



Abstract prepared for:

ESSHRA International Conference Berne, Switzerland 12-13 June 2007

Towards a Knowledge Society: Is Knowledge a Public Good?

Dynamics of Knowledge Production and Distribution

PD Dr. Wassilis Kassis, Universität Basel und Pädagogische Hochschule der Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz;
wassilis.kassis@unibas.ch

Prof. Dr. Andrea Bertschi-Kaufmann, Pädagogische Hochschule der Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz;
andrea.bertschi@fhnw.ch

Literal Socialisation of young people from lifeworlds that avoid writing

Our project is attached to the current research project “Literal competences and literal socialisation of adolescents from backgrounds alien to reading and writing – factors of resilience” (NFP 56) and therefore to a detailed survey of a sample I (N=500) and a multi-part analysis of literal processes and literal competences of a partial sample II (n=78). As a result of these analyses we will on the one hand try to illuminate the paths that lead to a successful acquisition of literacy. On the other hand we will offer an account of the special qualities of reading and writing of at-risk-adolescents, including their behaviour in relation to the use of media, and the text reception and production of those young persons.

These findings may constitute a theoretical basis for developing learning opportunities to stabilise the language- and literacy competences of the students, competences which are tightly linked to their everyday communication. In addition, in a subsequent project we would like to develop our understanding of the interactive structure of academic and extracurricular learning processes. Furthermore we are interested in establishing which contents – imparted in the context of (language) teaching at school – and which cultural values (Zittoun 2006a, 2006b) the future adults will use, firstly in establishing their communicative practice and secondly in realizing their academic and professional career paths.

1. Abstract

At the latest since the PISA study 2000, we have known that in Switzerland equal opportunities in school are no longer guaranteed. This is due to the pronounced disparity in academic achievement between those social groups which enjoy greater access compared those which are at a greater distance to education.

Nevertheless it is assumed that the development of literacy is not determined wholly by social origin.

The proposed project seeks to identify factors of literal resiliency. That is to say it seeks to establish what enables young persons with adverse conditions for the acquisition of literacy to – contrary to expectations – develop positively in reading and writing. Therefore we propose a longitudinal study on pupils in the first level of secondary school (9th and 10th year of school), in which we collect data about their reading and writing competence at two points in time. Furthermore we intend to get more information about factors impacting on literal socialization through questionnaires and interviews (the latter for a partial sample). Analyzing such data, we aim to achieve a deeper understanding about the combinations of and interactions amongst factors which influence the literal socialization of underprivileged young persons as well as information about factors which are able to compensate adverse starting conditions. The results shall constitute the basis for specific measures to assist learners in need of advancement.

2. Structure of the project

Our project aims to contribute to the understanding of those factors that lead young persons from risk groups to a successful literal development despite adversity in their linguistic cultural background. Thereby a basis shall be created for the “targeted promotion of language skills of ... young persons with adverse learning conditions” (EDK 2003, 11) proclaimed by the EDK (Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education) as well as for the prevention of illiteracy in Switzerland. We focus on pupils of in the first level of secondary school, who belong to language cultures that avoid writing. Typically these groups consist of young persons from sections of society where



educational achievement and aspiration are low often combined with a background of migration.

We will especially turn our attention to those factors that – under otherwise largely adverse conditions– lead to literal competences which enhance the sustainable academic and professional opportunities of the young persons. Such processual factors remain under researched; especially unclear is how and to which extent they can be positively influenced or used. Indeed a lot is known, e.g. about the modelling of the “Lesesozialisation in der Mediengesellschaft” (reading socialization in the media society) (title of a DFG-research-programme, comp. Groebnen/Hurrelmann Hrs. 2004). Also since PISA 2000 the reading skills are known in an international comparison (for weak readers in Germany see Stanat/Schneider 2004). But there are not yet studies which examine the effect of literal socialization and experience, based on objectively collected data about reading skills. Alongside focussing on risk groups, the project will also deliver comparable data from pupils with more advantageous starting conditions. Against that background, the following are our main questions:

1. Which combination and interaction of conditions (school, family, peers, media) characterizes literal socialisation and literal achievements of the group of adolescents?
2. How do adolescents from language cultural environments that avoid writing handle reading and writing and how can the thereby observed different qualities of reading and text production be explained?
3. And in conjunction with the foregoing questions: How do literal developments and general expectations about education and profession connect with the achieved goals and with their individual assessment and rating.

To answer these questions an interdisciplinary, method integrating approach is chosen. In doing so right from the start the approaches of reading and writing research as well as educational science are bundled. This enables a shared broad investigation of pupils in the first level of secondary school. This quantitative data collection shall, on the one side, make a development related statement about the combination of factors of socialization in environments that avoid writing. On the other side, it shall deliver data from which smaller samples can be taken for more detailed examination. Thus, in a partial sample the individual everyday dealings with reading and writing will be explored. Particularly interesting in this context will be factors related to positive outcomes despite adverse conditions and that can be positively influenced by activities in school and family

Reading and writing skills are an essential requirement for academic achievement as well as good career opportunities. Furthermore, they are a basic requirement for education. Literacy as a basic qualification is not just to be seen as a protective factor and active resource in professional life, but for the organisation of life as a whole (z.B. Baumert et al 2001, 29ff.). Studies like PISA 2000 and 2003 have demonstrated that the development and use of literal resources in turn depends on social origin (e.g. Zahner Rossier/Holzer 2004, Ramseier/Brühwiler 2003).

Deficient literal skills are especially prominent among those groups of adolescents from environments that avoid writing with a deep cultural gap between the two agents of socialization school and family.

School as an institution is rather helpless in the interaction with adolescents from families where educational achievement and aspiration are low (both locals as well as immigrants), especially concerning the integration into a language culture and the guidance towards the literal achievements expected by society. The disillusioning results about a close connection between social origin and reading competence notwithstanding, considerable differences can be observed regarding the dealings with writing and literal competence within groups of socially similarly placed adolescents (e.g. Groeben/Schroeder 2004, 344). To a large extent it is still open how these differences can be explained and which consequences can be drawn from it regarding literal advancement.

Researching the social backgrounds of reading competence necessarily needs an interdisciplinary approach.

Already before the general public got to know international comparative studies, academic failure grabbed the attention of researchers investigating education. Partially dramatic data exist (e.g. Bellenberg/Klemm 2000) that document the failure in the educational system, which to an increasing extent hits children from migrant families (e.g. Kronig et al. 2000, Kronig 2003, Powell/Wagner 2001).

Fundamental results of the theory of academic learning difficulties show that the exceptional use of individual theoretical explications for this development is not sufficient. Alone the empirically provable regional variation and therefore locality dependence of academic achievement drastically reduces the explication value of diffuse interpretation patterns about the – allegedly – lacking talent of “typical” weak pupils.