Host address:
The PAGES project

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The PAGES project is an acronym standing for „Projekt Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung für Erwachsene im Sozialraum“ (Project Alphabetization and Basic Education for Adults in Social Areas).

It is a joint research network between the University of Cologne and Siegen University as well as the Volkshochschule Köln (equivalent to a Community College, run by the City of Cologne) and the Learning Region (a local educational provider).

The research project started in January 2008 and is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research in the course of the current United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012). The project combines language learning theory and teaching practice.

The regional project intended to help people living in Cologne, both L1 and L2 German, without sufficient literacy skills.

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Project overview

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The project aims to improve access to literacy instruction & basic education for participants.

It also improves the number and quality of literacy classes (this includes developing teaching material and curricula). It helps train literacy instructors and teachers.

Research on linguistic prerequisites for literacy.

Research on the educational history of learners.

It enables learners to function in a literate world and to participate in society.

Course offer

Literacy classes for learners of German as L1 and German as L2 in three districts in Cologne that have been identified as socioeconomically and educationally disadvantaged districts. A social area is a district of Cologne with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged families, a high unemployment rate and often also a high percentage of immigrants. The City of Cologne has started identifying these districts in 2006 with the help of criteria such as socioeconomic status, increased recourse to educational support and increased social impacts.

To date, 10 districts have been declared „social areas“ in Cologne.

The PAGES classes are low-level (low-threshold) classes intended for learners of L1 and/or L2 German literacy.

They are divided into three terms/year with 150 hours/trimester. Classes are held 3 days weekly, 3 hours/day (Meschenich: Mon, Tue, Wed 9-12 am).

The classes cover literacy and basic education (basic maths, nutrition science, health education, kinematics, relaxation techniques). There is no fixed curriculum; instructors negotiate course contents individually.

Heterogeneous groups of learners are taught, varying degrees of L1 literacy, different L1 writing systems, varying degrees of oral proficiency in L2 German.
Heterogeneity in learner groups

- learners with L1 German
- immigrant learners with L2 German

oral proficiency in L2 German?
literate in L1?
characteristics of L1 writing system?
→ alphabetic system?
→ Roman letters?

collaboration with colleagues from Dept. of German Language and Literature

Kölner-Meschenich

- rural part of Cologne, surrounded by fields
- in the 1970s and 1980s 8 high-rise buildings of 26 floors each were built
- intended as housing areas in proximity to nature and rurality for private investors → no acceptance
- an increasing number of immigrants ("guest workers") and socioeconomically disadvantaged families moved in
- 1318 apartments, 4,000 inhabitants
- 73% of the inhabitants of Meschenich are immigrants, coming from 60 different countries
- integration is minimal: most of the immigrants prefer to stay with their families/nationalities, many speak no or little German
- transportation to central Cologne is difficult: only one bus line, 30 minutes to city center, many inhabitants prefer to stay in their familiar neighborhood

The PAGES class in Meschenich

- currently 7 women aged 30-60
- home countries: Afghanistan, Morocco, Iraq
- native languages: Pashto, Berber, Arabic
- length of residence in Germany: 6-17 yrs (average 12 yrs)
- time spent in this class: 8-28 months (average 12 months)
- the two women who have been in the class for 24 resp. 28 months will now leave to attend integration course; literacy as a prerequisite for participation in integration class; integration class leads to CEF level A1
- motivation: independence, help children with school work, improve oral proficiency → communication, write letters to family in home country

PAGES project work: the contribution of the research team

Portfolio work
- collection of writing samples and learner's results (also used for motivation)
- bi-annual assessment to investigate longitudinal development and progress
- helping the learner define his/her individual learning goals and offering ways how to achieve these goals → can-do perspective

Collection and analysis of writing samples

Assessment tool

1. Emblems
2. Letters
3. Vocabulary (oral)
4. Vocabulary (written)
5. Text reading & understanding
6. Writing
no standard degree required for teaching literacy classes at community colleges - not all instructors have been trained for literacy instruction or GSL instruction
first masters programme in „Literacy and basic education“ started in October 2009 at Weingarten College of Education
training of instructors is a crucial concern in literacy efforts in Germany
PAGES offers training and workshops for GSL literacy instructors, e.g. in teaching methods, contrastive literacy (for GSL learners who are literate in their L1) and in-classroom assessment/portfolio work

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Project movie
Today, 5:00 pm
A view from the classroom
video presentation of selected teaching units and material from the literacy class in Meschenich
discussion about adult literacy instruction in Germany with researchers and instructor

Selected references