FUNCTIONAL ILLITERACY IN GERMANY

In Germany about four million young people and adults with German as their first language are considered to be functionally illiterate (Döbert/Hubertus 2000).

Approximately 20,000 of them are currently attending courses at adult education centres to learn reading and writing.

Their skills and competences vary drastically:
- quantitatively different performance in reading and writing competences,
- qualitatively different competence profiles, approaches, strategies.

 Necessary competences teachers in the courses need to have:
- assessment and interpretation of the individual reading and writing competences,
- arrangement of differentiated learning situations and the ability to offer a rich variety of learning materials, which meet the learners' individual skills and profiles.

The teachers in courses have different qualifications:
- school-teacher, educationalist, psychologist, social welfare worker, ...
- only a few teachers have a profound education in teaching, assessing and developing reading and writing (Döbert/Löffler 2008).

So far, state-approved training programmes to qualify the teachers do not exist.

Individual diagnosis based on standardized assessment only is problematic, because
- test-items are limited to specific tasks due to the standardization of scoring and interpretation,
- tests and their items can focus only on small parts of an individuals profile of competence,
- test results are always affected by measurement errors (question of reliability);
- punctual assessments can not be precise,
- the validity of a test might be relatively high for a large group of people, but low for an individual, depending on his/her cultural and biographical background, experience, point of view, way of thinking, knowledge, interests etc. (question of validity),
- the greater the time span of prediction the lower the prognostic validity.

Individual diagnosis can be efficient only if the learners are given the opportunity
- to show their specific skills, competences and performance in various and – if possible – authentic situations,
- to explain their approach to solve a task or a problem so that the teacher is able to interpret results in a valid way (question of individual validity),
- to reflect and to express their own views on the progress of their performance and on the adequacy of their learning and development opportunities.
- Individual diagnosis is aiming at understanding not at measuring and scoring.
- To “understand”, individual diagnosis must be dialogue-based.

Dialogue-based diagnosis is
- necessary to assess the individual reading and writing competences of each student and to interpret them in order to find out how to stimulate and support their further development,
- the basis to arrange differentiated learning situations and to develop and offer a rich variety of learning materials, which meet the individual skills and competences of the learners
- helpful to observe the individual development of reading and orthographic competences and to answer the questions regarding what the learner is already able to do, what he/she wants to learn and what might be the next step in the learning biography (Dehn 2008).

LITERATURE