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1 CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

“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”

(High Level Group 2012: 31).

In the call of the European Commission for a “European Policy Network of National Literacy Organisations” (2013/C 130/07) one of the main objectives of the network was defined as follows:

“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.”

In our application we described our approach to work on this topic as follows: “To identify good policy practices in raising literacy levels of poor achievers in all age groups by developing a European Framework of Good Practice (EFGP) that can be applied in all European countries.” This framework should be “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.” As a second step we promised “to gather, select, analyse and disseminate examples of ‘good practice’ in literacy policy from all involved European countries in applying the criteria defined in the EFGP.”

In the common framework of the Country Reports which has been developed by three ELINET teams - children, adolescents and adults- we defined the different areas where “good practices in raising literacy levels” may be identified. For those areas we will define criteria of good practice (see our “Call for Good Practice”). In 2015, the three ELINET teams will work on the 30 country reports and simultaneously collect and analyse examples of good practice from member countries. The European Framework of Good Practice will be developed as a product of both activities: by defining criteria top-down from the framework of the country reports and bottom-up from the analysis of good practice examples in the different areas. The EFGP will be presented to policymakers, stakeholders and the wider public at the final ELINET European Literacy Conference in January 2016.
2 AGE GROUPS AND RELATED PRACTICE FIELDS

Children (0 – 10/12 years): Family literacy (connected to adult literacy); early childhood / preschool education / emergent literacy; primary education / acquisition of literacy / learning to read and write

Adolescents (10/12 – 18 years): secondary schools, vocational education and training (VET); adolescent literacy / content area literacy; multiliteracies / digital literacy

Adulthood (16 – 65 years): tertiary education / adult education; adult literacy, second-chance education...

3 WHAT DO WE CONSIDER AS “GOOD PRACTICE”?

We will take an iterative approach to the development of the Framework of Good Practice and the selection of examples of good practice:
(1) **Top down-approach:** Drawing on international research we will define indicators for the different fields of practice [top-down approach],

(2) **Bottom up-approach:** Secondly, we will collect good practice examples which cover at least some of those indicators [bottom-up approach]

(3) **Fusing both approaches:** In analyzing those examples we will revise, refine, modify or complete the indicators in the framework [bringing together both approaches].

**Towards a Definition of “Good Practice”**

In his evaluation reports on the Vienna and the Hoechst meetings our external evaluator Bill Brozo pointed out the need for a clear definition of this topic and made some suggestions which might be helpful for our discussion (and the inclusion in the future glossary about literacy terms being chaired by Greg Brooks).

“It is very important to have clear criteria for deciding what constitutes “best practice” on the European scene. In the United States, for instance, this is a code for government approved practices, meaning only those supported by randomized control trials (RCTs) or with empirically verifiable results. In a meeting of Team 3, I suggested two categories: “Best Practice” with just those practices based on empirical findings and “Promising Practices” with those that produce positive results but have not yet been empirically verified. An alternative could be “Theoretically Promising Practices”, as was suggested by one member, or I would prefer “Principled Practices”, in the way my colleagues and I defined this notion for a funded grant by the Carnegie Corporation. Our work with Carnegie involved using empirically valid principles as the foundation for many specific adolescent literacy practices for which we could not find empirical evidence. This could be the way to escape from the RCT- or experimental-evidence-only box members might find themselves in, leading to the rejection of many potentially effective practices.”


“Another significant challenge of the ELINET teams is coming to consensus on the criteria of “best” and/or “good” practices. In fact, these two words have been used interchangeably, but may not mean the same thing. In general, best practice implies a significant evidentiary basis of effectiveness for the practice; whereas, good practice may have a record of effectiveness, but not necessarily grounded in empirical evidence. Thus, it is important for the management board and team leaders to clarify these descriptors so team members will better understand which practices are acceptable to include in the reports and why. This is critical, because notions of
“good” or “best” practice appear to carry different meanings to different ELINET team members. For instance, to some, practices considered acceptable for inclusion must have a substantial evidence base (with empirical data); for others, practices that have any evidence of effectiveness (whether anecdotal, testimonial, or based on other criteria) are considered acceptable to include in the reports.”

(B. Brozo, Evaluation Report of the ELINET Work Teams’ Meeting in Hoechst, October 2014)

Following Prof Brozo’s advice, ELINET will differentiate between "good practice" and "promising practice" for the evaluation of literacy practices:

- **good practice** is based on a research-based programme theory and is evaluated in some form (e.g. quasi-experimental pre-post design)
- **promising practice** is based on a research-based programme theory proven practicability; but without evaluation. The practice may act as a source of inspiration for new projects.

All selected examples are committed to fostering literacy skills at different levels. Our quality criteria for selecting good or promising practices reflect the following aspects:

- A clear **focus on struggling readers/writers.** For pre-primary years, also universal programmes will be taken into consideration as they often have preventive character.
- A clear and sound **conceptual basis** (programme theory) which is well grounded in scientific research.
- A clear definition of **objectives**
- **Documentation** concerning the **implementation** of the program (clear information about the activities to be carried out, about participants, stakeholders and target groups etc.)
- In case of good-practice: **Transparent documentation** of the **evaluation** of the project and its effects on the target Group
- **Transferability:** The practice or project have the potential of being applied to parallel or similar situations in the same or different regions.
- The **program outcomes** (flyers, manuals, materials) should be available in print or – preferably - in the internet.
- **Sustainability**

Not all good or promising practice examples fulfill all of the points outlined in this list. This is mainly because some practices are new and therefore evaluations have yet to be completed.

Nevertheless, they have been included in the analysis because of their innovative approach that may serve as inspiration for similar projects. To reflect the lifelong and lifewide perspective of ELINET, peer reviewers are appointed across age-groups according to their
expertise. Naturally, they will not evaluate examples they are involved in themselves. The outcome of the review will be one of the following:

a- approved as good or promising practice
b- request for more information for a second round of review
c- not approved.

4 TYPES OF GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

The indicators of good practice described above may be identified in different types of practices (different intervention types). In order to guide our research the main types will be described here:

1. Progammes and initiatives to allow participation in literacy education and development opportunities
   - Prevention programmes aiming to decrease risk factors of early literacy in the pre-school age,
   - Intervention programmes supporting families from disadvantaged backgrounds, e.g. family literacy programmes, book-gifting programmes, languages courses for parents who do not speak the language of instruction

2. Literacy curricula, e.g. (national) core curricula based on clear educational standards and embedding literacy instruction and promotion systematically in all school subjects and all grades, in pre-school language and in emergent literacy programmes.

3. Screening / assessment tools or programmes to systematically monitor childrens’ / adolescents’ or adults’ progress / performance in basic literacy skills as a basis for individual support

4. Comprehensive literacy programmes where literacy growth of students (and special support of struggling readers) is at the centre of the programme. We understand “comprehensive” to encompass both performance and motivation.

5. Reading instruction: Programmes targeted at improving reading skills and strategies

6. Reading animation programmes: Programmes in schools, libraries and in cooperations fostering reading for pleasure and motivation for reading

7. Programmes / projects fostering digital literacy and multi-literacy skills of children, adolescents or adults
8. **Initial teacher education** programmes which systematically build literacy expertise for teachers of all school subjects and grades with the aim to diagnose and support poor readers and writers.

9. **Continuous professional development programmes** for teachers which systematically build / expand literacy expertise for teachers of all school subjects and grades with a focus in identifying and supporting struggling readers and writers.

10. **Closing the gaps**: Support for literacy learners with special needs (e.g. second-language learners/ migrants/ students from disadvantaged families) (preventive).

**Programmes / projects addressing struggling literacy learners** (also boys)

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**Coming Soon:**  **The European Framework of Good Policy Practices**

5.1  Literacy Policy Types: Possible Indicators of Good Practice

5.1.1  Participation in Literacy Education and Development Opportunities

5.1.2  Curricula

5.1.3  Screenings / assessment tools for identifying struggling literacy learners

5.1.4  Comprehensive literacy programmes

5.1.5  Reading instruction

5.1.6  Reading animation programmes

5.1.7  Programmes / projects fostering digital literacy and multi-literacy skills of children, adolescents or adults

5.1.8  Initial Teacher Training

5.1.9  Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of teachers, librarians and other experts

5.1.10 Closing the gaps: Support for literacy learners with special needs / for struggling literacy learners