Project: European Input for Sustainable Education and Learning EISEL (2017-2-NL01-KA104-038513)
Sending organisation: Learn for Life, NL (info@platformlearnforlife.nl, www.lflplatform.net)
Host organisation: Lesen und Schreiben Berlin e.V. / Grundbildungszentrum

**Aim of the study visit**
Learn from the implementation of the Alpha Dekade and especially the work of the Alpha Bündnisse in Berlin and gain insight into the Alpha partnerships in Berlin: key conditions and pitfalls.

**Participants**
- Joost Huiskens: Reading and Writing Foundation Friesland
- Marian Janssen: Zet een punt
- Majinka van Slijpe: Edukoers
- Lidwien Vos de Wael: Learn for Life

**Programme**
- **21 October**: Grundbildungszentrum
  - Raupe und Schmetterling i.v.m. Alpha Siegel
- **22 October**: Alpha-Bündnis Spandau
  - Lern-Café, Volkshochschule, GIZ
- **23 October**: Alpha-Bündnis Neukölln
  - Projectenhaus, Lesen und Schreiben, Lernhaus
21 OCTOBER 2019 – GRUNDBILDUNGSZENTRUM / RAUPE & SCHMETTERLING

Contact persons
- Theresa Hamilton - coördinator GBZ
- Claire Zynga – co-coördinator, GBZ
- Gerhard Prange – learner expert
- Björn Helbig, trainer GBZ en contactpersoon ervaringsdeskundigen

Alpha Dekade and Grundbildungszentrum (GBZ) [https://grundbildung-berlin.de](https://grundbildung-berlin.de)

Research in Germany revealed that around 6.2 million Germans (1 in 8) have difficulties with reading and writing. Therefore the government announced the Alpha Dekade (2016-2026) and is investing in basic education with the main objective to increase the level of basic skills nationwide. The national government provides the framework and the federal states design their own policy according to their specific needs. [http://www.basicskills.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/002_Decade-for-Literacy-in-Germany_Karin-Küßner.pdf](http://www.basicskills.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/002_Decade-for-Literacy-in-Germany_Karin-Küßner.pdf)

In Berlin, the Grundbildungszentrum is the supporting and coordinating organization for basic education. The GBZ builds networks (Alpha-Bündnisse) that implement the objectives of the Alpha Dekade in the districts of Berlin. This GBZ was established in 2014 by Lesen und Schreiben Berlin and Arbeitskreis Orientierungs- und Bildungshilfe (AOB).

The GBZ developed the Alpha Siegel and coordinates a Grundbildungs-Atlas in which all courses, projects and providers related to basic education can be found. GBZ supports Learner Experts (experts-by-experience). Yearly, GBZ organizes a big conference on basic education, best practices and research outcomes. [https://www.alphadekade.de/de/ziele-1698.html](https://www.alphadekade.de/de/ziele-1698.html), [https://grundbildung-berlin.de/grundbildungs-atlas/](https://grundbildung-berlin.de/grundbildungs-atlas/)

Learning ambassadors (Lerner-experten) and Komm cafe

In Berlin it is difficult to find adults for the courses whose native language is German. Therefore, GBZ makes use of learner experts: (former) participants who have been trained to be able to further highlight the existence of so many illiterate adults in Berlin, their needs and wishes. Learner experts assess written materials, answer questions from the press and support the awareness training sessions provided by GBZ. Grundbildungszentrum tries to organize the relationship with the learner experts as equally as possible. E.g., many internal meetings are accessible to both professionals and learner experts. Learner experts are not only deployed on call, but they enter into a long-term ‘partnership’ with GBZ. They receive a small reimbursement for their voluntary work. Currently, the group of learner experts is not very large. Therefore, the appeal made to them can sometimes be too much and the same faces appear in the newspapers (in the Netherlands we have a similar situation).

The learner experts meet every month in the ‘Komm-Café’ without an agenda. Here the experts talk freely about issues they want to know or exchange.
**Alpha Siegel**

As part of the Alpha Dekade, the Alpha Siegel has been developed. This is a quality seal for organizations that make both the building and communication more accessible. Therefore, organizations started using more pictograms and ask learner experts to check their written communication. Organizations that want to qualify for the Alpha Siegel need to follow a workshop at the GBZ where their staff learns how to recognize low literacy and to answer questions from people with less basic skills. They also learn to whom and how they can send people for an appropriate course. Learner experts are always present at this workshop.

After two years, the organization is re-evaluated in order to look if they still meet the criteria for this quality seal. In Berlin, 30 organizations now have Siegel and the ambition is that there will be many more in the near future. https://grundbildung-berlin.de/alpha-siegel/

**Alpha Bündnisse and mobile counselors**

GBZ is the support organisation for the Alpha Bündnisse (networks) in the districts of Berlin. Actually there are nine networks. The first one was founded in Neukölln. Each network has a paid coordinator who operates independently. One of the aims is to have a low-threshold open centre in every district. A good example is the ‘Anlaufstelle’ in Spandau. Another aim is to appoint mobile counsellors (Mobile Berater). This is an expert in basic education who can contact potential learners and inform them where they can join an appropriate course. The mobile counsellor also helps organisations with their questions on literacy issues.

**An organisation with an Alpha Siegel: Raupe und Schmetterling, Frauen in der Lebensmitte**

Contact person: Karin Trees

In Raupe und Schmetterling, founded in 1983, women can develop themselves from ‘caterpillar to butterfly’. Once started as a meeting place, it is now a centre to help women to find their way (again) to work, by offering courses and workshops. This concerns women who are divorced, who want to re-enter after illness, newcomers and others. In addition to the courses, women can ask for personal counselling. Many courses, mainly given by volunteers, are free of charge in order to keep the accessible. The Alpha Siegel fits well in the organizations’ policy. An accessible building and easy-to-read communication benefits the work of the organisation, not only for low-literate women but also for the public in general.

Raupe und Schmetterling was one of the first organisations receiving the Alpha Siegel. Counsellors followed the awareness training of GBZ and know how to recognize persons with reading and writing difficulties. Usually they try to arrange appropriate support for the person within their own organisation, as they offer several courses related to basic skills. Recently, the re-evaluation for the Alpha Siegel took place. Learner experts advised them to further adapt their flyer and website.

https://www.raupeundschmetterling.de/home/
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Contact persons
- Susanne Angulo, Alpha Bundniss Spandau
- Andrea Lehmann - Jobcenter Spandau
- Kristina Schmidt-Köhnelein, Volkshochschule Spandau
- Zeynep Sezgin Radandt – KASA

Alpha-Bündnis Spandau and Lerncafé

Alpha-Bündnis Spandau was founded in 2015 and has a network of 18 participants, such as the Volkshochschule and the public library. The network partners have signed an agreement that, amongst other issues, states that they will attend at least 6 meetings per year out of 9. They organize public activities and regularly meet in the Lern-Café, where the coordinator of the Bündnis has her office.

The Lern-Café and Jobcenter work closely together, trying to deliver a tailor-made offer for every specific learning need. The Lern-Café mainly focusses on reading, writing and digital skills. The Volkshochschule offers courses in further basic skills. ESF and the municipality finance the Lern-Café, which has an Alpha Siegel.

The Lern-Café provides literacy alpha level 1 and 2, Open Learning (individual learning with a teacher, based on a customized question), Social Counselling (such as support with application letters and childcare requests) and Legal Support.

In addition to being a course location, the Lerncafé is also an accessible meeting place. The Lerncafé is located in a shopping street and has an open appearance. Despite its accessible location and appearance, it is still not easy to find native speaker learners. Together, Lern-Café and Volkshochschule, are looking for new strategies to recruit native speakers in particular. E.g. they developed a new campaign handing out postcards at organizations where potential target group can be found.

Volkshochschule (VHS) Spandau

Every district in Berlin has its own Volkshochschule. VHS Spandau, located at walking distance from the Lern-Café, offers courses in many different fields, from hobby courses to formal adult education courses. There are courses mathematics, finances, digitalization, health skills and courses that offer support to find a job. The VHS offers many language courses for migrants, but does not offer reading and writing courses for native speakers. Participants pay only a little fee for these courses in order to keep them accessible for everybody. The total number of participants per year is around 10,000.

NB: Volkshochschule and Jobcenter use the same IT-system, which facilitates mutual referral.

Jobcenter Spandau - Alpha Lotsen (‘guides’) and Alpha tool

Inspired by the Alpha-Siegel, Jobcenter Spandau introduced the Alpha Lotsen: since 2016, every team at the Jobcenter has a contact person for low literacy issues. This person, trained by the Grundbildungszentrum, can answer questions about the illiteracy and refer someone to a course when needed.

In addition, Spandau Jobcenter also developed the Alpha Tool in 2018. This tool has two goals: promote awareness of illiteracy and support of low-literate persons (like reading activities for parents and for youngsters, psychological support and accessible communication). E.g. Jobcenter offers workshops for young parents in cooperation with Stiftung Lernen.
Gesellschaft für Interkulturelles Zusammenleben (GIZ) – KASA project

The LEO research on illiteracy was the starting point for many projects in Germany. In that context, GIZ started with KASA, an international project that develops courses for low-literate persons with a migrant background. The courses developed in the framework of this project, are given in places where they already come regularly, such as mosques, churches and migrant organizations. The method is based on the contrastive approach: the differences and similarities between the mother tongue and foreign language are examined. The KASA project developed maps in which the similarities and differences between sounds from the migrants’ native language and German are shown with images. In addition, a textbook and a teacher’s guide have been developed.

The courses have bilingual teachers who speak German-Arabic, German-Persian and / or German-Turkish. These courses have been developed this way in order to give an appropriate offer to persons who need small-scale, low-threshold courses, with the pace adapted to their own learning capacities. These courses usually take two years. A project team monitors the quality of the courses. All courses are visited once a month. Experts from Austria and Bulgaria participate as evaluators in the KASA project.

In addition to KASA, GIZ is developing EUKOAL. The aim of this project is to realize a network for contrastive adult literacy in order to exchange knowledge and look for possibilities to implement the methodology in other areas, like schools. In that context, GIZ is interested to have contacts with relevant initiatives in the Netherlands.
Contact persons
- Conny Kirsten: coordinator Alpha Bündniss and Lern Laden, mobile counselor
- Franziska Vorwerk- Public Library Neukölln – recently joining the Bündniss
- Urda Thiessen – Stiftung Lesen und Schreiben Neukölln
- Nikola Amrhein – coordinator Lernhaus, teacher en social worker

Alpha-Bündnis Neukölln

Alpha Bündnis Neukölln started in 2012, initiated by Lesen und Schreiben e.V. Berlin. This network with 60 partners is partly financed by the European Social Fund.

Aims of Alpha-Bündnis Neukölln
- Develop training programmes and courses
- Joint publicity
- Create awareness on illiteracy
- Securing finances
- Professionalism: exchange knowledge about literacy or related topics

Structure
- Steering group with Lesen und Schreiben, Alpha-Bündnis coordinator, public library and Jobcenter. The group meets every six weeks, they plan activities, make decisions and review the objectives
- Alliance partners. Every organisation can join the Bündnis. Alliance partners have signed a declaration of intent. No further specific agreements are made. Despite the voluntary basis, many partners are actively involved in the activities.
- Further network contacts with interested organisations that have not signed the declaration of intent

Activities
- Awareness training, four times a year, with the involvement of learner experts
- Workshops for network partners about content and methodology of the Alpha courses
- Information meetings about the Alpha Bündnis for potential new partners
- Professional exchange
- Learning campaigns
- Four network meetings a year for all partners and others interested organisations
- Newsletter
- Mobile Counsellor for basic education, linked to Lernladen and Alpha-Bündnis. This counsellor visits organisations in Neukölln in order to find potential learners who many cases, have multi-problems. The counsellor informs them about basic skills courses and further education, and if relevant, about how to find their way on the labour market

Success factors of Alpha-Bündnis Neukölln
- Involvement of learner experts
- Use the qualities of every organisation involved and strengthen each other
- Every organisation can contribute in its own way and this contribution is periodically updated
- Cooperation with social partners, like the police or organisations for free food distribution
- Regular network meetings with useful information and current topics for discussion
- Good communication in between the network meetings via newsletters and online platform
- Patience
- A coordinator with a vision on literacy
- The network is embedded in the Neukölln social structure
Challenges of Alpha-Bündnis Neukölln
- Keep the partners involved
- Find new connections/partners
- Find/recruit native speaker learners
- Sufficient financial resources to cover all needs
- Organisations are familiar with the Alpha Bündnis and its aims, but literacy is not high enough on their priority list. Illiteracy is merely seen as an individual problem and not yet as a social problem that involves the society as a whole.

Benefit of the network

As most learners need a customized approach it is important that the partners organisations know the Neukölln social map very well. The Alpha Bündnis made such a map, including the places where potential learners can be found. By connecting relevant organisations and places better with each other, it is much easier to refer potential learners to the most appropriate place.

Lernladen

The Lernladen offers information about basic and further education related to work. The Laden is easy accessible located in a shopping street. People just walk in and make an appointment with one of the employees. The Mobile Counselor is regularly present to give advice.

Lesen und Schreiben

This organisation was founded in 1983 with an important contribution of (what we now would call) learner experts. At a start the foundation offered education combined with learning at a workplace within the same building. Nowadays this workplace is less used because of lack of finances, but social skills and empowerment are still important goals of the foundation. In the past, Lesen und Schreiben had contact with the Dutch foundation of/for learner experts ABC. During our visit we met participants who learn about the separation of waste, how to make cartoons, and how to deal with (fake) news. Lesen und Schreiben wants to offer a community atmosphere amongst participants and staff, among other things through the daily joint lunch.

Lernhaus Neukölln

Lernhaus Neukölln, part of Volkshochschule Neukölln, offers basic skills courses for the labour market. 80% of the participants find a job afterwards. The Lernhaus is intended for ‘functional illiterates.’ Currently, there are three groups with 10 participants each, generally persons with a migration background.

Every week the Lernhaus organises an Info-Café with a guest speaker who presents topics in easy-to-understand language. Topics can be insurances, health, mobility or house renting. The Café is free and open for all public. People just walk in: participants of the courses, their friends of family and persons that just pass by. An announcement board on the sidewalk shows what the lecture is about that week. The windows have no curtains. Anyone can look inside and decide to drink a cup of coffee and join the conversations.

In addition to the Info-Café there is a discussion group for parents where they talk about child raising. The mentor of this group starts the conversation with a short introduction or video. This group is also for public in general, even for persons who do not speak German very well. The Info-Café is like a community centre for the neighbourhood.
The basic skills courses (reading, writing and maths) are fulltime, given in a relaxed atmosphere. In addition to these courses participants can also join creative courses like photography or painting. There is a joint lunch and a quiet corner for students who need to withdraw for a moment. Every week there is a meeting with all students. The Lernhaus has very motivated certified freelance teachers.

At the moment there are three level groups. A simple command of (basic) German, basic reading and writing is required. Participants pay a symbolic fee of € 5,00 per three months. The programme is mainly financed with ESF money.

We visit one of the three groups. These participants have a migrant background and a basic level of basic skills. They need more support towards work. The group is very diverse: from a Syrian woman who has only been in Germany for a few years to a Turkish man who went to a German primary school, but has been unable to come along sufficiently and now wants to develop towards a metro driver.
Discussion and points for attention of the Dutch delegation

Learning experts

We discussed about learner experts having the ABC pilot project about Innovation Rooms in mind. The organisations we met try to work with learner experts as much as possible in a horizontal way. Of course this is not easy. How do you realize more equality between learner experts and professionals? It can be useful to organise joint conferences and work meetings, but at the same time it is important to take in account the different positions and needs of both parts. Sometimes it is necessary to talk more freely and then, a separate conversation can be more fruitful. This could be a suggestion for the Innovation Rooms: a balance between joint meetings and conversation within the own group.

Sometimes the same learner experts are appearing again and again in the press, conferences and other meetings. This creates a one-sided image of the very varied group of low literate persons. The aim should be to make this variety more visible by having learner experts with different profiles.

The life story of a learner expert must be authentic and therefore it might be good saying goodbye to an expert after a while and introducing a new person. And in some occasions, it can be wise to protect learner experts against ‘exploitation’ and offer them further possibilities to develop themselves.

Networks - Alpha Bündnisse

We saw that is a real asset to have a coordinator designated for the network, a person with knowledge and vision on illiteracy, who connects the organizations and keeps the network going. In the Netherlands, there is not always such an appointed coordinator (apart from the support of the Reading and Writing Foundation). According the Grundbildungszentrum, the Berlin Bündnisse are more successful when they make clear agreements about the role and tasks of each partner. In addition, it is important to update the common goals and agreements once a year. Networking takes time of the coordinator and all partners involved, therefore investments must be made to facilitate the network.

We discussed whether it is better to have a separate structure for literacy networks of embed such networks in already existing social structure. The answer maybe depends on the specific situation in every region.

Alpha Siegel

The idea of the Alpha Siegel appeals to us. Such a quality mark could also be introduced in our country, fitting quite well in the intention of e-government and accessible (digital) citizen service.

Mobile counsellor

We also liked the idea of the mobile counsellor, who goes from one place to another in order to meet and guide adults with basic skills challenges. A mobile counsellor could also support participation in the Dutch so-called camouflage courses (e.g. in the framework of KLASSE!). In that case, the mobile counsellor must be a professional capable to recognize adults with literacy issues and capable to start a (confidential) conversation.

Anlaufstelle

These low threshold meeting places with a professional, could also be interesting in the Dutch context. We also have some of these easy accessible places and it would be good to develop this idea more, keeping in mind the following:

- Meeting places like this can be linked to already existing civil society initiatives to alleviate a possible financial burden
- We would prefer low threshold places where people can ask their questions and meet a mobile counsellor and not a place where their literacy level is tested
- Learner experts can play an important role in these meeting places
- A good relation with education providers is key to successfully refer a visitor to learning activities without waiting list
Alpha-Bündnis Spandau

For the Lerncafé, the recruitment of native speakers is also a challenge, just like in the Netherlands. We noticed that recruitment in Berlin is mainly focussing on reading and writing activities. Maybe the approaches of KLASSE! and ikwilleren.nl, which focus on a broader spectrum of basic skills in order to motivate potential learners, are interesting for Spandau.

Alpha-Bündnis Spandau has a high level of involvement. Yearly, the 18 partners participate in at least six meetings and there is no ‘one size fits all – pressure’: every partner can contribute according their strengths, limits and needs. Important decisions are taken together. The role of the steering group is primarily the preparation of the meetings.

Alpha-Bündnis Neukölln

The Lernhaus is a low threshold facility with a confidential atmosphere. Its integrated approach, focused on work can be useful in the Netherlands as well as the concept of the open Info-Café. We also conclude that a coordinator with a clear vision on illiteracy provides important added value in the network.

The visit to Neukölln led to an in-depth substantive discussion in our delegation: do we need another system to help low literate persons in an effective way? The current education system is bureaucratic and more aimed at the higher educated. Many persons don’t fit in this system and fall out. Low literacy is a social problem and not an individual problem, as it is treated now. The main question should be: how can we really help persons with reading and writing difficulties and where is the best place to do that? Education should support other goals, such as inclusion, empowerment, participation, and not be a goal in itself. Within our delegation we discussed how this could be applied. It would already be much better to link education and social support stronger together.

Local and regional partnerships

An important aim of this study visit was to gain insight into the way partnerships in Berlin are organised: what are the key conditions for cooperation and what can be pitfalls? The presentation in Neukölln about this topic was very interesting for us and we recognized many aspects that were presented. This will help us to finalize our working document about “How to work in partnerships’.

Input from the Netherlands

Erasmus+ KA1 study visits are primarily aimed at increasing the expertise of the staff of the sending organization and not so much on reciprocity. However, while preparing this study visit, we actively looked how we could give something back to our host organisation. In this way we wanted to express our appreciation for their efforts to receive us so well. We presented two Dutch project: KLASSE! and ikwilleren.nl. Both presentations were very well received and this will lead to further exchange in the near future.