



DESCRIPTION OF TEACHERS' COMPETENCE

in initial and functional literacy
for adults with non-Nordic
mother tongues



INTRODUCTION



This is the first Nordic description of the competencies required of a professional teacher of initial and functional literacies to adults whose mother tongue is not a Nordic language. The content area that these professionals need to master extends far beyond the competence needed to teach at the very first stage of literacy. Hence, the term used to refer to the teacher has been adapted accordingly.

The present description, which was drawn up by the Nordic adult literacy network Alfarådet, aims to provide a comprehensive definition of the specific competencies required for this complex task.

The six different competence areas described below require a basic pedagogic/didactic competence and basic knowledge of second-language acquisition. The competence areas should be understood as being crucially important and task-specific and are described in concrete terms through the knowledge, skills and actions that characterise them.

Alfarådet, the Nordic Adult Literacy Network

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PREFACE



One important focus area for the Nordic adult literacy network Alfarådet is quality assurance of initial and functional literacy education for adults with a non-Nordic mother tongue. In the course of its work in this area, Alfarådet has over the years revealed an urgent need for quality development with regard to teacher competence and, thereby, also teaching.

A report on literacy education in the Nordic countries was published by the network in 2007 (updates in 2009 and 2012, www.nordvux.net/download/3176/alfar_kan_rapport.pdf). Along with supplementary studies, the report has shown that in most Nordic countries there are very few formal teacher competence requirements, very few descriptions and study plans, and little guidance relating to teacher training oriented towards initial literacy training for adults. More-over, it has become clear that in several Nordic countries, teachers of general second language skills to adults are not widely required to have specific teaching qualifications. The Alfarådet network has therefore focussed on compiling a teacher competence description for basic literacy education with the aim of bolstering education and thereby creating more favourable conditions for the learners with regard to their further studies, work opportunities, and active social participation as citizens.

During a joint teacher conference organised by Alfarådet in Sandefjord in 2012, teachers and specialists from the Nordic countries discussed a first proposal for a teacher competence description. Based on comments from conference participants and various experts in adult pedagogy, reading and writing acquisition and second language development, Alfarådet then finalised the competence description.

Two central contributors to this process have been PhD Qarin Franker, lecturer at the University of Gothenburg, whose doctoral thesis focusses on low-educated learners of Swedish for immigrants, and Lilly Christensen, teacher of Danish as a second language and reading pedagogue at VoksenUddannelsescenter Fredriksberg. Both have extensive experience of the target group.

The competence description will function as a basis for the development and implementation of education and courses in the Nordic countries and hopefully in interaction with them. The Alfarådet network will contribute actively towards transforming the description into new education provision that will benefit teachers and education and training.



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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This competence description is based on a view of literacy in which reading and writing are not viewed merely as a set of autonomous skills that must be learned, but rather as the core components of living communication. All reading and writing is being created continuously in the social practices of which they form a part. These, not infrequently digitalised everyday practices, include not only the reading and writing of multimodal texts, but also more formal oral language use and basic everyday mathematics.

The target group of the education provided by teachers in possession of the professional competence described in this document consist of adult learners, all of whom have direct or indirect experience of writing-related practices. It is therefore natural that the education is based on resources already acquired by the learners, building on their life experience, while at the same time integrating and using the domains of everyday life and work to equip students for new linguistic and communicative challenges.

Thus the instruction should provide students with a resource-enhancing literacy

and include activities that stimulate the learners' pragmatic usage of text with an emphasis on meaning creation and understanding, and give students encoding and decoding competence as well as competence relating to textual criticism.

Three approaches characterise such an integrative and resource-enhancing teaching style:

1. *Mutual respect* between teacher and learner, which is manifested through, for instance, the opportunity to use and develop all of one's linguistic resources, including one's mother tongue, to advance learning and enhance one's language skills, reading and writing.
2. *Meaningfulness and usability* with regard to the content and design of the course and choice of learning materials in such a way that they directly affect and are affected by the learners' current and desired life situations.
3. *Involvement and personal responsibility* for the learning process, leading to increased motivation, commitment and improved self-confidence in the role of adult learners.

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COMPETENCE AREAS FOR TEACHERS
IN INITIAL AND FUNCTIONAL LITERACY
for adults with non-Nordic mother tongues



Literacy in a Global, Local and
Individual Perspective.
Theoretical and didactic aspects
and approaches



Adult Formal Learning in a Creative
and Critical Learning Environment
Based on teachers' reflective practice and
learners' learning goals



Materials for Adult Learning
Multimodal, up-to-date and challenging



Teaching Oral Communicative Competence
without Written Support
to Adult Second-Language Learners



Initial and Functional Literacy
for Adult Second-Language Learners



Basic Everyday Mathematics (Numeracy)
for Adult Second-Language Learners



LITERACY IN A GLOBAL, LOCAL AND INDIVIDUAL PERSPECTIVE

Theoretical and didactic aspects and approaches

TEACHER COMPETENCE

The teacher applies, and converts into didactic practice, various scientific theories of literacy - drawing on research in psychology, linguistics, sociology and language policy - in his/her daily teaching work and is aware of how the individual's and society's values and attitudes to literacy affect not only policy documents and the planning, content and goals of teaching, but also the participants' daily lives and future perspectives.

KNOWLEDGE

The teacher

1. is familiar with the complexity of the concept of literacy and is able to discuss literacy broadly from a historic, lingual-political, socio-cultural and linguistic perspective
2. is familiar with the similarities and differences between spoken and written language in monolingual as well as multilingual contexts
3. is aware of different writing systems, their historical evolution, principles and mutual relationships today
4. is familiar with how changing communication patterns in society affect the content and design of formal literacy education
5. is familiar with how society's' views on literacy and multilingualism affects the content and design of literacy education
6. has developed an insight into how learners' earlier experiences of written language use and formal education, as well as their current ambitions, needs and goals, affect the content and design of the course

7. is aware of the psychological and physical obstacles to learning such as PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and common visual and hearing impairments

SKILLS AND ACTIONS

The teacher

1. consistently utilises his/her knowledge of literacy when making decisions concerning pedagogy, didactics and methods
2. utilises his/her knowledge of society's attitudes towards literacy when planning teaching arrangements, content and form
3. shows an understanding of, and interest in, the learners' background, current situation and learning potential and uses those when planning and teaching a course
4. understands that the participants' competence and skills in their mother-tongue /first language affect written language acquisition in the second language, and takes this into account



ADULT FORMAL LEARNING IN A CREATIVE AND CRITICAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



Based on teachers' reflective practice
and learners' learning goals

TEACHER COMPETENCE

In interacting with the learners the teacher displays knowledge of, and an interest in, the learners' backgrounds and converts their objectives and preferences into teaching goals. The teacher adapts content, didactics, and methods to suit the learners' level and creates a supportive and creative adult learning environment by constantly gathering new knowledge and reflecting on his/her own teaching practices.

KNOWLEDGE

The teacher

1. is familiar with adult learning
2. has current information about the learners' social, cultural and language background
3. has current knowledge about factors relating to the learners' situation in their new home country which may affect the content and progress of their studies
4. is aware of what kind of texts learners encounter in their daily lives
5. is familiar with how to chart and analyse the learners' progress in literacy
6. is familiar with how to formulate modified training goals together with the learner

SKILLS AND ACTIONS

The teacher

1. creates a learning environment based on the principles of adult pedagogy and uses teaching methods consistent with adult pedagogy

2. cooperates with an interpreter, mother-tongue teachers or other people who speak the learner's mother tongue in order to facilitate learning
3. facilitates learners' use of their mother-tongue skills as a support in learning the target language
4. converts learners' needs and preferences into teaching goals
5. makes the overall goals, sub-goals and daily targets of the course understandable to the learner
6. uses teaching methods that facilitate learners' active participation and allows them to contribute their own personal experience
7. creates, together with the learners, a common meta-language that they can use to discuss the teaching and learning processes
8. evaluates his/her own teaching and the learners' progress, methods and material



MATERIALS FOR ADULT LEARNING

Multimodal, up-to-date and challenging

TEACHER COMPETENCE

The teacher can critically analyse, choose and utilise relevant teaching and learning materials adapted to the learners' wishes and needs and their current and future situation.

KNOWLEDGE

The teacher

1. is aware of current teaching materials suitable for developing adults' language and literacy skills development
2. is familiar with how images, symbols, texts, sounds, and other semiotic signs in the learners' daily environment communicate messages and how they perceive those.
3. is familiar with the components and function of images and visual texts
4. is aware of and familiar with easy-reading texts for adults
5. is familiar with ICT and current digital tools and media, how learners use them and how they can be utilised in teaching

SKILLS AND ACTIONS

The teacher

1. chooses learning materials and other learning resources based on the requirements of the group in question

2. uses material during the course that learners have encountered in their everyday lives
3. chooses material that challenges the participants and encourages a critical, questioning attitude towards texts belonging to different genres
4. creates up-to-date teaching materials with the help of the learners' mother-tongue teachers and in collaboration with the learners
5. works systematically on image interpretation and supports the learners' visual literacy skills
6. can analyse different types of texts from a readability perspective
7. can adapt texts to fit the learners' current level using reading pedagogy methods and readability principles
8. can analyse multimodal material from a multicultural, adult perspective
9. utilises commonly used digital tools, such as smartphones, tablets and interactive whiteboards, in teaching





TEACHING ORAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE WITHOUT WRITTEN SUPPORT

to Adult Second-Language Learners

TEACHER COMPETENCE

In collaboration with the learners, the teacher develops their oral communicative competence with no written support or with very limited written support based on current (language) research and the adult learners' language resources, cultural background and communicative needs.

KNOWLEDGE

The teacher

1. is familiar with the conditions governing the spoken language, its structure, grammar and function
2. is familiar with the significance of phonological awareness
3. has expertise concerning methods for developing and teaching oral language skills: pronunciation, prosody, pragmatics, grammatical structure and vocabulary in a second language without written support
4. is familiar with suitable stages and methods of word learning without written support
5. is familiar with the analysis and assessment of oral language skills
6. is familiar with the significance of different levels of oral communicative language mastery to the individual, the group and to the course
7. has contrastive knowledge concerning cultural conversational patterns and language structures and the characteristics of authentic conversations
8. is familiar with real-life and digital oral communication patterns
9. is aware of the linguistic manifestations of power in oral relationships

SKILLS AND ACTIONS

The teacher

1. uses methods and material intended for oral communicative teaching using no written support or limited written support
2. chooses, together with the learners, adequate graphic materials and other multimodal material to aid comprehension
3. uses methods that develop the learner's pronunciation, prosody, phonological awareness and oral communicative competence
4. uses his/her own expertise, and that of the learners' mother-tongue teachers, regarding the sound systems in the learners' first languages in order to construct individually-tailored pronunciation exercises in the target language
5. uses authentic conversation situations, which reflect the learners' everyday experience, as a starting point in teaching
6. systematically works on the learners' pragmatic conversational competence, clarifies and discusses culturally acceptable conversational strategies from a contrastive perspective
7. uses and chooses assessment forms that focus on both content and form
8. uses digital media, such as smartphones, tablets, computers and interactive whiteboards, in teaching



INITIAL AND FUNCTIONAL LITERACY for Adult Second-Language Learners

TEACHER COMPETENCE

The teacher has theoretical and didactic knowledge concerning reading and writing skills development in the first language and the second language and converts that knowledge into an adult-oriented, challenging and communication-based reading and writing environment utilising multimodal texts with content that reflects the learners' everyday life and is meaningful to them.

KNOWLEDGE

The teacher

1. has expertise relating to theories on reading and writing development in the first and the second language
2. is familiar with the similarities and differences between written language development in children, young people and adults in the first and second language
3. is familiar with the central concepts of literacy research
4. is aware of the relationship between oral language mastery and the choice of language, content and method for teaching reading and writing skills
5. is aware of different written language systems and current conventions of written language
6. is familiar with how written language interacts in communication with sound, images and other semiotic resources
7. understands the importance and significance of developing a written language awareness as a precondition for continued literacy development
8. is familiar with both psycholinguistic and sociocultural reading strategies (bottom-up/top-down, synthetic/analytic; phonics/whole language) and how those can interact and be supported through teaching
9. is familiar with how newly acquired written language skills can be developed and used in different domains of society and in the learners' everyday lives and work
10. is familiar with the common signs of dyslexia and other psychological and physical obstacles to written language acquisition

SKILLS AND ACTIONS

The teacher

1. provides a creative written-language environment with metalinguistic discussions and support in all the languages spoken by the learner
2. finds out about the role and nature of spoken and written language, reading direction and reading and writing habits in the learner's earlier life/home environment
3. uses a variety of multimodal materials, modified to suit adults' communicative needs and reflective of their daily lives and work-related situations, as a basis for teaching reading and writing skills
4. works systematically to develop the learners' awareness of written language in order to help and enable them to break the alphabetical writing code
5. analyses written-language progression in adult second-language learners
6. uses tried and tested methods for developing reading and writing adapted to every learner's needs, learning style and skills level
7. focuses on reading and writing as useful communicative tools in environments that the learners currently encounter or hope to encounter
8. plans, executes and evaluates reading and writing training in cooperation with the learners and with their needs in mind
9. monitors, supports and evaluates each learner's development in written language in the areas of motor skills and cognitive and communicative skills
10. guides the learner in the process of developing reading and writing strategies which the learner must be able to apply independently outside the classroom in situations involving written language
11. consults and, when necessary, cooperates with specialist teachers and reading pedagogues



BASIC EVERYDAY MATHEMATICS (NUMERACY) For Adult Second-Language Learners

TEACHER COMPETENCE

The teacher uses the learners' practical experiences of mathematical situations as a basis for developing communication-based mathematical skills adapted to the learners' individual everyday needs, the requirements posed by society, and to their further studies.

KNOWLEDGE

The teacher

1. is familiar with, and is able to discuss, the concept of everyday mathematics / numeracy
2. is familiar with the learners' practical experience of mathematical situations and how they deal with them
3. is aware of dyscalculia and how it can affect a learner's learning of mathematics
4. is familiar with the learning of basic mathematics skills from an adult educational didactic perspective
5. is aware of how the four arithmetic operations, percentages and fractions occur in practical contexts
6. is familiar with adult-oriented methodology for developing learners' understanding of quantities and figures, different measurements and ways of displaying time, geometric shapes, and diagrams, tables and statistics of different kinds
7. is familiar with adult-oriented learning materials in basic maths
8. is familiar with the language-related dimensions of the subject of mathematics

SKILLS AND ACTIONS

The teacher

1. provides a learning environment and a teaching approach that gives learners basic mathematics skills which are directly applicable to current and desired situations in their studies, daily lives and work
2. provides a learning environment based on the learners' existing practical mathematics skills, enhances those skills, and stimulates learners to use mathematical information in their daily lives
3. has access to methods for developing the learners' oral ability to talk about mathematics
4. is able to analyse mathematical skills progression in adult second-language learners
5. plans, executes and assesses mathematics teaching
6. monitors, supports and evaluates each individual learner's progress
7. when necessary, co-operates with the learner's mother-tongue teacher or a specialist teacher