance.

In courses for **teachers of pre-school children** the following subject matters should be included:

- oral language development from birth to the start of primary school, in terms of both form and function and including consideration of bilingual learners to enable prospective teachers to:
 - analyse the complexity of children's oral language
 - recognize the need to develop children's syntax as well as their vocabulary and their awareness of speech sounds
 - recognize the need to develop different functions of language
 - value children's language play for its potential in creating metalinguistic and phonological awareness
- the emergent literacy learning that can take place in the pre-school years
- the role of both dialogue and narrative in developing language
- literature for young children, with an emphasis on stories, picture books, informational books and poetry
- effective ways of developing and assessing children's oral language and emergent literacy skills.
- strategies for involving parents in their children's literacy development.

In courses for **teachers of primary children** the following subject matters should be included:

- oral language development from pre-school to the end of primary school, in terms of both form and function
- the emergent literacy learning that takes place in the pre-school years (including digital literacy)
- the phonics lessons that children need to learn in order to read and spell and the underlying principles of the orthography of the language of instruction
- the patterns of progress children make
- methods to engage students in literacy tasks, e.g. through cooperative learning
- the most effective classroom approaches to literacy teaching at both word and text level, including teaching of cognitive and meta-cognitive comprehension strategies
- teaching struggling literacy learners, including working collaboratively with specialist teachers
- teaching (language and) literacy to second language learners
- incorporating digital and multimodal reading and composition in school teaching
- developing comprehension, including critical literacy
- introducing children to a variety of text genres, teaching writing in a range of genres
- assessment of literacy skills, for formative as well as summative purposes.

In courses for **secondary teachers** the following subject matters should be included:

- a basic understanding of what is involved in learning to read and write, both for supporting those who are struggling with literacy and for teaching advanced literacy skills
- developing adolescents' disposition to engage with literacy, both in reading and writing
- building 'content area literacy' expertise among teachers of all subjects in order to get a clear picture about the specific literacy demands of all relevant school subjects
- advanced literacy skills: teaching adolescents to read and create complex texts for complex purposes
- digital literacy as part of secondary teaching of all subjects
- fostering a critical approach to literacy in general and digital literacy in particular
- building or improving professionals' expertise in applying summative, diagnostic and formative literacy assessment tools and techniques
- developing cooperative learning approaches to engage all students and improving everyday classroom practices
- building teachers' expertise for teaching cognitive and metacognitive literacy strategies and engaging their students in continuous metacognitive reflection on their learning processes
- building teachers' expertise in using multimodal texts and appropriate digital resources in teaching and learning.

The most effective courses for **teachers of adult literacy** include considered attention to the following:

- social and cultural diversity and its effect on learning and on curriculum development and delivery
- the social, cultural and economic background of individual learners and the implications of this for learning and teaching

- ways of ensuring that linguistic diversity is valued and accommodated within programmes of learning and teaching
- the concept of inclusive learning
- the broad range of learning needs including the needs of those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the facilities and arrangements that are available to help meet these needs.

For all four age levels, the most effective courses enable teachers to:

- assess students' strengths and needs in their use of spoken and written language
- construct an environment that encourages students to become more confident and proficient users of spoken and written language
- plan and prepare teaching and learning programmes for literacy development
- develop and use a range of literacy teaching and learning techniques, allowing differentiation and using appropriate and engaging materials
- facilitate literacy learning in groups, ensuring all are involved
- plan and structure literacy learning activities
- communicate effectively with literacy learners and review the learning process with them
- select and develop resources to support literacy learning, monitoring students' response to these and evaluating their effectiveness
- reflect upon and evaluate their own performance against what is required, conducting a critical evaluation of their own literacy teaching and identifying the extent and nature of their current knowledge and skills.

4 Increasing participation, inclusion and equity

As international literacy surveys such as PIRLS, PISA and PIAAC demonstrate, in all European countries there are, to a greater or lesser degree, gaps in achievement between different groups. Of particular concern are the social gap, the migrant gap and (especially among adolescents) the gender gap. To close or significantly reduce these gaps are some of the biggest literacy challenges in Europe.

Pupils with sensory and cognitive impairments, often referred to as students with special educational needs, are also at risk in terms of literacy achievement.

4.1 Programmes offering provision of literacy learning opportunities to disadvantaged groups

4.1.1 Children and adolescents

As this policy area is transversal, some aspects of the programmes and practices listed in other areas are reiterated, this time with a special focus on increasing the participation and performance of the groups at risk. This section refers to children and adolescents who for different reasons can be considered as a group “at risk” (e.g. children from lower socio-economic homes, students with migrant background or whose home language is not the language of instruction, male students from low SES/migrant families or students with “special educational needs” or learning disabilities). The focus is on preventing literacy difficulties among members of these groups. There is a certain overlap with the topic “Identification of and support for struggling literacy learners” dealt with in section 3.5 (Literacy instruction in school).

The programmes and practices included in this area aim to ensure high-quality literacy instruction for all; fair access to development of literacy skills for at-risk groups (rather than in the group referred to in 3.5 as those having been identified as struggling readers); specialised support for disadvantaged groups; and appropriate and engaging reading materials for all literacy learners.

Features of good practice for children and adolescents:

- Early identification of children with special educational needs is ensured through collaboration with health and early years specialists to provide screening programmes for early identification of speech and language delays, as well as visual and hearing impairment.
- Pre-school attendance is promoted, especially among disadvantaged children. Pre-school education is free or affordable so that economically disadvantaged families do not miss out.
- An appropriate level of support is provided for pre-school children with language difficulties and those whose home language is not the main language of instruction.
- Family literacy programmes especially for parents from disadvantaged backgrounds provide support to help their children develop print and digital literacy. The literacy skills of young learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are enhanced by improving their parents’ literacy skills and creating a culture of reading and writing for pleasure in the family.
- Family literacy programmes combine home- and institution-based activities.

- Personal, face-to-face guidance on the significance of reading and writing accompanies the provision of reading and writing materials to children and their families.
- National or federal legislation ensures a legal right for students with disabilities to access high-quality, inclusive, and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live, thus realising article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities⁹.
- Low-performing pupils and schools are provided with the resources and assistance they need, as early as possible.
- Comprehensive support is in place for low socio-economic status learners to address their livelihood needs in parallel with their literacy learning needs.
- The support is delivered by well-trained professionals, e.g. teachers, librarians, special needs experts or literacy experts.
- The needs of learners whose home language is not the language of instruction are addressed (second language/migrant background learners).
- There are support measures in place to specifically address the gender gap in literacy engagement and performance.

4.1.2 Adults

In effect all adult literacy provision is aimed at closing the gap by supporting adults to acquire the literacy skills that they need and without which they may be at risk of failing to meet the demands placed on them as citizens, employees and family members.

There is a great deal of information for policy-makers to draw on from PIAAC and other surveys to identify groups of adults most likely to have poor literacy, which can be used to design and target awareness-raising campaigns and learning provision. However, policy-makers should also be aware that while adults with low proficiency in literacy are more likely than the rest of the adult population to exhibit certain characteristics (e.g. non- completion of upper secondary level education, low-level employment, lack of engagement in civic affairs, etc.), the majority of them do not. Many adults with poor levels of literacy are successful citizens, employees and family members, but would also benefit from improving their literacy. However, with limited public funds to support adult literacy provision it makes sense for these limited resources to be targeted at those most in need.

It is a matter of national importance that all citizens and residents understand and are able to communicate appropriately in the national language or languages. When the official language of a country is the second or third language of an adult, and that adult is still gaining command of this official language, understanding of second/foreign or bi-/multilingual language teaching and learning methods should inform the design of learning programmes. However, in designing such provision it is important to bear in mind that these adults are required to learn both oral and written communication. Learners who already have higher-level literacy skills in their home language will have different needs from those who have few or no literacy skills in their home language. It is also important to consider the learning needs of those who use a non-standard variety of the national language (for example, a Caribbean variety of French), which may differ from the 'standard' national variety in vocabulary, grammar and spelling.

⁹ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Article 24, <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>.

Features of good practice for adults:

- Policy-makers and others understand the groups within their society most likely to have poor literacy skills.
- Awareness-raising campaigns highlight the benefit to individuals of improved literacy.
- Such campaigns use role models to encourage adults at risk of not engaging.
- NGOs and public authorities working with such groups screen adults they work with who have poor literacy skills and/or refer them to appropriate provision.
- Adult literacy learning provision is targeted at groups identified as most at risk.
- Adult literacy learning provision is freely available, accessible, of good quality and adaptable to the needs of adults.
- Adult language policy is informed by an understanding of the needs and capabilities of adult migrants.

5 Conclusion

Considered attention and careful action is required by policy-makers across government and beyond, in order to formulate national and regional literacy policies that enable people to live full and meaningful lives and to contribute towards the enrichment of the communities in which we all live. Literacy education and learning are issues across all sectors and require the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policy actions across government departments and agencies, and across a wide range of policy actors.

“Europe and its Member States should position literacy not just at the heart of their educational strategies but at the heart of public policies more generally”
(EU High Level Group 2012: 31).

Education policy-makers are centrally important in developing literacy policy. In order to ensure that policies and programmes attract learners and cater for their needs and possibilities, literacy education policy-makers should ensure that learners themselves play a role in the design of literacy education policy and practice. This would allow for literacy education policy to be informed by an understanding of the demands of literacy placed on us all in engaging effectively with society.

Policy coherence in literacy can be achieved only with an understanding of the major impact of literacy on a wide range of policy areas, other than education, such as health and employment, among others. Indeed, as governments increasingly choose to engage with their citizens online, no government area can afford to be unaware of literacy as an issue of individual, regional, national and global importance. Policy-makers in government departments and agencies should look beyond their own narrow areas of responsibility and actively seek ways to exploit the potential for positive impacts beyond their own policy sphere, by supporting the development of policies and programmes that seek to understand the literacy demands placed on European citizens, and considering how to support them in meeting those demands. Such policy coherence can only be achieved when there is clarity about current policy: how it is framed, who the actors are and what policy levers they seek to use.

Often policy coherence is not achieved because the various stakeholders lack a shared understanding. Constant policy change (policy churn) works against coherence by requiring constant renegotiation and recalibration of policy. Constant change also inevitably reduces institutional memory, meaning that new policy isn't necessarily informed by what has gone before. Effective cooperation between all stakeholders is key, and for that to happen stakeholders need to be clear about their own responsibilities and what they stand to gain, and of course there needs to be trust between them. Trust is built through successful joint working and supports the development of increases in shared knowledge and understanding.

To realize the basic right of all Europeans to develop literacy, as declared by ELINET in the **European Declaration of the Right to Literacy**, policy-makers across government, at European, national, regional and local levels, should ensure that there is support for all members of society to meet the literacy demands placed upon them, whether as children or subsequently as adults.

References

Please note:

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