

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



Background input 2 for the pilot courses

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<https://www.bridgingbarriers.eu/>

Input 2

How do educators help learners to
overcome learning barriers? –
The idea of ‚deliberate practice‘

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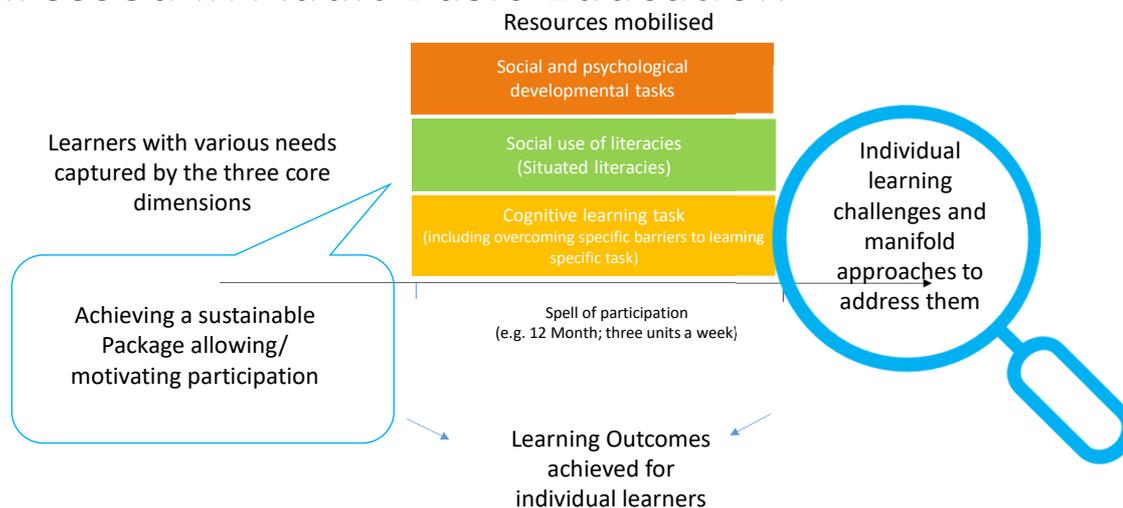
Role Bridging Barriers: Senior researcher



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Typologies of challenges/tasks addressed in Adult Basic Education



In our first input, we have introduced to some of our key ideas underpinning our 'bridging barriers' project. We have summarised our view on adult basic education in the overview preetned.

Learners enter Adult Basic Education courses, which may last considerably long and can have quite a high number of teaching units with quit different needs and they might face quite different challenges or barriers in making progress.

For allowing them to stay with the course, the course needs on the one hand to guarantee a sustainable package, out of

- a framework responding to psycho-social needs of the participants, allowing them to stay with the course and to evolve by their participation, if required
- an appropriate way to make the learning of immediate use for the participants, so that their motivation can be sustained in phases where they run into difficulties
- a framework providing appropriate tasks, sensitive to the fact, that even rather elementary tasks can include difficulties which cannot be overcome by participants without specific support.

Providing this package is already a demanding tasks, calling for high level of

professional competence on the side of the practitioners. However, for Adult Basic Education, even more is required.

Given that many participants face rather specific barriers potentially blocking their progress, adult educators need to be able to detect the difficulties, make up their mind about what type of intervention might be helpful, suggest appropriate exercises to overcome the difficulties and see together with the participants whether the way of working around the difficulties has been successful. We suggest to understand this core element of professional practice within Adult Basic Education by the help of the concept of 'Deliberate Practice'.

The current presentation will introduce the concept of 'Deliberate Practice'

'Deliberate Practice' as a model of learning

The roots of the concept

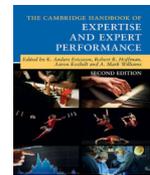
Rooted in the research on the acquisition of expert levels of performance in fields as different as playing the violine, playing chess, interpreting sonograms, giving military commands in combat situations

Not any practice, but a thoughtfully planned practice, with hints/targeted exercises provided by a knowledgeable expert teacher for how to overcome any difficulties, allows for the acquisition of higher level of expertise

He coined the term 'deliberate practice' (in the sense of planned, reflected, but also in the sense of negotiated between two parties) for a type of practice, where one expert shares his/her knowledge about how to approach a difficulty best with a student, the latter experimenting with this approach and coming back with his/her experiences; the transmission of expertise is a kind of guided practice based on mainly tacit knowledge hold by communities of practice on how to learn something presenting considerably difficulties to the learner



K. Anders Ericsson
1947-2020



The concept of deliberate practice is mainly connected to the work of the Swedish psychologist Anders Ericsson, who spent most of his academic life in the U.S.

His main interest lies in the sources of expertise. He agrees with the fact that in practically any domain of professional expertise including the performing arts, expert performance can do things completely out of the reach of lay people. However, he took an interest in reconstructing how these superior levels of expertise had been achieved in the first place. How do experts acquire their advanced levels of skills?

He starts with the obvious assumption that 'practice makes perfect', something expressed in German by „Übung macht den Meister“, which has no equivalent in English.

However, more exercises – more of the same – do not typically lead to higher levels of expertise.

In his most seminal study, he followed students playing an instrument over longer stretches of time, measuring their efforts made and their progress achieved. By investing more time in exercising alone, their progress remain limited, with more hours of training leading to poor outcomes, but considerable health problems. Only

by following the useful suggestions how to work around a technical difficulty in a piece, they were able to make progress. Not the amount of hours spent on practice, but the effectiveness of the hints given and the readiness to give the recommendation a try and reflect on their outcome turned out to explain differences in the progress students were able to make.

In the following, we explain how we propose to use related ideas in the field of 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)



Our idea to use the concept of deliberate practice starts with the observation, that learners experience many tasks as if they are facing highly complex problems in playing a particular sequence in a piece of music. They can simply not do it. It is important to become sensitive for the brutal fact that they face difficulties where the ‚well educated‘ see hardly any problem.

It also helps to see which active role the teacher can play in designing tailored ways to make progress. For this, he or she needs to assess the current situation and rely on his/her experience to make helpful suggestions. Moreover, he or she needs to work together with the student so that together, a way forward can be found.

Deliberate Practice as a model of learning

„Deliberate Practice“

ABE practitioners – 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 progress and so forth



The current slide illustrates the idea of deliberate practice in a step by step approach.

A learner cannot solve a task as the current competences do not allow it – practice alone does not allow to make substantial progress. The learner faces a barrier.

For bridging the gulf, the practitioner evaluates the situation, suggests specific options for working around the problem. Together with the learner, the experiences made with giving the exercises a try are evaluated and new solutions are sought for, if required.

In the end, the original task will be completed, although by ways which might be much longer than anticipated, and a know level of competence is achieved.

Barriers within learning processes & participation in the group activity

- Spelling specific combinations of sounds
- Learning to read specific combinations of letters
- Actively using specific patterns of grammar
- Solving a particular problem in everyday maths (e.g. subtracting Value Add taxes from the gross value)
- Sitting longer than 10 minutes
- Reading aloud in front of the group
- Taking any topics discussed seriously (stop being the clown in the group)



The problems of learning might often be in the cognitive domain, but it is clear, that they can also stem from the psycho-social domain as well.

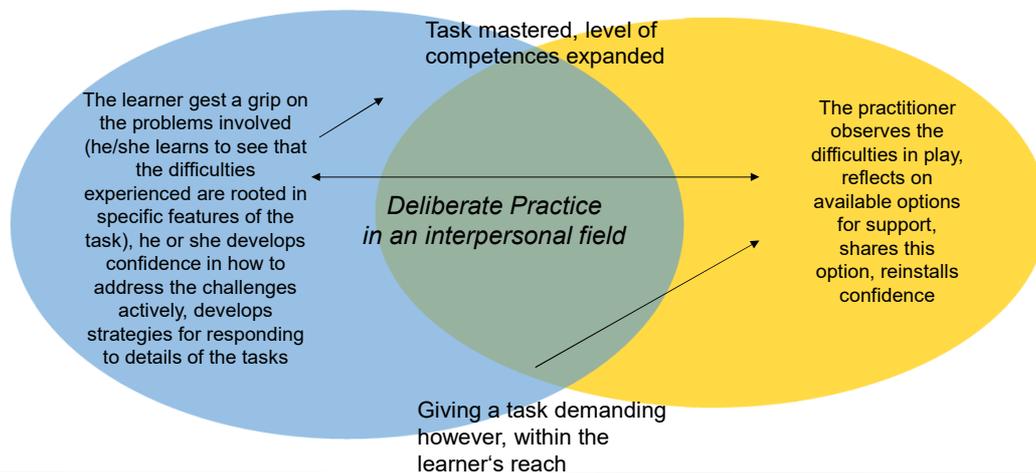
Deliberate Practice as a model of learning

	Example general	Transfer to ABE	
	Piano playing	Learning to read	Teaching reading
Learner encounters an unsolvable barrier	Complicated fingering pattern/rhythm/phrasing	Learn a language Connecting letters; pronounce a certain sound	Teaching a language Not successful in supporting the learning process with usual set of exercises.
Teacher recognises the barrier and suggest a solution ('detour')	Suggestion of an exercise (e.g. more complicated but specific, easier but more focussed)	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 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 practices while getting further support (e.g. feedback, encouragement)	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	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



In the following, we illustrate the ideas of 'deliberate practice' even in more detail, with examples taken from piano lessons as a guideline, and possible ways of applying the ideas to the field Adult Basic Education.

Learning as an interpersonal experience



Any 'deliberate practice' is rooted within an intense relationship between a teacher and a learner. Although we are not going into any details here, we would like to remind ourselves that learning is often approached best as something taking place between two persons, populating the very same interpersonal field. The teacher provides specific resources to the shared field as the learner does, and learning can be captured as a specific form of combination, where the teacher first takes in the difficulties presented, modifies them by working them through, provides the very same problem in a transformed way to the learner, who experiences the difficulties in a new light, as they become commensurable – 'thinkable' – to him and her, so that it is possible to relate differently to problems which had been overwhelming or impenetrable in the first place.

'Deliberate practice' echoes in this interpretation the lessons of a psychodynamic interpretation of 'learning from experience', where what needs to be learnt has to be contained by a person first, so that it becomes 'thinkable' by the learner later, following the suggestions of the British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion. So, it is important to see that deliberate practice is a shared activity of both the teacher and the learner.

We hope that our presentation has been helpful and we are looking forward to learn about your/your groups ideas about the usability of this conception for the field of Adult Basic Education.

Good bey for know and thank you very much for your attention.

Further Reading

- Ericsson, K. Anders, Krampe, Ralf Th., & Tesch-Römer, Clemens. (1993). The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance. *Psychological Review*, 100(3), 363-406.

- For an introduction in Bion's (Learning from Experience, 1962) two persons psychology: Weiss, H., & Steiner, J. (2013). Das Labyrinth der Borderline-Kommunikation: Klinische Zugänge zum Erleben von Raum und Zeit: Klett-Cotta. – Kapitel 2
- Bion, Wilfred Ruprecht. (1962). Learning from Experience. London: William Heinemann Medical Books.



Thank you for your attention!

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