Literacy for All Seminar

Overview of Report of High Level Group of Experts on Literacy

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Final report HLG Literacy
“to help kick-start an ambitious, comprehensive and structural approach within and across EU member states to prevent and reduce literacy problems”
Overview

- The role of literacy
- the key areas of the HLG Report
- refer briefly to some examples of good practice
- recommendations of the HLG groups
Literacy

‘Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope’

• (Kof Annan)
Is literacy a big deal?

Youngsters who feel frustrated and humiliated - cannot decode the 'graffiti’ on the board.

Youngsters - anxious they will not find any respectable employment and fearful they will be rejected once any employer ‘discovers’ their secret.
Yes! Literacy is a Big Deal!

- Youngsters who develop deviant behaviour
- Parents who might turn up for a meeting two month too late!
- The employee who has to wade through the dreaded sticky notes
“Literacy is not a luxury. Literacy is a right and responsibility. If our world is to meet the challenges of the twenty first century we must harness the energy and creativity of all our citizens.”

• Bill Clinton, Former President of the United States of America
The PISA Shock!
Programme for International Assessment

Outcomes of Pisa study revealed that one in five 15-year-olds in the E.U. cannot read and write.

This Report emanates from what is now referred to as the PISA SHOCK!
Percentage of low achievers in reading literacy

PISA 2009

FINLAND 9.1
ESTONIA 15.3
NETHERLANDS 14.3
POLAND 12
DENMARK 16.9
IRELAND 17.2
SWEDEN 19.4
PORTUGAL 19.0
HUNGARY 17.8
LATVIA 17.6
BELGIUM 17.7
UK 18.4
GERMANY 18.5
SPAIN 19.6
EU (28 COUNTRIES) 19.7
FRANCE 19.8
ITALY 21
SLOVENIA 22.2
GREECE 23.5
SLOVAKIA 22.3
CZECH REPUBLIC 23.1
LITHUANIA 24.8
LUXEMBOURG 26
AUSTRIA 27.5
MALTA 28.3
ROMANIA 40.4
BULGARIA 41

Share of 15-year-olds scoring at or below Level 2 in PISA 2009
Aftermath of shock!

• Commissioner Vassiliou established an independent HIGH LEVEL Group of Experts on Literacy in February 2011

• ‘to examine the most effective and efficient ways to improve reading skills in Europe’ (p.9)

• and to contribute to reducing the percentage of low achievers to less than 15%.
Wide-range of stakeholders

Co-operative approach

- Businesses
- Celebrities
- NGOs
- Youth workers
- Volunteers
- Media
- Publishers
- Politicians
- Policy Makers
- Parents
- Health professionals
- Ministries of Finance
Tackling the Literacy Challenge

Preconditions For Success

• Creating a Literate environment
• Improving the Quality of Teaching
• Ensuring Participation and Inclusion
Creating a Literate Environment

- Cultivating a **culture** of reading

- Increasing the **availability** and **visibility** of reading materials: online and offline

- Increasing **motivation** by offering diverse reading materials: books, comics, magazines ..... 

- Increasing **family literacy** programmes: 
Improving the Quality of Teaching

• Report recommends that all teachers

(i) should have excellent, **in-depth knowledge** about the teaching of literacy

(ii) should be able to **detect and handle reading difficulties**

(iii) should be involved in **determining what to teach**, how to teach and what materials to use

(iv) teachers need an environment in which their **continuous learning** is stimulated,

(v) the best teachers 'are not just trained well, they are **trained often** throughout their career'
A coherent literacy curriculum

• The report recommends that schools:

  - allow adequate time for reading activities
  - children should be encouraged to carry out free reading, thus gain experience in choosing their own reading materials
Improving the Quality of Teaching (Cont.)

• “A quarter of 15-year-old claim that reading is a waste of time, while 34% never read for pleasure”.

• Secondary school teachers should also be teachers of reading and get involved to support ‘school-wide literacy strategies’ (p.44).

• Literacy must be seen as essential not just by literacy specialists but by the entire school system.

• The digital environment needs to be further exploited to entice youngsters to read
Participation and Inclusion

• **Socio-economic gap**
  Children from poorer backgrounds tend to have more difficulties with literacy - hence Report suggests that schools need to provide all students with **similar opportunities** for learning.

• **The migrant gap**
  Migrants students also appear to have lower reading levels - hence Report suggests that Member States need to provide **language and literacy screening** and provide the necessary individualised support.
Participation and Inclusion (cont.)

• **The gender gap**
  Differences between boys and girls are considerable and widen at secondary -

  Only 13% of the girls have poor reading skills while 27% of boys. (Malta significant differences)

  Member states are encouraged to think in terms of what can motivate and engage boys (p.48)

• **The digital gap**
  Poorly educated, elderly and unemployed have much less opportunity to increase their digital skills.
The Report does not advocate any ‘quick fixes’ but stresses the need to develop a comprehensive vision on literacy that spans the entire life course” (p.31)
Recommendations: Literacy For All Ages

- Young children
- Primary school years
- Adolescents
- Adults
Young children

• The Report considers the importance of the provision of high quality *early childhood education and care*.

• Encourages the development of *effective* ways of working with parents.
Primary School Years

• Increase the number of **specialist reading teachers** and promote **higher qualifications** for all primary teachers.

• *Identify reading difficulties* before they ‘become entrenched’

• *Inspire the motivation to read* by providing reading materials which are attractive and challenging for all abilities, by using ICT.
Adolescents

• Make every teacher a literacy teacher

• *raise awareness* among teachers about the importance of literacy skills for all courses

• Provide the *right materials* to motivate all readers, especially boys.

• *Stimulate school-business* cooperation and promote awareness of ‘*the importance of literacy in the workplace*’.
Adults

- Adults need support to overcome their shame and ask for help
- They need to be enabled to understand the NEED for literacy
- Strengthen the profession of adult literacy teachers
- Ensure broad and varied access to learning opportunities: offer adults appropriate courses at convenient times
What initiatives are being undertaken in the E.U. to support the development of literacy?

- **Poland**: 'All Poland loves to Read'
- **U.K.**: 'Get London Reading Campaign'
- **Italy**: 'Nati per Leggere'
- **Netherland**: 'Literacy chains'
- **Portugal**: 'National Reading Plan'
Conclusion

• The Report has served to accentuate Europe’s concerns about extending literacy levels across the age groups and reducing or preventing illiteracy.

• It has underlined that literacy is not an issue 'just for the educational sector, nor a problem to be solved by policy makers alone....'

• All players in society have important contributions

• The message is clear: whatever our role we should all....