

# Bridging Barriers - Competence development at the cutting edge for educators in Adult Basic Education in Europe

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# Presenters



## **Eva Steinheimer**

Researcher and project manager at 3s - Vienna

Research topics include LLL (focus on VET and work based learning), evaluation studies; policy analysis; competence development; formal and non-formal adult education

**Role Bridging Barriers:** Project coordination, researcher

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## **Günter Hefler**

Researcher and project manager at 3s - Vienna

Cross-country comparative research on LLL, formal and non-formal adult education, firm-provided training and workplace learning, competence development; educational statistics

**Role Bridging Barriers:** Senior researcher

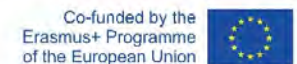


# The Bridging Barriers Project at a Glance

- A **competence matrix** on skills used by ABE teachers in delivering adult basic education
- A **curriculum** for ABE teachers targeting their skills in helping students with overcoming learning barriers
- Implementation of **pilot courses** in four countries (AT, CH, IT, SK)
- A **handbook** supporting the implementation of train-the-trainer courses modelled on the developed curriculum



S V E B ■ Schweizerischer Verband für Weiterbildung  
F S E A ■ Fédération suisse pour la formation continue  
Federazione svizzera per la formazione continua  
Swiss Federation for Adult Learning



# Adult Basic Education – A vital field of activity in search of representation

\_\_ Notwithstanding its much longer tradition, Adult Basic Education (ABE) has emerged only within the past two decades as field of provision in its own right in many European countries – or is just about to enter this stage of development.

\_\_ Only a few people outside the field have a clear vision of what Adult Basic Education is all about and what is going on within the courses



Youth course – Vienna (Interface)\*



# Adult Basic Education – A vital field of activity in search of representation

It is key to acknowledge the variety of participants in adult basic education, and their

\_\_ manifold learning goals (literacy, numeracy, ICT, any really 'useful knowledge'; Learning the locally dominating language as a Second Language without an 'academic' background)

\_\_ manifold needs, that need to be sufficiently met, so that they can enter the course, stay with the course and make progress in their learning/ by help of the course



# Adult Basic Education – A vital field of activity in search of representation

It is essential to represent what educators in Adult Basic Education actually do and what professional competences they apply in their work

\_\_ what they do to make learning happen and helping participants to stay with the course and progress *against all odds*

\_\_ how they develop their professional competences, contribute to their field, defend their professionalism and fight for sustainable employment conditions and fair pay.



# Content versus problem-, task- and solution-centred approaches

## *Content centred perspective*

How to deliver – for the common participant

e.g. the curriculum of lower secondary education adjusted to the needs of adult learners

Role (and competences) of the ABE teacher/professional

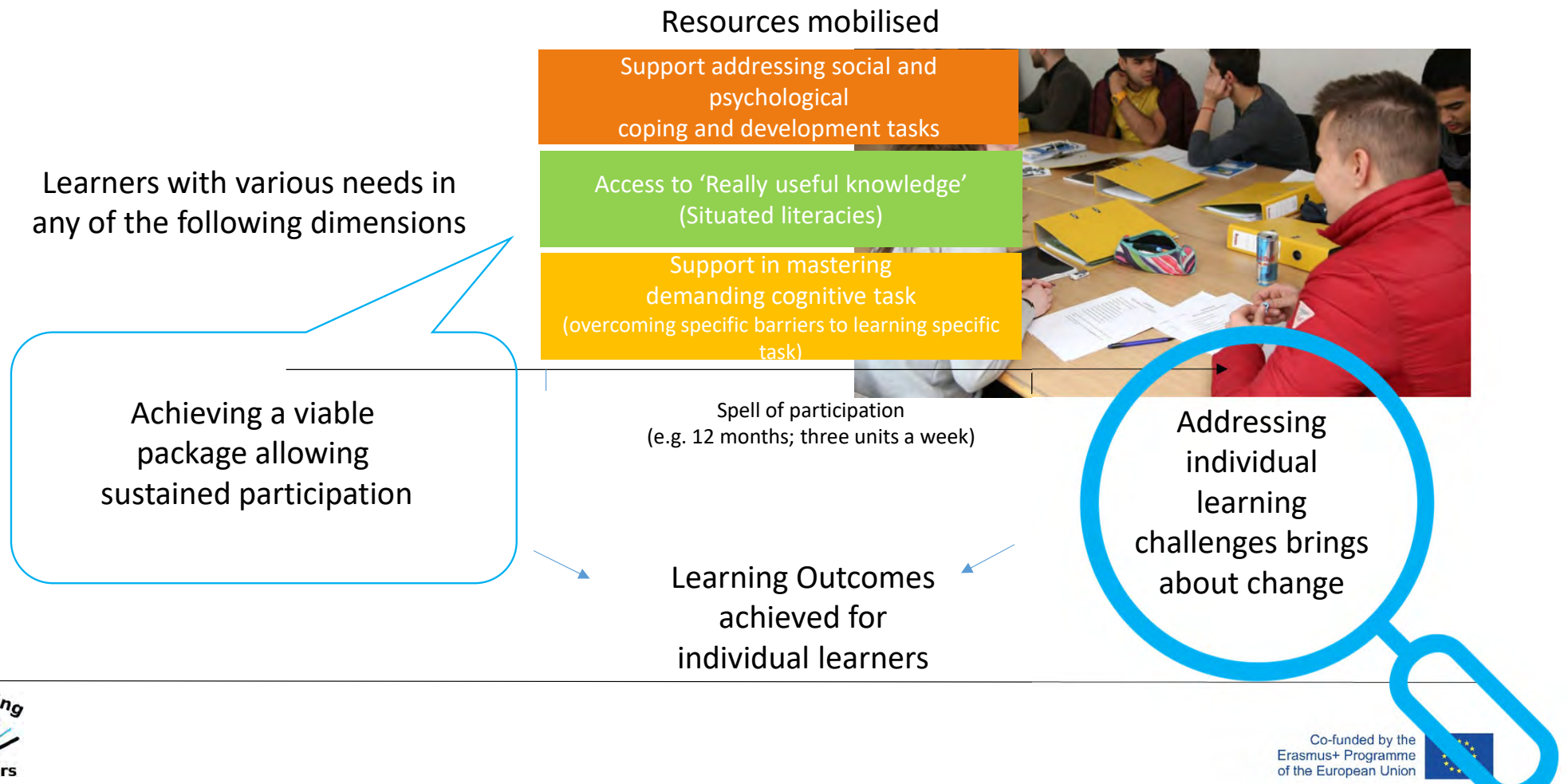
## *Problem-, task- and solution-centred perspective*

How to allow participants to learn by responding to specific learning

barriers on levels including

- the cognitive level
- the psycho-social level
- the situated/motivational level

# Responding to participants' needs allowing them to enter in, stay with and profit from Adult Basic Education





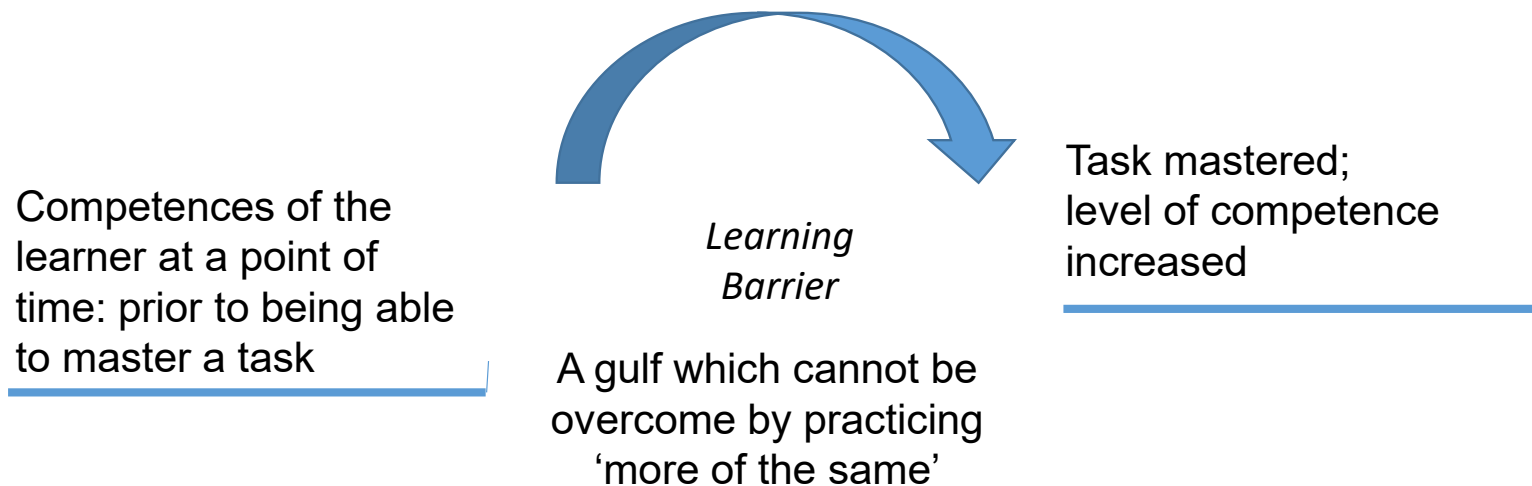
# Deliberate Practice in Adult Basic Education

- Specific tasks pose difficulties to participants which can be understood by making the comparison to ‚advanced problems‘ in the acquisition of expert performance (easy for a master, but incomprehensible for a beginner ...)
- The concept allows to become sensitive about why a task (allegedly ‚basic‘) can pose problems to a learner who cannot draw on the ‚patterns‘ which make the solution easy for a knowledgeable person (e.g. the frequent reader, the native speaker ...)
- The concept allows to focus on the ways practitioners recognise the problem and makes helpful suggestions without assigning more of the same, given practice alone is not helpful (e.g. for a dyslectic person copying words is often of no help, even doing it a 100 times)

# Deliberate Practice as a model of learning/teaching

## Deliberate Practice

ABE practitioner – based on their evaluation of the situation and experience/tacit knowledge) – proposes tailored exercises, the participant gives them a try, the outcomes of these attempts of working around the difficulty are reflected, further exercises are selected for making (any/further) progress and so forth

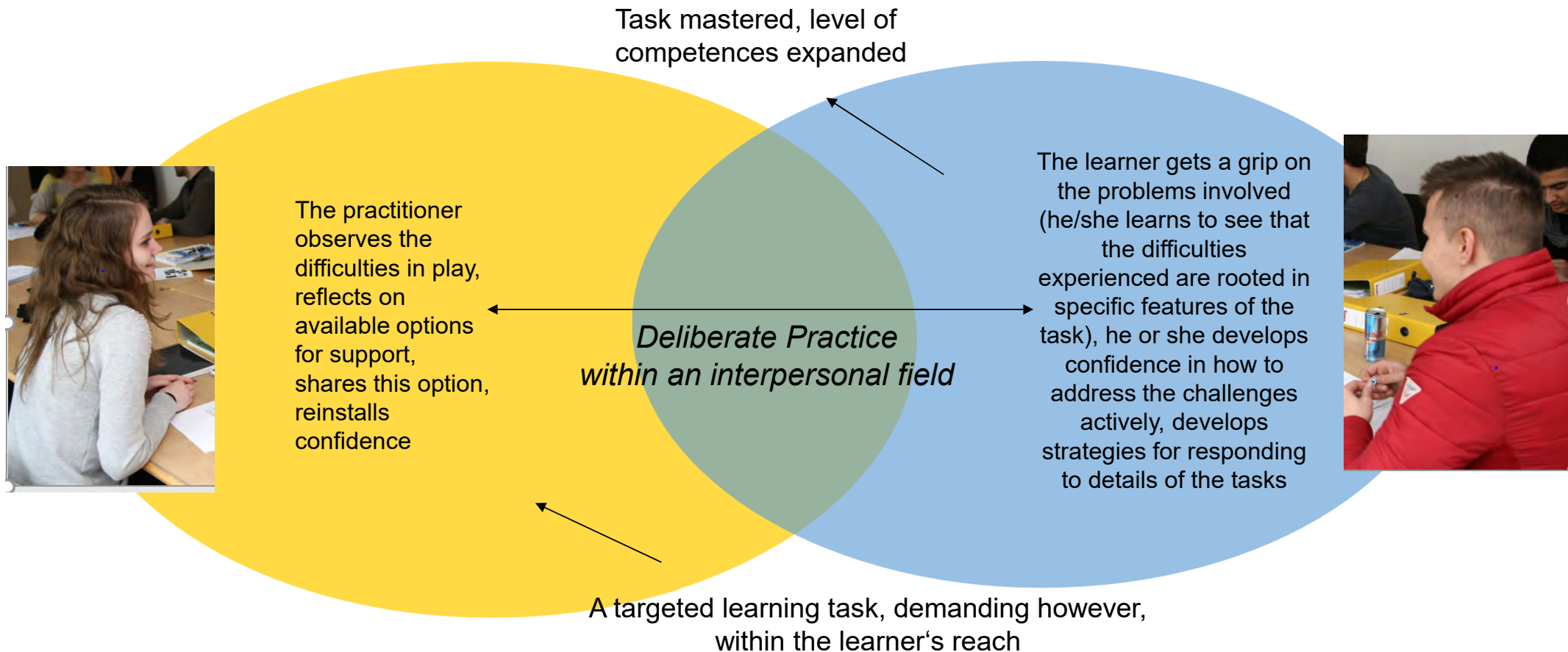


# Deliberate Practice as a Model of Learning

	Example general
	Piano playing
Learner encounters an unsolvable barrier	Complicated fingering pattern/rhythm/phrasing
Teacher recognises the barrier and suggests a solution ('detour')	Suggestion of an exercise (e.g. more complicated but specific, easier but more focussed)
Learner takes the 'detour' (practices), 'unlearns' the problem, learns to differentiate approaches ('take the right turn')	Learner practices while getting further support (e.g. feedback, encouragement)
Learner goes back to initial task and A) learns to solve it and (partly) generalises the experience or B) the deliberate learning process starts over	Learner goes back to initial sequence of music and A) succeeds or B) fails and restarts the process with another alternative

Transfer to ABE	
Learning to read	Teaching reading
Learn a language	Teaching a language
Connecting letters; pronounce a certain sound	Not successful in supporting the learning process with usual set of exercises.
Suggestion of an exercise	Sharing the experience on which exercises may support possible barriers and which signs may lead to possible pathways of solutions ('professional confidence')
Learner practices while getting further support (e.g. feedback, encouragement)	Learner practices while getting further support (e.g. feedback, encouragement)
Learner goes back to initial letters/sounds and A) succeeds or B) fails and restarts the process with another alternative	The learning barrier can A) be overcome (in a good enough way) or B) not be overcome and the process to search a solution starts over

# Learning as an interpersonal experience



# Conclusions

\_\_ Helping learners to ‘work around’ – to bridge – highly specific (individual) learning barriers is a vital area of competences of teachers in adult basic education

\_\_ Making the tacit knowledge available in the field visible, thereby supporting the opportunities for transfer between educators, is key

\_\_ Identifying the gaps and the available approaches for overcoming learning barriers is an important field for future development

\_\_ Highlighting teachers’ competences for bringing up change – for bridging barriers – can help them in their quest for fair pay and sustainable employment patterns (in places where this has not been achieved)

# Thank you for your attention!

[www.bridgingbarriers.eu](http://www.bridgingbarriers.eu)

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# Abstract

Bridging Barriers - The Future of Adult Basic Education in Europe

Adult Basic Education (ABE) is organized in different ways across Europe, reflecting different historical pathways, institutional environments and policies. Teachers in ABE have entered the field based on a diverse set of educational backgrounds, experiences and competences. Skills crucial for successfully helping adults to acquire basic skills are typically not described in a systematic manner. This is where the Erasmus+ funded project “Bridging Barriers – Competence development of teachers in adult basic education” comes in. The project aims to improve the professionalism of ABE teachers in Europe by developing new approaches to make visible and systematise the specific skills and competences applied in this field.

Against the backdrop of preliminary results from the project and the experiences collected during workshops with adult basic educators, we discuss the role of the concept of ‘deliberate practice’ for explaining how educators succeed in helping learners to finally overcome persisting learning barriers. It is proposed that educators’ tacit knowledge about how to bring up change where learners previously could not make any progress forms the core of their professional competences.