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THE CASE OF GERMANY: LITERACY INSTRUCTION FOR ADULT IMMIGRANTS

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1 Introduction

Since the end of the 1970s immigrants in Germany have been taught how to read and write. These were the days where consciousness began to grow that many of the immigrants that so far had been referred to as *Gastarbeiter* 'guest-workers',¹ would not be returning to their home countries as expected (see Sollors, 2005). After Germany was in ruins in the years following Second World War, by the 1960s industry had begun to recover, revealing a lack of workers. The government then started to 'invite' foreign workers from different European countries who were implicitly expected to leave after several years. Even despite the subsequent immigration of family members and the birth of a whole generation of guest-worker children, the government repeatedly kept claiming that Germany was not an immigration country (see Sprenger & Yaşaner, 2007). Nevertheless, by the end of the 1970s, the first courses for immigrants had already been organized and funded by the government. Throughout the 1980s, 1990s and part of the new millennium a federal organisation (*Sprachverband*) was the major funding source for courses for immigrants. Most of these were regular courses for German as a second language.²

In the year 2000 signs of the inevitable turnaround became clear. The government finally understood that Germany had been an immigration country for decades and that during this period of time many errors had been made. The results of the PISA surveys particularly provided evidence of a serious disadvantage of children and adolescents with migration history (Baumert *et al.*, 2001; see further <http://www.pisa.oecd.org>). The survey clearly shows that being a (young) immigrant in Germany increases a child's chance of disadvantage with all its following educational, employment and social drawbacks.

Fortunately during the past two years some major changes have become apparent. They rest basically upon the Immigration Act,³ which came into force on 1 January 2005 (also see footnote 7). Concepts and curricula⁴ have now been published for language and literacy courses and for the first time there is a curricular framework (e.g. the Austrian concept Fritz *et al.*, 2006). With federal funding there have also been some important changes in the area of qualification: The German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees has published a curriculum which lays the basis for train-the-trainer-programmes for teachers involved in *language* courses. Based on this groundwork a number of train-the-trainer-courses are offered in many places. The costs of these courses are born by the government. Furthermore the Federal Office has published a 'concept' which will lay the basis for training-courses for teachers involved in *literacy* training. Parallel to this development in the last 18 months the *Bielefelder Lehrgang*,⁵ a one-year course developed in Bielefeld with the goal of qualifying literacy-

¹ Guest workers came from Greece, Italy, former Yugoslavia, Spain and Turkey (see chapter IV in Herbert, 2001).

² In the following simply referred as language courses or language classes as opposed to Literacy Courses in German as a Second Language referred as literacy courses or literacy classes.

³ See:

http://www.zuwanderung.de/cln_115/nn_1068550/EN/ImmigrationToday/TheImmigrationAct/theImmigrationAct_node.html?_nnn=true

⁴ In this article a differentiation between 'concept' and 'curriculum' is made. While a concept is mainly understood as a description of goals and teaching-methods without giving specific information about the time needed to reach these goals, a curriculum is understood as containing detailed information about a time schedule. While the concept for German as Second Language and Literacy from Vienna is a good example of concept (see Fritz *et al.*, 2006), since it does not refer to a time schedule, the concept for Germany is an example of curriculum (see Feldmeier, 2007).

⁵ See <http://www.bielefelder-alphaehrgang.de>

trainers, has finally matured and has started, with federal funding, on November 2007. In addition, prompted by the results of an evaluation survey, there has been a nationwide discussion about the necessity for a better funding for L2-literacy teaching, which has finally led to a rise in the total number of units being paid by the government. For literacy-learners there is funding provided for 1200 units (45 minutes per unit). Altogether, there seems to be a turn for the better.

2 *More than two Decades of Literacy Instruction*

The first literacy instruction classes for immigrants were run in the beginning of the 1980s. The starting phase of this literacy work coincided with the beginning of the literacy instruction of *functionally illiterate Germans*. These people had attended school for some years (some dropped out, while others did finish school) and yet were not able to read and write to the extent society expects. Unlike the related general field of literacy instruction, L2-literacy instruction had existed for more than two decades without being able to foster professionalization, although the government did fund literacy courses.⁶ The governmental organisation in charge of funding language and literacy courses for immigrants was the *Sprachverband* (created in 1986), which was provisionally displaced in 2004 by the *Bundesamt für die Anerkennung ausländischer Flüchtlinge* (BAFL) 'Federal Office for the Recognition of Foreign Refugees'. This was finally replaced in 2005 by the *Federal Office for Migration and Refugees* (BAMF), which is now in charge of funding language and literacy courses for immigrants.⁷

One might ask how it was possible that, given more than 20 years of L2-literacy instruction in Germany, it took so long for the fundamental changes of the past two years to occur. Surely, one of the causes has been the governmental view of immigrants in Germany, which has, however, recently undergone an important change with the coming into force of the Immigration Act on 1 January 2005 (the Act will be described in greater depth in the next section). Other reasons might be that, in comparison to countries like USA or UK, there are basically no publication organs; no journals reflect the work done in the field. Established professional journals, for example in the field of (applied) linguistics, will not publish articles by practitioners if their work does not meet their scientific criteria. Thus the link between practitioners in the field and researchers at universities is non-existent. Most of the 'experience-based' concepts for running literacy instruction, curricular frameworks or instruction materials which are developed in centres for adult education are unknown to the rest of the field. In reality it is unclear if lack of communication between practitioners is due to the lack of publication organs; this may instead be the result of practitioners involved in the developing of concepts, curricula and materials appearing to protect their work rather than sharing it with other centres of adult education. This in turn may be due to a lack of possibilities for publication or conference presentation leading to limited opportunities to share one's own (unpaid and demanding) work. The idea that a 'mere practitioner' can become a professional expert in literacy instruction has never been fostered.

⁶ In the field of literacy instruction for German illiterates the grade of professionalisation is higher due to the excellent work done by the „*Bundesverband Alphabetisierung und Grundbildung* 'German Association of Literacy Instruction and elementary Education'. This association, formed in 1984, issues a journal and since 2003 holds an annual conference for literacy instruction. Furthermore its public relation work done in and for the field (for instance TV spots announcing literacy courses) is remarkable. For further information see <http://www.alphabetisierung.de>

⁷ Of course there has been and still are other possibilities for funding literacy instruction. While the Federal Office supplies funding for all of Germany, there are also local funding sources in the different federal states. An example of this kind of communal, municipal or local funding is courses organized by employment agencies. For such courses there is still neither teaching concepts nor curricula nor qualifying courses for trainers, so that the grade of professionalisation in comparison to the federal-level courses is quite low. Theoretically there is a possibility (and in fact this is not an uncommon practice in some cities) to draw on these two (or even more) different types of funding for some learners), thereby boosting the total amount of teaching units available for some courses.

Another important point that might explain why the field of literacy instruction for immigrants has experienced little change over the past two decades could be the role of communities and neighbourhoods in the field of literacy work: in Germany the (migrant) community or the (migrant) neighbourhood rarely serve as a source of volunteers who might get involved in the assistance of literacy instructors. For the same reason the link between centres for adult education and (migrant) communities is not very pronounced.

Finally, attention should be drawn to the fact that there has been constant and easily accessible governmental funding for literacy work. This funding was and is of course very welcome, but it could have paradoxically hindered professionalisation, since there has been no need for the centres involved in adult education to compete for a better position within the field.

3 *The Immigration Act, the Standard Integration Course and the Specific Target Groups*

As noted before, on 1 January 2005, the Immigration Act came into force, which '[...] for the first time provides a legislative framework for controlling and restricting immigration as a whole. The new law also contains measures to promote the integration of legal immigrants in Germany.⁷⁸ The basic idea of this act is the wish to facilitate the integration process of immigrants into German society. This goal is approached in different ways:

- integration through naturalisation;
- integration through language;
- integration through education;
- integration through professional training and employment and
- social integration through projects.

Although all aspects of this goal are of interest, in the following I focus on 'integration through language', since the consideration of all other points are beyond the scope of this chapter.

The goals set by the Federal Office of Immigration and Refugees (in the following referred to as Federal Office) in the Concept for a Nation-Wide Integration Course are based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The main goal - to take an initial step towards integration and towards mastery of German - is seen as the most vital step: 'Language skills are the key to and thus the essential prerequisite for successful integration.' (Integration in Germany, 6).

The core of this course-system is the Standard Integration Course and its respective Nation-wide Concept, which aims at the B1-Level (CEFR) in 600 units (every unit has 45 minutes). Originally three different paces⁹ for reaching the Threshold-Level were settled on: a low pace, which after 600 units leads to the A2-Level, a normal pace which after 600 units leads to the B1-Level and a fast pace which takes 500 units to result in the B1-Level. Based on these three paces, the funding system is apparent: The Federal Office pays for every learner to reach the B1-Level in not more than 600 units. If, for instance, in the placement test a

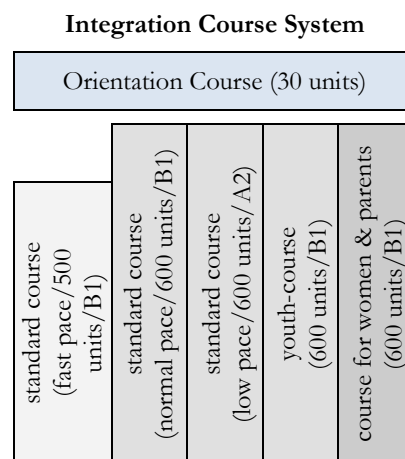


Table 1

⁷⁸ http://www.zuwanderung.de/EN/Home/home__node.html?__nnn=true

⁹ The different paces were set by the Federal Office based on first hand reports of practitioners.

learner turns out to have reached the B1-level, s/he will not receive any funding. After having reached B1-level or having completed 600 to 900 units (even without reaching B1) the learner has to attend an ‘orientation course’ (45 units) which aims at communicating important facts about German society (see Table 1; see further *Integrationskursverordnung*, 2004).

After the findings of the Evaluation Survey of the Integration Course System were published in 2006, the government made some adaptations regarding the course system. The survey revealed that for illiterates, 600 units were clearly insufficient for reaching B1. It was further suggested that a system which differentiates various paces but does not so with respect to the curriculum is not appropriate.¹⁰ Thus one major change in the course system is that the three different paces originally established have been discarded and the number of units for some courses has been increased to 900, resulting in the following:

1. Intensive Course with 400 units for the B1-level
2. Standard Course with 600-900 units for the B1-level.

In order to take into account the different types of learner histories and their social situations in Germany the Federal Office additionally developed three more courses for specific target groups: a Youth Integration Course, a Course for Women and Parents and a Literacy-Course. There is a teaching concept for every one of these three courses (Hoffmann, 2007; Feldmeier, 2007; Reimann, 2007; Concept for a Nationwide Integration Course, 2007), and the original funding for 600 units has been raised to 900 units. Moreover, a fourth specific target group has been settled on which addresses those learners with a special need for coaching (e.g. learners with presumed fossilized knowledge of German). For this fourth special course the teaching concept is still under development.

Altogether the course system includes four additional courses for special target groups, which are based on specific curricula (see Table 2; see *Integrationskursverordnung*, 2007):

3. Youth Course with 900-1200 units for the B1-Level
4. Course for Women and Parents with 900-1200 units for the B1-Level
5. Support Course (curriculum is still to come) with 900-1200 units for the B1-Level.
6. Literacy Course with 900-1200 units for the A2-Level.

The outcome of the classes is measured with a final test (A2/B1-Test). Learners in the intensive courses take the test after 400 units and learners of the standard Integration course after 600 units. The rest of the learners in the special target groups take the test after 900 units. Those who fail the B1-Test have the possibility to take 300 more course units. The prerequisite for this is that they attend the classes regularly (70% attendance)

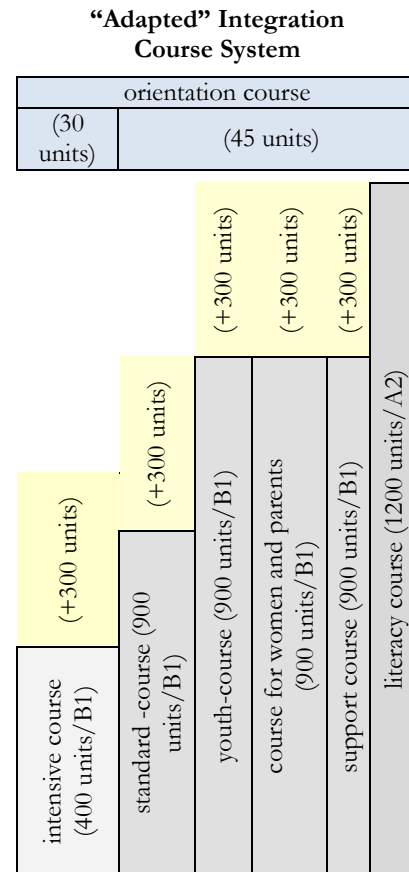


Table 2

¹⁰ Although the survey evaluates the Integration Course System as a whole, literacy classes were insufficiently focussed on. Thus data about the languages or home countries, and the outcomes of literacy classes are still missing. A new special survey on literacy course is planned by the Federal Office for 2009.

and that they complete the Orientation Course. The objective in the Orientation Course (originally 30 units, now 45) is not to teach German or literacy, but to give information about the German society and laws. While it is not expected that the target groups 3-5 will need more than 900 units to reach the B1-level, there seems to be a consensus about the abilities of literacy learners: most of them will not reach B1 in 900 units and will therefore need the additional 300 units.

3.1 The Literacy Course

As already mentioned, the literacy-course is based on a special concept and on the CEFR. Today the practitioners are still working with the “Provisional Concept for a Literacy-Integration-Course”¹¹, which has been adjusted to a total amount of 600 units

Provisional Concept for a nation-wide Literacy-Integration-Course (still in use)		Concept for a nation-wide Literacy-Integration-Course (in work)	
		(compulsory) test (A2/B1)	
voluntary test (A2/B1)		literacy course D	additional module (100 teaching units)
			additional module (100 teaching units)
additional module (100 teaching units)			
orientation course (30 units) or simplified literacy-orientation course (30 units)		(compulsory) test (A2/B1)	
		orientation course (with 45 units) or simplified literacy-orientation course (with 45 units)	
follow-up literacy course	module 6 (100 teaching units)	literacy course C	module 9 (100 teaching units)
	module 5 (100 teaching units)		module 8 (100 teaching units)
	module 4 (100 teaching units)		module 7 (100 teaching units)
basic literacy course	module 3 (100 teaching units)	literacy course B	module 6 (100 teaching units)
	module 2 (100 teaching units)		module 5 (100 teaching units)
	module 1 (100 teaching units)		module 4 (100 teaching units)
		literacy course A	module 3 (100 teaching units)
			module 2 (100 teaching units)
			module 1 (100 teaching units)

Table 3

¹¹The Concept for Literacy-Courses was published in July 2007, while an evaluation survey of the whole Integration Course System was running. Since there was the conviction that after the evaluation there would be some changes necessary, the attribute “provisional” was added, which will expire after the adaptation to the new funding frame.

plus 30 units for the Orientation Course. Since the funding situation has improved and the total amount of teaching units has been raised to a maximum of 1200 units it will be necessary to adapt the concept for the Literacy Course to the new number of teaching units. Table 3 shows the structure of the “provisional concept” (now in use) and the structure of the “coming” concept (still in progress) conforming to the different total number of teaching units. An important point to be referred to is the permeability of the literacy-course in relation to all other courses described in table 2: there is a possibility of changing the course type. Those learners, who can meet the oral and writing demands of the other course-types, can leave the literacy classes and attend a Youth-Course for example, which might be better adapted to the learners needs (e.g. technical language for specific jobs).

3.1.1 *Goals of the Literacy Course*

Among other things, the provisional concept describes goals, topics and to some extent methods for the teaching of literacy classes. Since for any learner there is no way to learn to write and read in German as a second language without understanding German itself, the concept takes into account the necessity of teaching oral German and literacy at the same time. In order to understand the tenets of the concept, literacy classes should instead be thought of as “German classes with literacy” and not the other way around. Thus, learning the second language and learning to write and read constitute two main lines of progression of the concept. A third line of progression is made up of aspects that can be described as “learning to learn”. Within this progression line the goal is to make the learning process transparent and offer the learners tools for setting, planning, conducting and evaluating their own learning. Further goals of the course are, among others, to introduce learners to working with computers, the internet and learning software. Another important aspect of the concept is that it addresses all the different groups of illiterates. Organizing and teaching literacy courses thus means working with pre- and non-literates, functional illiterates and those learners who already have learned to write and read a different script (non-Roman alphabet literates and non- alphabet literates; see Burt, Peyton & Adams, 2003). Of course learners in literacy classes also show much variation in their oral competence in German, ranging from absolute beginners to presumably fossilised¹² learners with a large vocabulary and good communicative competence,¹³ (about A1 or even higher with respect to the CEFR in oral production and reception). Furthermore learners usually show a range of competencies in working with media (e.g. computer and internet), of knowledge of learning strategies or of living situations.¹⁴

4 *The Qualification of the Teachers*

While in the first two decades of literacy teaching in Germany there were no official guidelines concerning the qualification of literacy instructors, there are now some apparent changes in this respect. The Provisional Concept for a Nationwide Integration Literacy Course of the Federal Office points out the importance of qualified staff (see Feldmeier, 2007: 52) and gives four specific minimal criteria concerning the qualification of literacy instructors:

¹² The term “fossilized” is not defined here. The concept for the new Support Course (see Table 2) is still to be published. General information about this new type of course is that it will specifically address fossilized learners, and the definition of this term will be given, based on various factors. One of these seems to be a length of residence of between three and five years. Another is likely to be the ability to communicate at a level of A1 or A2, but with very low grammatical competence (often referred as speaking broken German). Detailed information about this new type of course is not yet available.

¹³ The term “communicative competence” is not meant in the strict sense of the CEFR (see CEFR, p. 101 et seq.). Here it indicates a person who speaks in broken German.

¹⁴ The factors related to living situation do not deal with residence permit status since only “settled foreigners”, “recently immigrated foreigners” and “resettlers” from former German areas in Eastern Europe are allowed to attend classes, while asylum seekers are not.

- Literacy instructors should have completed the course of German as a Foreign Language or German as a Second Language (*Magister*¹⁵, Bachelor or Master).
 - If literacy instructors do not fulfil this requirement, they should have completed the course for Supplementary Qualification for German as a Second Language (either the short course with 70 units (45 minutes per unit) or the long course with 140 units (45 minutes per unit)).
 - Without a Bachelor/Master in German as a Foreign/Second Language or the certification of the Supplementary Qualification for German as Second Language literacy instructors have to apply for an exemption from the Federal Office. Exemptions will be granted only until 31 December 2009.
- Literacy instructors should have experience in the teaching of German as a Second Language. In particular, they should have teaching experience in beginning classes (at A1 level or below) and should know about the written and oral problems that learners will encounter (in class and in the textbooks, workbooks and other teaching materials) in the Basic Language Course (the first 300 units) of the Standard Integration Course.
- Literacy instructors can – in an ideal case – have recognized certifications of attendance of workshops, courses, congresses on literacy and so on. Some knowledge in learner-languages is beneficial.
- Literacy instructors who wish to offer contrastive literacy classes (L1 and L2)¹⁶ should have an additional qualification in contrastive literacy instruction and should have a basic knowledge of the specific learner languages involved.¹⁷

It should be noted that although these criteria can be read in the official Provisional Concept of the Federal Office, there is a conscious use of modal verbs. Being aware that the majority of all teaching staff would not meet the minimal criteria, the Federal Office has emphasized the need for a continuous qualification process without specifying “must-have” criteria.

As mentioned above after 31 December 2009 only qualified teachers with a *Magister*, Bachelor, Master in German as a Foreign/Second Language or the certificate of attendance of the Supplementary Qualification will be allowed to teach in the Integration Course System. Such a deadline for qualification in the field of literacy instruction has not been set by the Federal Office (and it seems that if a deadline for qualification is set, its date will not be earlier 31 December 2009, since there is wish to avoid every additional hurdle to qualification). Nevertheless the (future) line to follow

¹⁵ The *Magister* in Germany has been replaced in the last several years by the Bachelor and Master degrees. In terms of time needed, the *Magister* was comparable to the Bachelor plus Master degree. For the *Magister* in “German as a Foreign/Second Language” about four to five years were expected. For the Bachelor and the Master five years are involved (three and two years respectively).

¹⁶ Unlike bilingual literacy classes whose goal is to foster literacy in both the L1 and L2 (see for example Verhoeven, 1987), contrastive literacy classes are held completely in German as a Second Language and seek a gradual integration of the L1 (see Feldmeier, 2005; Craats & Feldmeier, 2008). The inclusion of a L1/L2 contrastive approach in literacy classes is a direct consequence of the Common European Framework, which describes mediation (interpreting and translating) as one language activity (see CEFL, p. 14).

¹⁷ In the evaluation survey of the Integration Course System data about the languages of the course-participants were not collected. Only data about the nationalities of the course-participants are available. This allows only an imprecise insight into the possible L1s in the Integration Course System. According to the evaluation results 23.1% of the participants are Turkish, 16.1% are from the Russian Federation, 6.7% are Ukrainian, 6.7% are from Kazakhstan, 3.3% are from Albania, 2.6% are from Iraq, 2.5% from Serbia/Montenegro, 2.2% from Thailand, 2% from Iran and 2% are Vietnamese. 38.2% are from other countries (see the *Evaluation der Integrationskurse*, 2006: 35). Based on these data there is – for instance – no way to figure out how many of the Turkish participants have Kurdish as L1 or are bilingual in Turkish and Kurdish. Nor is it possible to find out which dialect the participants may speak; this is of special interest because it is – based on experiences and on first hand reports – widely assumed that among the Kurdish participants, those with Kurmanji dialect as L1 constitute one of the largest groups in literacy classes (see Thackston (undated) for a description of the Kurmanji-dialect). Newer but unpublished data especially concerning the literacy classes suggest that the most spoken L1s in literacy classes are Turkish, Arabic, Russian, Kurdish, Albanian, Thai, Persian, Polish, Serbian and Vietnamese.

seems to be clear: Literacy instructors will – at some specific date in the future – have to earn a qualification in Second Language Instruction and Literacy Instruction. This makes sense, since literacy instruction in the second language will always have to include language teaching. And in fact there is funding for a qualification course German as a Second Language (70 or 140 units) and since November 2007 also for an 80 unit qualification course Literacy Instruction in German as a Second Language.

4.1 *The Qualification Course Literacy Training in German as a Second Language*

As noted before, teachers working in the Integration Course System need a qualification in teaching German as a Second Language. For those who do not have a Bachelor/Master in German as a Foreign/Second Language there is the possibility of acquiring a qualification by attending a qualifying course. This course is funded by the government with a maximum of 650 Euro (70 units for the course) or 1300 Euro (140 units for the course), respectively, for every participant approved (the terms of approval are not discussed here).

Throughout 2006 and 2007 a group of practitioners and theorists worked out a course for the qualification of literacy-teachers. The Bielefeld Course for Literacy Teaching in German as a Second Language (*Bielefelder Lehrgang zur Alphabetisierung in der Zweitsprache Deutsch*) was originally designed as a 120 unit course with about 120 units of homework phases. It covered four important fields (four modules with 30 units each) of literacy work, moving from theory to practice.

- In the first module theoretical fundamentals such as literacy acquisition models are discussed.
- The themes covered lead to a theory-based module which focuses on *concrete* aspects of literacy work (e. g. use of visuals in literacy courses or inclusion of the learner's first languages).
- The third module leaves the theory behind and primarily deals with practical problems including the conceptualisation and production of teaching resources like games, exercise sheets, etc. or the use of computers in literacy work. A second goal of these 30 units is to prepare participants for the practical module to come.
- This last practical module provides an opportunity to visit and observe literacy classes, to work out one's own teaching sequence and to field test it. Instruments for planning, carrying out and evaluating the participants (own) teaching sequences are discussed.

In November 2007 the *Bielefelder Lehrgang* started with 16 participants and finished July 2008. Based on this train-the-trainer-program the Federal Office developed its own concept for train-the-trainer courses that is yet to be published. Unlike the *Bielefelder Lehrgang* the Federal Office has designed a concept for an 80 unit course. The reduction of units in the Federal Concept is principally due to the absence of a practical module. Based upon this governmental concept, centres all around Germany will be able to design a train-the-trainer course which can be paid for by the government (about 700 Euro per participant).

5 *Conclusion*

Since the beginning of literacy work practitioners in Germany have been teaching without an official concept.¹⁸ The Immigration Act established in January 2005 for the first time the right of immigrants to funding to attend a German course. Based on this, different types of concepts were developed. After an initial period of two years, an evaluation of the course system led to an improvement: the total amount of teaching units has been increased to a maximum of 1200 units. Necessary adaptations are yet to

¹⁸ See for other newly published concepts Sprenger & Rieker, 2006; Sprenger, 2006; Fritz *et al.*, 2006.

come. Another important change is that there is funding for a qualification course for teachers: Literacy Training in German as a Second Language. Despite all the positive changes in the course system, there is still one flaw: most literacy learners will not be able to reach even the B1-level in 1200 units. A further improvement of the system may be necessary, since the B1-level is a prerequisite for naturalization.

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