

## **New Developments in Adult Education in Northrhine Westfalia – Presentation of the Project „Intercultural Learning in Small Enterprises“**

Manfred BUHL, BLK-Programm „Lebenslanges Lernen“

### **Abstract**

The conventional system of adult education in Northrhine Westfalia (NW) was quite reliable for 30 years: people had the occasion to go to adult colleges if they had a motivation to learn languages, politics, health, etc. – but not specialties that belonged to their jobs and enterprises. The enterprises themselves enabled their management to continue studies, but not their common workers. This system seems no longer correspond to actual developments. The public financing of adult education becomes more difficult because of smaller public budgets. Globalization is more and more a risk. Jobs are more and more insecure. Employed and unemployed persons have to learn new matters in shorter times. For that reason the administration of NW tries to specify public financing of adult education. Adult colleges are encouraged to place their offers closer to the enterprises. On the other side the enterprises are invited to integrate education and continuing studies into their strategies of development. My project tries to support this development: Intercultural learning integrates general, political and professional learning. Money from public budget and investments of the enterprise as well as of the learner are bounded to enable lifelong learning in the context of working.

Nowadays Implementation of lifelong learning is a leading idea in discussions about education and adult education world wide – or at least in the so-called developed countries.

The reasons are:

- Globalization is more and more a risk.
- Jobs are more and more insecure.
- Employed and unemployed persons have to learn new subjects in a shorter time.

Many older concepts of adult education are no longer up-to-date. Education Politics are therefore encouraged to develop conceptions that consider this new situation. However, at first I present to you the most important elements of the conventional system of adult education politics in North Rhine-Westphalia (NW), and then I will tell you something about the changes.

### **The conventional System of adult education in North Rhine-Westphalia**

In the Federal Republic of Germany, education politics are mainly under responsibility of the 16 federal states. NW has the most inhabitants of all these 16 states, 15 of 80 millions German people live in NW. In former decades NW had a high percentage of hard working people without optimal equipment to obtain a professional qualification. That is why the majority of people in NW in elections traditionally gave their votes to the social democratic party. Since the 1960s one of the central offers of NW social democratic governments was to enable people to get adult education after finishing the time of obligatory education. A system of general adult education was therefore established.

*General adult education in NW means:*

- All communities have to offer it, especially in adult colleges. To fulfill this obligation, the communities get money from the government of NW.
- Contents of the tuition in adult colleges are: languages, PC-training, politics, domestic sciences and family relationships, health, sports, culture, etc.
- People may use the tuition, but there is no obligation to do so. Many of the lessons are given in the later afternoon, to facilitate people that are working in the earlier hours of the day. People pay a small fee for these educational services.

Beside this general adult education there is another method of educational training which vocational adult education is. Whereas the conditions of general adult education differ in the 16 states of Germany, in case of vocational adult education they are quite similar.

*Vocational adult education means:*

Companies and enterprises decide about the contents of the courses. Companies mostly pay the fees or provide opportunity during normal working hours for training, if they are immediately useful in the context of production, distribution etc. (especially for employees that are working as members of the management). The employees pay the fees, if the tuition is mainly useful for their individual education. In past years, companies were interested in defending this sphere, because they distrusted some contents of public adult education or considered that it was unnecessary. On the other hand it is not the function of taxes to subsidize learning in the immediate context of introducing new technologies in special enterprise, and so on.

Between the described two spheres there is another sphere that has increased continually: i.e. in situations caused by unemployment necessitating training for a new job, which is paid by the unemployment insurance.

### **New Developments in society**

This system seems no longer relevant to actual developments. As I mentioned earlier, Globalization is influencing more and more the rules of adult education. There is a high level of unemployment – more than 4 millions registered people, about 9%. Unemployed people do not pay taxes. Companies and enterprises claim that they pay too many taxes – compared with the conditions in other countries. The German central government has reduced taxes. The result: public financing of adult education becomes more difficult because of smaller public budgets. On the other hand more adult education – general and vocational – is needed to improve the faculties of working people to fulfill new functions or to find a new job.

### **New orientation of adult education**

For that reason the administration of NW tries to specify public financing of adult education. Adult colleges are encouraged to place their facilities for training closer to commercial enterprises. On the other hand the commercial enterprises are invited to integrate education and continuing studies into the strategies of their development. The most important principles of this new conception are:

#### *Concentration of public support*

The adult colleges no longer get money to offer tuition for sports or other recreational hobbies. They do receive money to offer qualifications that are useful in the context of assuring employability or in the solving of relevant social problems, for example integration of immigrants, etc.

The consequence of this recommendation is therefore to persuade the educational authorities to emphasize or encourage training which will assist the teaching of professional or social subjects; resulting in the reduction of fees for such courses but increasing of fees for sports and other recreational subjects.

#### *Integration of general, political and vocational learning*

The current differentiation between vocational and general or political learning seems to be unsatisfactory therefore. Recommended training to be promoted will be those which integrate elements of general, political and vocational learning. (I will give you an example later on.)

#### *Developing of new places of learning*

Adult colleges are urged to go to the company enterprises and to offer contents that are coordinated with the actual need, i.e. representatives of the teaching faculty will be prepared to instruct at the location of the company.

### **Project „Intercultural learning“**

My project tries to support this development. Intercultural learning integrates general, political and professional learning. Money from public budget and investment by commercial enterprise as well as of the student are coordinated to enable lifelong learning within context of working. For example: A small enterprise intends to make business with a commercial enterprise in another country. The workers of the commercial enterprise have to learn about the organizational and technological structure of the enterprise in the other country. However they also have to learn the language of that country, to learn about the political and social system of that country and they have to study the culture of people and business partners in that country. This is a typical case of integrated learning. The enterprise has the responsibility for the commercial and technological parts of the preparation of workers, and it will pay the costs of this preparation. However the other contents: language, political system, culture, etc. are those that belong to the individual equipment of the learner. That is why the capacities and the know-how of adult colleges may also be used to assist the worker.

An important principle of our project is that all participants contribute their part of the costs. These parts may be: investment of paid working time by the enterprise, investment of leisure time by the worker, subsidy of individual parts of learning by public money, sharing of the remaining fees of tuition. At least: a very important aim is to impart not only science to the student, but also the awareness that lifelong learning is necessary and that each single student has a responsibility for his own development.