



# Bridging Barriers

Making Competence Visible

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**Sharing Adult Basic Education Practitioners'  
Tacit Knowledge Across Europe**

Four Countries – Four Approaches

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Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

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Bridging Barriers was a two-and-a-half-year project funded by the European Union Erasmus+ framework, bringing together researchers, teachers and representatives of course providers from Austria, Italy, Slovakia, and Switzerland. The project's aims include the development of a competence matrix, a further education curriculum and the implementation of pilot courses for teachers active in Adult Basic Education (ABE). By these activities, the project intended to enhance the professionalism of educators in this field.

Adult Basic Education (ABE) forms a vital part of adult education, allowing adults to improve their basic skills in reading, writing and calculating as well as in using IT in professional and everyday life. In addition, ABE is supporting migrants who have received only rudimentary education prior to their move to acquire good skills in the use of the language of the receiving country.

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

Empowering adults by providing access to basic skills has been a key aim of adult education as a social movement in Europe since the 19th century. Adult education is thereby understood as a counter-movement, using the provision of adult learning as a tool for fighting against the violation of individual rights and against any form of injustice instilled by a society's institutional framework, the formal education system in particular. The inherent conflict dimension explains why Adult Basic Education is far from receiving unconditional support over long stretches of time, but requires the constant work of social movement organizations which are pressing for their proper provision. Adult Basic Education, as a "rebellious" field withstanding the demands for effectiveness and efficiency, falls "out of fashion" among policy makers time and again<sup>1</sup>.

With adult learning developing its identity in a firm opposition to formal schooling in the 1970s, school reforms have blurred the borders inherent in the "formal/non-formal divide" over the years (Rogers, 2004). However, even within a field like Adult Basic Education, which has been founded to do so, overcoming the "capital sins of formal education" (Freire, 2005 [1971]), remains a task challenging to achieve and many shortcomings of schooling – take the example of "teaching to the test" – tend to reappear in new forms of camouflage.

With each cycle of renewing Adult Basic Education for ever changing groups of adult learners, the unavoidable conflict dimensions present in the field become visible once more. For example, in many European countries, refugees have become the single largest target group of Adult Basic Education. In consequence, the outcomes of illiberal migration regimes and a growing hostility vis-à-vis migrants in larger fractions of society are countered by Adult Basic Education attempts to respond to their learners needs and to equip them with whatever learning opportunities they need to make their way and live according to their preferences.

With expanded provision of public funding, the latter essential for expanding provision, forms of governance present in formal adult education or the active labour market policy gain in significance, urging Adult Basic Education practitioners to defend the principles of their field against such exogenic

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<sup>1</sup> For the varied histories of Adult Basic Education, see NCSALL: Publications (<https://www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=15.html>) or the relevant chapters in (Löffler & Korfkamp, 2016; Perin, 2020)

pressure as good as they can. They know that learning will cease when they cannot sustain the basic conditions required for making adult learning possible. Clear violations of adult education's code of conduct, as for example, by making participation mandatory or by imposing high stake examinations on participants (e.g. for sustaining one's residence permit), put considerable strains on practitioners, who aim at providing a learning conducive environment despite these unfavourable circumstances.

The learners' needs and the politics interfering with the field put high demands on practitioners. Many practitioners in the field experience their work as their vocation and are prepared to apply themselves to the fullest, thereby allowing the participants to learn and grow against all odds. However, for being able to stay with the field for long stretches of time, adult educators are in need for support themselves. They need fair pay, continuous employment and sustainable working conditions, which allow them to develop and defend their vision of professionalism. For achieving these collective goals, they need to organize as a professional group and make their voice heard vis-à-vis both the policy makers and their employing provider organizations. The varied tasks of learning about and finding one's role within the "politics of working life" and the social conflicts pervading the field, constitute thereby a vital component of a teacher's professional development, which call not only for preparation in initial training<sup>2</sup>, but require a regular opportunity to collaborate with peers and to partake in the representation of the field's proper interest.

## 1.2 THE AIMS OF THE BRIDGING BARRIERS PROJECT

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 credentials, professional 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 Bridging Barriers project came in by its aims to contribute to the development of higher levels of professionalism of ABE teachers in Europe. The project aimed at developing new approaches for making visible and systematising the specific skills and competences applied in this field, thereby supporting the development of a European profile of ABE teachers' competences while also enhancing networking among teachers in the field.

The core outcomes of the project include

- a competence matrix of skills used by ABE teachers in delivering Adult Basic Education, applying an established approach (VQTS – Luomi-Messerer & Markowitsch, 2006; Markowitsch, Becker, Spöttl, & Luomi-Messerer, 2008) for the development of such a matrix,
- a curriculum for a train-the-trainer course for ABE teachers targeting their skills in helping students with overcoming learning barriers,
- the current handbook summarising the project's achievements and supporting the implementation of pilot courses modelled on the developed curriculum.

Started in late 2019, the implementation of Bridging Barriers was disrupted by the events and restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic in manifold ways. Despite all obstacles and by the extension of the project duration, the project team managed to cope with the situation and carry out all planned activities. In the first project phase, the grounds for the development of a competence matrix were laid. Based on desk research and 45 in-depth interviews with ABE teachers in the four involved countries, work tasks of teachers as a structural element for the competence matrix were identified.

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<sup>2</sup> The Austrian curriculum for teachers in Adult Basic Education provides for such a reflection [https://erwachsenenbildung.at/downloads/themen/Rahmencurriculum\\_Fachspezifische\\_Erstausbildung\\_BasisbildungstrainerInnen.pdf](https://erwachsenenbildung.at/downloads/themen/Rahmencurriculum_Fachspezifische_Erstausbildung_BasisbildungstrainerInnen.pdf)



Information on competence development of teachers in the field, working conditions in the participating countries and reflections on the needs for further training of ABE teachers could be acquired through the interviews.

The competence matrix was designed according to the VQTS approach that follows a broad understanding of the term competences, including cognitive competences (knowledge), functional competences (skills) and social competences (behaviour) (Luomi-Messerer and Markowitsch, 2006; Markowitsch, Becker, Spöttl and Luomi-Messerer, 2008). Derived from the identified core work tasks, a number of competence areas are defined. For each competence area, between two and six competence development steps capture the competence development. However, the number of levels depends on the complexity of tasks solely and on the – from an expert practitioner’s point of view – number of stages of professional development observable in the particular area of work. Soft skills and key competences are understood to be required for performing the core work tasks and are therefore not described separately as specific competence areas, yet as inherent in the competence descriptions where relevant. This implies also that – while for example, high levels of interprofessional skills are required as such for all activities – it is not sufficient to have such high levels of skills, but it is required to apply these skills for complementing a specific task (e.g. sorting out a conflict within a group of learners). The approach is guided by the idea, that for ABE teachers, their key competence is related to their ability to help participants to overcome considerable learning difficulties. The latter might be traced back to issues on a cognitive psycho-social level. For helping to make learning possible, teachers are applying strategies, which can be summarised by the concept of "deliberate practice" (Hefler, Steinheimer, & Wulz, 2018).

The validation process of the competence matrix was supported by feedback gathered in expert interviews and the continuous process of discussions within the project consortium, in the pilot courses and the international workshop and the matrix updated accordingly.

In the second project phase, a framework curriculum – understood as a design for a train-the-trainer course for educators in the field of ABE – was developed based on the collected findings on demands for further training among practitioners. An attempt was made to translate the identified competences of ABE educators into learning processes with a focus on competences of ABE practitioners required to support adult participants to overcome specific learning barriers, rooted in cognitive, psychosocial or situated circumstances. For exploring these competences, the concept of "deliberate practice" was chosen as the key model, where the ABE educators "perceive" the difficulties, propose tailored activities to overcome them, install confidence and motivation to "give it a try", evaluate with the learner the progress made and adopt the exercises as required for allowing progress to be made. (See also Chapter 2).

In the third and final phase of the project, the curriculum was adapted to preconditions and needs in the four participating organizations and brought to life in four pilot courses following the Bridging Barriers approach in summer and autumn 2021. The outcomes of the implementation of the courses are used for refining the approaches taken and the results of the implemented peer learning activities are documented in this publication. It is meant to be used as a handbook and inspiration for the development of similar further training offers across Europe. Elements of our work are already used in continuous activities of some project partners and we hope that the vivid spirit evolved in the Bridging Barriers courses that is described in the country specific chapters (Chapter 3-6) will spread beyond our consortium.

We hope to raise interest for our approach in the Adult Basic Education community and are happy to engage in more exchange in the future.

## 2 THE BRIDGING BARRIERS APPROACH

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In the following, we present our approach to an essential question within Adult Basic Education (ABE): What do participants need in order to make individual progress in their learning journey? But let us first present the background of our approach: With the three-year Horizon 2020 ENLIVEN project, a project focussing on adult learning, we have done case studies on the evolving Adult Basic Education Sector in Austria.<sup>3</sup>

Within one line of work, we asked practitioners in Adult Basic Education what they do in their day-to-day work and how they have actually learned to support the learning of their participants. We interviewed eight practitioners and studied two organizations providing Adult Basic Education in Austria. Moreover, we have extensively consulted the literature and have reached out to various stakeholders in the field of Adult Basic Education.

In our work, it became clear that participants in Adult Basic Education have rather different needs and face different challenges in making progress in their learning. In consequence, practitioners need to apply a broad set of strategies and tools to help students overcome their learning barriers. We found that neither the varied needs of participants nor the required competences of practitioners relevant for providing tailored support are well captured in the literature. This is certainly unfortunate, as the key competences of teachers in Adult Basic Education remain mainly invisible for this reason. This finding has been one of the sources of inspiration for the current Bridging Barriers project.

### 2.1 LEARNING NEEDS OF PARTICIPANTS IN ABE

Starting with the learning needs and the related challenges faced by the participants, our literature review has shown a scarcity of approaches to classify the learning needs and the related challenges in any detail. Available typologies often do not focus on the learning needs as such – and therefore not on the practitioners' approaches required to address them – but on selected socio-economic characteristics of the learners themselves. Here is the assumption that groups of learners with some similar features have also somewhat more similar learning needs to be addressed by the programmes.

We would like to demonstrate our point by the example of an otherwise quite helpful typology of participants in Adult Literacy Classes in Germany, proposing seven main types of participants supported by seven subtypes (Drucks, Bauer, & Hastaoglu, 2011). The typology uses two key dimensions. The first dimension refers to the group-specific quantity of economic and educational but also symbolic capital, in particular with regard to citizenship rights. Groups differ in their relative wealth and poverty, with some groups characterised by marked levels of poverty. The second dimension refers to the various "Whys", explaining why adults have not achieved higher levels of literacy – or a much better command of German as a second language – at earlier stages of their life course.

The reasons for that include

- the effects of the social class of the family of origin
- effects of gender, bringing about disadvantage for either women (for example within some groups of migrants) or men (e.g. for young men stemming from economically deprived families).

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<sup>3</sup> <https://h2020enliven.org/home/>

- effects of various forms of severe stress of traumatic events, including the untimely death of close family members, illness, the illness – in particular mental illness – of a family member, dysfunctional families, violence, experience of foster care and many more.
- The effects of immigration and related forms of institutional discrimination within Germany for members of discriminated groups of migrants; a particular form of symbolic violence stems from the denial of a permanent permission of residence, which can lead to a life in absence of practically any right, given that leaving the country is not an option.
- The effects of discrimination and the experience of violence in the countries of origin

The types of participants achieved can be positioned within a matrix. For example, Type 1 refers to participants stemming from deprived households to the majority group of the society who could not complete an education during their youth and who, however, might have been considerably successful in adult life, although their low-level literacy remains a matter of individual concern. On the contrary, Type 2 refers to adults who are the offspring of well-off families from the majority group of society but who became estranged from schooling and did badly in school and thereby disappointed the high-flying expectations of their parents who did their best to delay the drop out of their children as long as possible.

To take another opposition, while one group of participants comprises of highly skilled migrants (Type 7) with a non-disputed right for residence who are mainly struggling with learning German as a second language (being thereby no particular target group of Adult Basic Education), another important subgroup (Type 5c) comprises of displaced persons who are denied the refugee status, although their life histories are characterised by a series of traumatic experiences or their former lives by severe forms of repression, which hampered all educational projects.

While the typology might capture the reasons well why a participant is in need of Adult Basic Education, it tells surprisingly little about the learning required, the learning difficulties encountered and the type of support required. For taking a fresh starting point, we suggest falling back to a fictitious example from the highly recommended tragic comedy "Italian for Beginners", a Danish movie first screened in the year 2000, directed by Lone Scherfig. In the movie, we meet Olympia, in her late 30s, one of the story's main protagonists, taking part in an Italian for beginners class. Now, what has Olympia brought into the quite empty classroom of the local adult education centre as one of six participants? Let us start with the trigger. Olympia lives with her father, depends economically on him, but has also been already taking care of him for some years as he is suffering from dementia. Moreover, he abuses his caregiver and tries to control every aspect of her life. One day, she decides to take a leap of faith and leaves the house in the evening (i.e. not for work). For her, this is a major act of self-empowerment. She selects the Italian course as it being the only social activity accessible to her.

Her choices are restricted for various reasons. She has heard that the "for beginners" lesson does not include any writing, which appeals to her as she cannot write due to a learning disability and a handicap not addressed well, meaning she would not be able to write down any notes. She can read, yet not write more than single words. However, having lived as a functional analphabetic her entire adult life, she relies on her memory and typically does not forget anything.

To come back to our topic, it is clear that Olympia's needs and challenges are multifaceted.

- First of all, participating in a social group forms one of the most valuable assets available in any type of adult learning and the present course is not excluding the protagonist based on her low level of literacy. She does quite well within the group despite the fact that she is afraid of potentially negative reactions by others in response to her disability.



- Second, she is not motivated by the distant opportunity of progressing on the educational ladder, but by the very outcome of each lesson, given their practical value for her day-to-day work.
- Third, she has quite a specific profile of strengths and handicaps – for making progress in writing, she would need a tailored training and access to life hacks, so that she could communicate in written even prior to an improvement of her motoric abilities, the latter only improvable in the long run. She would drop out certainly from any course not taking into account her needs, thereby repeating the situation in initial education, where she was found "too impaired" for being worth the efforts of extensive support.

In reality, in the basic education classrooms, with large differences between locations and times welcome individuals with highly different reasons for attending the courses, with a broad variety of learning barriers, and rather different individual goals for their future learning pathway.

## 2.2 CONTENT- VERSUS "LEARNING CHALLENGES"- AND SOLUTION-CENTRED APPROACHES

While the field of Adult Basic Education can be approached by referencing to a "common participant" who requires standardised educational support following a curriculum, for example, equivalent to parts of the curriculum of lower secondary education, this might not capture the essence of Adult Basic Education.

Therefore, we focus on a "close up" of specific learning challenges presented by the participants and on the solutions imagined and applied by their teachers for bringing up change, so that over time learning can take place despite difficulties that might have looked impenetrable at first sight.

It is also important to emphasize the fact that learning needs and related challenges are not on a cognitive level alone, but can be equally present on a psychosocial level. Moreover, it is of key importance to secure the relevance of the learning achieved for the participants' current lives and not to rely on a vague significance of today's learning for a distant future.

Participants in Adult Basic Education can certainly be mapped according to their key learning needs and their key tasks and challenges, stemming from their current life situations. Their needs can be roughly in line with what is anticipated for the common participant in adult learning. However, in many cases, their needs might be more specific and requiring a more tailored approach for allowing them to gain from their participation.

Speaking of their learning needs in the content domains like literacy or numeracy, participants also differ by the fact that some participants profit from a broad set of teaching provided, while others are in need of one-on-one highly tailored provision in order to overcome learning barriers that had undermined progress in the past.

We summarise our view on Adult Basic Education in the following figure.

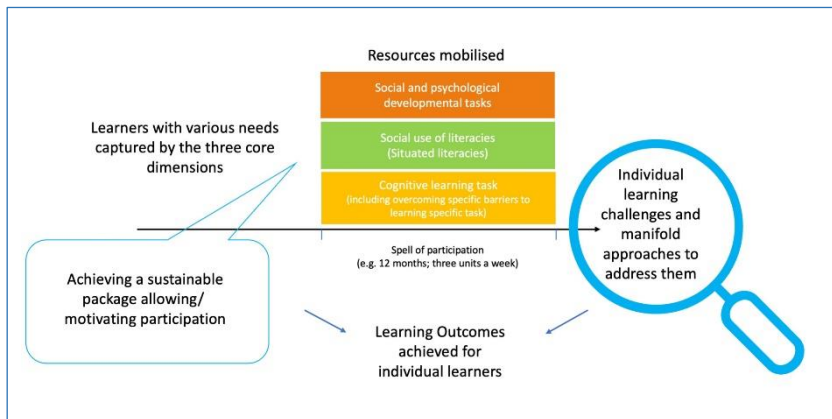


Figure 1: Typologies of challenges/tasks addressed in Adult Basic Education. Source: 3s

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

For allowing them to stay with the course, the course needs to guarantee a sustainable package consisting of

- a framework responding to psycho-social needs of the participants, with special provisions to answer their individual sensitivities, if required
- an appropriate way to make learning of immediate use for the participants, so their motivation can be sustained even during phases where their learning progress is slow
- a flexible approach for providing tasks tailored to a learner's current abilities, and sensitive to the fact, that even rather elementary tasks can include difficulties which cannot be overcome by participants without the proper support.

Making arrangements for such a package is already a demanding task, calling for a high level of professional competence on the side of the practitioners. However, in 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 and explore the difficulties, make up their mind what type of intervention might be helpful, suggest appropriate exercises to overcome the difficulties and examine, together with the participants, whether the way of working around the difficulties was successful. We suggest understanding this core element of professional practice within Adult Basic Education by the help of the concept of "deliberate practice".

## 2.3 THE IDEA OF "DELIBERATE PRACTICE"

The concept of deliberate practice has been promoted by the work of the Swedish psychologist Anders Ericsson, who spent most of his academic life in the US. He studied the acquisition of expert levels of performance in fields as different as playing the violin, playing chess, interpreting sonograms, giving military commands in combat situations. Not practice alone, as measured by the hours of exercising, but a thoughtfully planned practice, with hints/targeted exercises provided by a knowledgeable expert teacher for how to overcome specific difficulties, allows for the acquisition of higher level of expertise.

Ericsson 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 challenging task best with a student, the latter experimenting with the suggested approach and coming back with his/her experiences whether the arrangements made have

provided a way forward; the transmission of expertise is a kind of guided practice based on mainly tacit knowledge, as developed and held by *communities of practice* on how to acquire expert levels of performance involving considerable difficulties to be mastered by the learner (K. A. Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993).

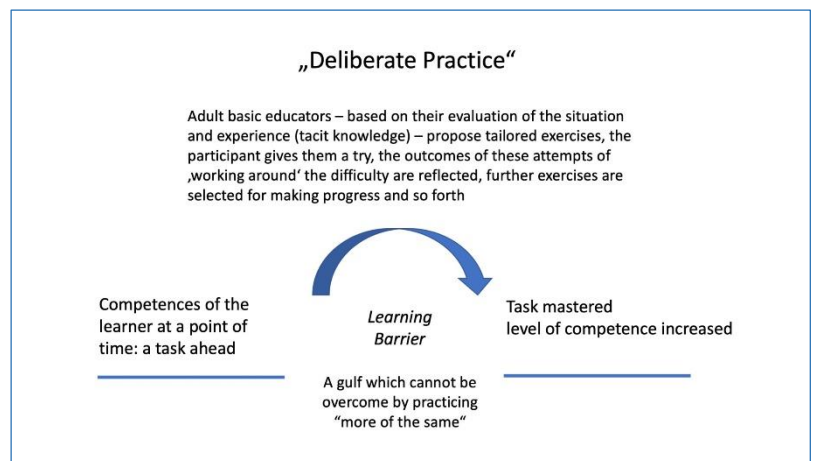
Ericsson’s main interest lies in the sources of expertise. He agrees with the fact that in practically any domain of professional expertise including the performing arts, expert performance can do things completely out of the reach of lay people. However, he took an interest in reconstructing how these 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 performance levels.

In his most seminal study, he followed students playing an instrument over longer stretches of time, measuring their efforts made and their progress achieved (K. A. Ericsson, 2009). By solely investing more time in exercising, their progress remains 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, students were able to make progress. Not the number of hours spent on exercising, 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 students’ progress achieved.

In the following, we explain how we propose to use related ideas in the field of Adult Basic Education. 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. It is simply beyond their reach. For teachers, it is essential to understand that for the learners tasks may involve striking difficulties which are practically invisible for anyone who has already internalised the related skills. It also helps to see which active role the teacher can play in designing tailored exercises. 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 cooperate with the student so that together, a way forward can be found.

Figure 2: Deliberate practice as a model of learning. Source: 3s

Figure 2 summarises the ideas underpinning the idea of deliberate practice in the field of Adult Basic Education. 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, detects the likely source of the difficulty, and 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 require more efforts than anticipated, however, with the learner having achieved a higher level of competence in a particular domain.



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



Any "deliberate practice" is rooted in 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 well as the learner, 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 in his/her mind, provides the very same problem in a transformed way to the learner who then 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 initially been overwhelming or impenetrable.

"Deliberate practice", in this interpretation, echoes the lessons of a psychodynamic interpretation of "learning from experience", when what needs to be learned has to be contained by a person first in order to become "thinkable" by the learner later, following the suggestions of the British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion (1962). Therefore, it is important to see that deliberate practice is a shared activity of both teacher and learner.

## 2.4 THE PEER LEARNING APPROACH – A FRAMEWORK CURRICULUM

One key activity of the project concerns the development of a design for a peer learning activity for teachers in Adult Basic Education. The developed model for such a training is described in the following sections. It is based on research on the working context and further training needs of ABE teachers undertaken earlier in the project and draws a framework that can be adapted to specific needs and circumstances of a provider that intends to implement a training activity of that type.

### 2.4.1 Target Groups

Participants addressed by the course are mainly practitioners in Adult Basic Education with at least two years of experience in the field. This is essential for the peer learning activities of the course when teachers in the field shall profit from sharing their experience. A smaller number of practitioners with less experience may complement the group. As for the size of the group, it is recommended to take on at least ten but not more than 20 participants in order to allow for well balanced and functional group activities.

Course activities should be planned with enough temporal distance in order to have sufficient time for promoting the course and reaching out to potential participants. For announcing the course, the use of a variety of channels should be considered. Starting with the provider organization's professional network and enhancing word-of-mouth advertising, the course can be promoted via online communication channels (e.g. newsletters, social media channels etc.). Establishing a cooperation with a partner organization that brings in additional knowhow AND potential participants can be another outreach strategy.

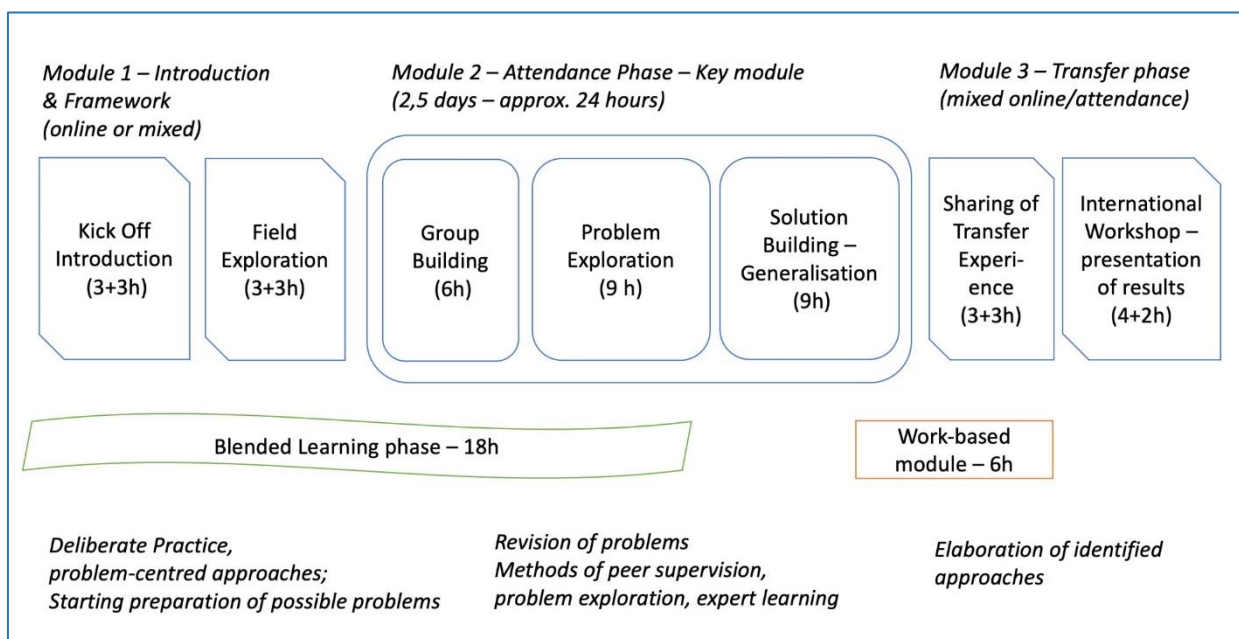
## 2.4.2 Design and Organisation of the Course

The model foresees, that the course takes place over the run of six to twelve weeks. It includes elements of blended learning and work-based learning. Three modules (48 hours in total) are accompanied by an e-learning module (18 hours) and a work-based practical module (6 hours). The core module constitutes in a 2,5-day workshop.

The course foresees most group meetings being held as presence sessions. Physical meetings are compulsory for the 2,5-day workshops. The introductory module at the start and the finalising module can be held (partly) online. This can support the feasibility of implementing the course under uncertain conditions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, although a mixed online-presence mode that potentially reduces travelling time and cost and thereby reaches a broader audience can also be attractive for course participants.

The elements of the course and their sequence are displayed in figure 3. This framework can be understood as flexible. In the following country specific chapters, it will be shown how these elements were arranged in slightly different ways.

Figure 3: Design of the ideal typo of course. Source: 3s



The course starts with an opening kick-off module that can be held online or in presence. The goal of this introductory module is that the group meets for the first time and a common understanding of the learning activity's targets is created. The framework of the Bridging Barriers project and how it builds on the concepts of competence development, deliberate practice and the VQTS approach in describing competence development is presented and discussed.

In a next step, the group is accompanied in exploring the field of ABE in their own country and the other participating countries. This can be implemented in online meeting sessions. This process is supported by presenting insights gained from the interviews in the initial phase of the project and the case studies that were drafted to summarise the framework for providing ABE, the funding structures and the policy context in the countries involved. Based on the discussions of this input from the project results, the preparation of the workshop starts. The group discusses the problem formulation for the next steps and identifies three to five topics they want to address.





Starting from the kick-off module, self-study material and directions on how to approach the material will be provided on an e-learning platform that allows access to all material across countries and for optional receiving of additional literature. The learning platform will be accessible beyond the project runtime and is open for use to all interested parties.

The core activity in the course is a 2,5-day workshop where the group meets in person. Ideally, this is organized on one weekend. The first half day is dedicated to initiate a process of forming a group and building trust. It is important to save sufficient time for these activities to build the foundation for the demanding peer learning process ahead.

The second day and the first half of the third day is allocated for the exploration of example cases. Every group member is invited to contribute case descriptions from their work experience. The group decides together on which cases they will focus. The goal of this case exploration is to mobilize the tacit knowledge of the group for "overcoming learning barriers" by applying methods of peer learning. It is suggested to engage a facilitator with good knowledge of applying such peer learning methods and knowledge in the field of ABE to support the process. The last part of the 2,5-day workshop is dedicated to collect the results and initiate a generalization process of the discovered outcomes. After the workshop, participants are encouraged to take their newly gained insights back to practice and reflect them in their daily work in a work-based module. For this, it is suggested to agree on a common framework based on the discussions in the workshop. Participants should provide a short written report on their experiences that they can bring to the follow-up modules.

A first follow-up module for the pilot courses on country levels aims at sharing the transfer experience from the workshop outcomes to day-to-day work. Furthermore, the group comes back to discuss and provide feedback on the attempt to "codify" the used competences and the steps of competence development as presented in the competence matrix. In a last step, goals and activities for the international learning event are defined.

For the pilot courses implemented in the run of the Bridging Barriers project, it is foreseen to complete the activities on a national level with a "Learning, Teaching and Training Event" on an international level. In this two-day event, the experiences and outcomes from all four participating countries are brought together. All participants are invited to join the event where they also meet other practitioners from the field and the participating organizations beyond the course participants.

### 2.4.3 Common Content, Methods and Course-Spanning Aims

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The approach used in the Bridging Barriers project as the common ground all activities build on is also presented and discussed in the introductory modules of the course. This covers the topics VQTS approach (Markowitsch et al., 2008), competence development and deliberate practice and expert learning (Ericsson, 2009; Ericsson, 2018; Ericsson et al., 1993). Dealing with those concepts is supported by rich material presented in the e-learning platform including scientific literature, learning videos and presentations.

Each country is encouraged to design the course according to its needs and the needs of its targeted audience, and each course group shall be given space to choose the cases and specific teaching and learning barriers they want to discuss in-depth. As a guideline for implementing the courses, the following common aims were agreed on:

- for participating educators to reflect their day-to-day professional practice in a structured way
- to make participants' tacit knowledge regarding the support for students to overcome learning barriers visible and thereby available for deliberate use in daily work
- to increase the scope of action and strengthen teachers' agency
- to gain insights in the competence development of adult educators and describe educators' competences based on their activities
- to question educators' inner attitudes in the teaching and learning process and its role in creating and dismantling learning barriers
- to strengthen educators' networks in the field of Adult Basic Education

For reaching these goals, the use of methods developed for peer learning, collaborative learning, peer supervision and case exploration are proposed. The organizations implementing the course are invited to choose appropriate methods from their wide range of experience or to take into account the facilitator's specific methodological competences when choosing a facilitator.

In the country specific chapters of this publication, it will be shown how the partner organizations adapted the common approach that proved to be flexible enough in its modular design to be tailored to specific needs. There were deviations in the chronology of the different building blocks (e.g. online and presence modules, blended learning phases) and the overall duration and time arrangements made (e.g. workshop on one weekend or more). In one case, course participants even decided to meet more often than planned. There were variations in the presentation and intensity of discussion of the theoretical approach, and, as inherent to the goal of the course, much space for participants to focus on cases and challenges of their choice in all pilot courses. In three courses, a facilitator guided through the activities, whereas in Austria the members of the group shared the tasks of facilitation among themselves. A broad variety of methods was used that are described in detail in the country specific chapters. All courses used the learning platform on the Bridging Barriers website, that is accessible for all those interested also beyond the project duration.

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All project proceedings can be found on [bridgingbarriers.eu](http://bridgingbarriers.eu)

## 3 THE PEER LEARNING EVENT IN AUSTRIA

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Adult Basic Education (ABE) is a part of non-formal adult education. How can it be better anchored into the Austrian education system, how can Adult Basic Educators (ABEs) develop their professional competences? ABEs have knowledge and skills that they acquire in the course of their professional practice. This knowledge and these skills are generally available as experiential knowledge (tacit knowledge).

The Pilot Course, and especially the Key Modules of ISOP's part in Bridging Barriers, was designed as a workshop for further education. It should deal with our experiential knowledge as teachers and as experts. Our aim was this knowledge to become conscious and manifest by means of jointly processed case examples. Thereby we wanted to name professional action, make knowledge explicit and name competences derived from action.

### 3.2 PLANNING

#### 3.2.1 Target Groups

The content of Adult Basic Education is not only taught by ABEs, but also by counsellors, social pedagogues, German trainers and specialist trainers. We wanted to address teachers from all relevant fields in order to reach the widest possible spectrum of people from different educational fields.

#### 3.2.2 Content and Objectives

- identify and name learning barriers
- identify and apply deliberate practice as a tool to overcome learning barriers
- explore the importance of attitudes and the role Adult Basic Educators
- make the experiential knowledge of Adult Basic Educators explicit and visible
- identify existing competencies of Adult Basic Educators, develop professional competencies
- compare the results with the competence matrix of 3s

#### 3.2.3 Methods, Models, Concepts for the Approach

##### Peer Learning

In case studies from practice, learning barriers were to be identified, specific actions (as Deliberate Practice) to overcome the learning barriers were to be named and compared, and then competencies were to be derived from these actions. "Peer-to-peer learning" describes an equal learning situation in which professional partners exchange their knowledge, ideas and experiences and learn with and from each other.<sup>4</sup>

Also due to the different terminology that exists in the English and German language areas, we use the terms "peer learning" and "joint/collaborative/cooperative learning" as synonyms. We deliberately decided against external or internal moderation and thus against a too influential control by us as hosts. We believe that experts in ABE are their best in talking and giving information about their own

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.weiterbildungsberatung.nrw/themen/glossar/peer-to-peer-learning>

professional knowledge. Therefore, we wanted to use joint/collaborative learning as an access point and thus create a non-hierarchical space to promote equal participation and awareness. It was in our interest to participate directly in the group’s shared thinking process – without facilitation by others. For this reason, we did not see ourselves as "knowledge carriers" but also as learners.

We were well aware of our multiple roles: the dichotomy of being hosts and communicators. We had planned the pilot course and the modules and had considered content, possible outcomes and developments in advance. We also defined a framework of methods, approaches and procedures that seemed to make sense to us. However, we always wanted to mediate: Peer learning means that experts work and learn together.

### Work-Based Learning (WBL) – Learning in and from Practice

*Work-based learning refers to learning that occurs when people do real work. This work can be paid or unpaid, but it must be real work leading to the production of real goods and services.*<sup>5</sup>

Learning on the job is a natural part of Adult Basic Education. Challenges in the teaching-learning process and the necessary confrontation with these processes are natural companions of Adult Basic educators. In the case of our pilot course, we wanted to look at situations from personal professional practice from a new perspective. Under the impression of concepts presented, we wanted to work on cases we had experienced ourselves. We wanted to look at our past actions (successful and not successful) and wanted to reflect: What problematic issues might have been present? What approach were taken to overcome barriers in the teaching-learning process? What new interventions were used? How did overcoming the barrier become noticeable? We were inspired largely by questions that had been asked in interviews with ABE teachers beforehand.

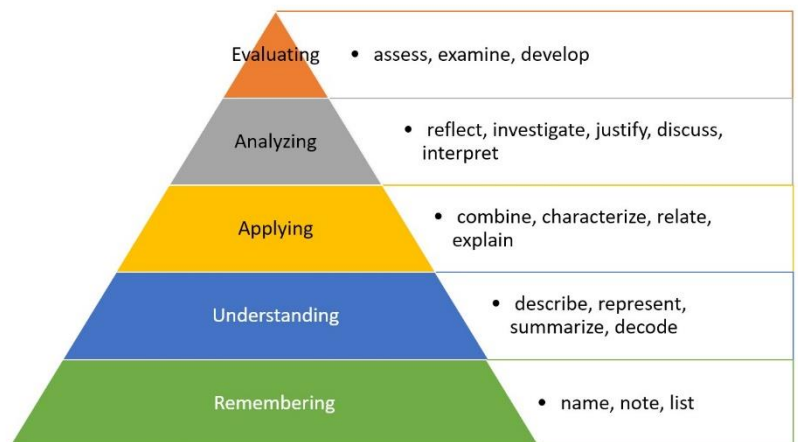
### Blended Learning

Blended learning in the project took place "conservatively" via messenger services and e-mail as well as online conferences. Via these media, we exchanged documents, literature worth reading, links and tasks. Certainly due to the pandemic, the online meetings were held via Zoom, where we could exchange information in plenary and "live". In principle, however, our meetings were designed as face-to-face events and were held as such, as we believed that the virtual space could not offer a fully adequate substitute.

## 3.2.4 Country-Specific Methods and Models

### Bloom’s Taxonomy

Using Benjamin Bloom’s Competence Model<sup>6</sup>, we planned to work on case studies from our own practice in the so-called "Core" or "Key Module". We wanted to name, explain, analyse and examine our actions from the case studies we experienced ourselves. Following this procedure, we later wanted to derive implicit competencies of Adult Basic Educators from the named actions.



*Bloom’s Taxonomy, Illustration: ISOP*

<sup>5</sup> Work-based learning: A handbook for policy makers and social partners in ETF partner countries <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/work-based-learning-handbook-policy-makers-and-social-0>

<sup>6</sup> [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin\\_Bloom](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Bloom)

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY: DEFINITIONS OF COMPETENCIES				
I. Remembering	II. Understanding	III. Applying	IV. Analysing	V. Evaluating
To remember previously learned material by recalling facts, terms, basic concepts, and answers.	To demonstrate understanding of facts and ideas by organizing, comparing, translating, interpreting, giving descriptions, and stating main ideas.	To solve problems to new situations by applying acquired knowledge, facts, techniques and rules in a different way.	To examine and break information into parts by identifying motives or causes. Make inferences and find evidence to support generalizations.	To present and defend opinions by making judgments about information, validity of ideas, or quality of work based on a set of criteria.

### Learning Outcome Orientation

The inclusion of the concept of "*Lernergebnisorientierung*"<sup>7</sup> (Learning Outcome Orientation or Guideline for the Creation of a Learning Outcome Oriented Curriculum) proved to be helpful already in the planning phase, but also during the implementation of our pilot course. In a very simplified way, it describes a starting situation and a desired end situation, i.e. learning outcomes that should be made transparent and negotiated at the beginning of a learning situation. In a next step, the necessary learning steps or learning contents are named and described in order to achieve the negotiated learning outcomes. That way, teachers can plan small learning units that have realistic, achievable and consensual objectives. That way, desired objectives are not only questioned in terms of their feasibility, but all participants are involved in the teaching-learning process.

## 3.3 DESCRIPTION OF IMPLEMENTATION

The framework curriculum included

- joint events with ABE experts
- the Core or Key Module in a two and a half day workshop
- a transfer phase

ISOP planned several meetings with the colleagues. Through the continuous alignment of ideas, we wanted to become capable of acting together in order to achieve cooperatively developed content and goals.

### 3.3.1 Kick-Off

Despite the challenges of the Corona pandemic, the first event was designed as a face-to-face event to allow participants to get to know each other physically. Face-to-face meetings allowed us to communicate key points more directly and discuss issues in a more diverse way. For example, we began by discussing the area of learning barriers and the idea of Deliberate Practice, Peer and Cooperative Learning, as well as Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy Model. By introducing this concept, we wanted to create a common frame of reference that we would always keep in mind and refer to as we proceeded.

<sup>7</sup> Reinhard Zürcher: *Lernergebnisorientierung in der Erwachsenenbildung. Begriffe, Konzepte, Fragestellungen.* Wien 2012. <https://wba.or.at/de/fachinfo/lernergebnisorientierung.php>.

### 3.3.2 Getting into the Topic

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In the second meeting, we formulated questions in the group that focused on making professional competencies visible. Two questions were worked on in the group:

What do the terms discovery learning, learning by doing, learning by teaching mean to me?

The following statements were made:

- Discovery learning is often not recognised as learning by participants. They ask: "Well, when do we start learning?"
- Everyone has to let go of a safety net in the process, teachers and learners.
- There are subjects that lean to learning by doing, such as science and geometry.
- Learning should be perceived as action, not as the accumulation of knowledge.
- The question remains whether the participants' learning goals can be achieved by alternative learning settings.
- Learners must be guided to action.

In which situations do I have the feeling that I am not good? What tasks do I find difficult in my job?

The following statements were made:

- Adult Basic Education is often seen as aimless. Learning happens more easily without goals because "nothing" has to be achieved. However, this creates a conflict with e-PSA (adult-oriented compulsory school leaving certificate), because certain times are set.
- What content should reach the students? What is the essence? In conversation, ask the question: What has reached you? Tell me a story about it.
- Classical exams represent a learning barrier.
- Think aloud, what are you thinking now? (Solve math example on the board). There are different possible solutions to be heard here.
- You actually have to clarify together what is right, what is wrong.
- Aha experiences as an indication that one must find the connection in order to make learning happen (connection to the reality of the participants' lives).

For processing the case studies we presented the following approach and referred methodically to the ABC model of Albert Ellis<sup>8</sup>.

- A – "Activating events": The situation describes when and how the teacher perceived a learning barrier.
- B – "Beliefs": The evaluation at that time should show how the situation was interpreted by the teacher at that time.
- C – "Consequences": The consequence asks whether the barrier could be resolved through a standard approach by the instructor or an alternative intervention like Deliberate Practice.
- D – The fourth question we ask ourselves: How could the teacher notice that the barrier was overcome?

#### **Example of exercise: A psychosocial learning barrier**

A female participant from Afghanistan, with no school education, attended a preliminary course so that she could subsequently complete Compulsory School. The trainers (team teaching) were unable to detect any learning progress for two months after a certain point, especially in mathematics. The participant was putting a lot of pressure on herself because she was about to be accepted into the e-PSA (Compulsory School). In addition, she was to see her family again after thirteen years in Iran. For

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<sup>8</sup> <https://lexikon.stangl.eu/12609/abc-modell-der-emotionen>

this occasion, she wanted to present her academic achievements to her mother. The trainers learned this information through individual conversations with the participant.

### Intervention

The trainers recognised this barrier. They consequently changed the lessons by making the upcoming journey the learning content. Through this intervention, the learning block dissolved, the participant made learning progress and was able to prepare well for the trip. Upon return, her great progress was noticeable, especially in mathematics. Thus, the success was not expected in this form. The trainers' competences in changing perspectives, i.e. the departure from rigid standardized learning content, proved to be essential. The seemingly aimless interventions led to an unexpectedly successful result. Leaving the narrow course context led to the expansion of the didactic repertoire of the teachers. The example shows that a new approach could remove the barrier.

The participants were given the task of finding practical examples from their own everyday working situation and working on them until the pilot course would start.

### 3.3.3 The Key Module (Two and a Half Days in June 2021)



Three Chairs: A) How was your morning? B) What were you thinking when you came here? C) What can you contribute to the success?

We use the Renko Method<sup>9</sup> ("chain thinking") to stimulate our collective thinking. The initial question was: "What can I contribute to success?" The question led us to a discussion regarding the need for perspective and role changes in teaching as well as to noting that processes, not just outcomes, are important in learning settings. We also discussed reasons for attending professional development: self-affirmation, curiosity in new content. In the discussion, our event was perceived as a cooking pot in which one's own ideas could be cooked with the ingredients of others to create something new.

The topic of learning barriers was discussed in terms of usefulness: Participants often have unrealistic ideas. The image of a profession often does not coincide with the real training requirements. Large and distant goals can obstruct learning if they are seen as the only point of orientation.

At the end of the first day, we asked the question about the "muddiest points" of the group. These were questions and topics that seemed unclear and diffuse.

The next day, we used these cards to form conceptual clouds on values, learning barriers, paths to success, and goal orientation: Who is to blame for learning barriers? How and by whom are learning barriers defined or assessed? Are there intermediate forms of learning barriers? Are individual or group interventions useful? Targets as a source of motivation: Who sets goals? What are learning targets, what are learning outcomes?



The "muddiest" points

We decided as a group to change the term *learning barriers* to *teaching and learning barriers*, because attitudes of teachers are an essential part in the teaching and learning process.

<sup>9</sup> Following a method of Österreichische Gesellschaft für Politische Bildung, ÖGPB



The idea of a competence matrix for teachers in Adult Basic Education was viewed critically overall. Who is in a position to judge on which level a teacher is with regard to a certain competence? Furthermore, a fundamental problem in the written presentation of competence descriptions in curricula was pointed out: namely, how generally can a competence be described without finally only becoming a word shell?

**During the morning, the following conflict arose:**

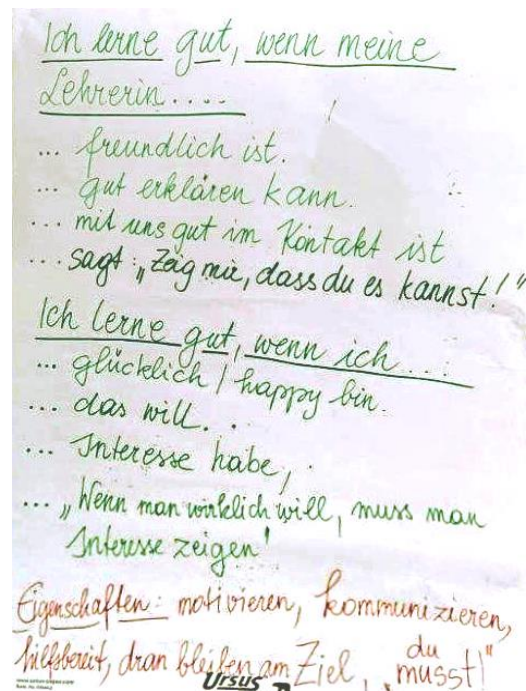
One participant in our group announced that she could not come in the afternoon of the same day because of a German course she had to attend, but would very much like to do so. In this context, she had noticed that we had neglected the participant perspective in our course concept. From this intervention we developed the idea to invite the participants of the German course as "experts of their own learning" to join us in the afternoon. Our colleague addressed the following questions with her participants and collected answers:

- I learn well when my teacher ...
- I learn well when I ...

In parallel, we defined our personal goals in this reversed roles where we would now be learners and listeners.

**Gathering responses:**

- taking a different perspective
- being able to ask good (fruitful) questions
- being able to follow up with authentic answers
- implementing cooperative and participatory learning
- allowing participants to become self-efficacious
- allowing learners to represent themselves
- being able to take statements of participants well
- satisfying curiosity
- creating spaces for encounter
- showing interest for the persons



After defining targets, we met in the garden and, as interviewers, took on the role of questioners who asked experts. The participants had prepared posters, told us about them and we asked questions. We took notes individually, which we later processed.

### 3.3.4 Derivation of Competencies from the Key Module



We show the procedure in detail here. We think that this detail can serve as a handout, in order to be used and adapted by readers, adapted to their own practices.

**First step** Based on our notes during the interview, we narrated the situation (our conversation with the participants) to each other and collected the participants' word-for-word statements.

- "The teacher says, "I believe in you. I believe, one day, you can learn anything.'"
- "She understands me like her child."
- "I learn well when I believe in myself, trust myself."
- "You have to change your mind. You need to make plans."
- "We need to talk, find out together what we can do".
- "75% should come from the teacher, 25% from me".
- "I learn well when I trust myself. I talk to myself [aloud]. It makes me stronger."
- "Teachers are supposed to be punctual".
- "If I didn't come for three days, the teacher has to ask what my problem is".
- Related to learning, "You always have to try, a little bit, a little bit ..."
- "She [the teacher] should be fine. I don't want her to have stress. She should have free time. Then she will be fine".
- "If our teacher has problems, she can't teach well".
- "I do not feel like it when I don't understand well".
- "It is bad if I do not understand. [Then ...] the time is lost".
- "I learn well when I'm happy."

**Second step** From these statements, we also derived overarching wishes of the participants for the teachers and wrote them on cards.

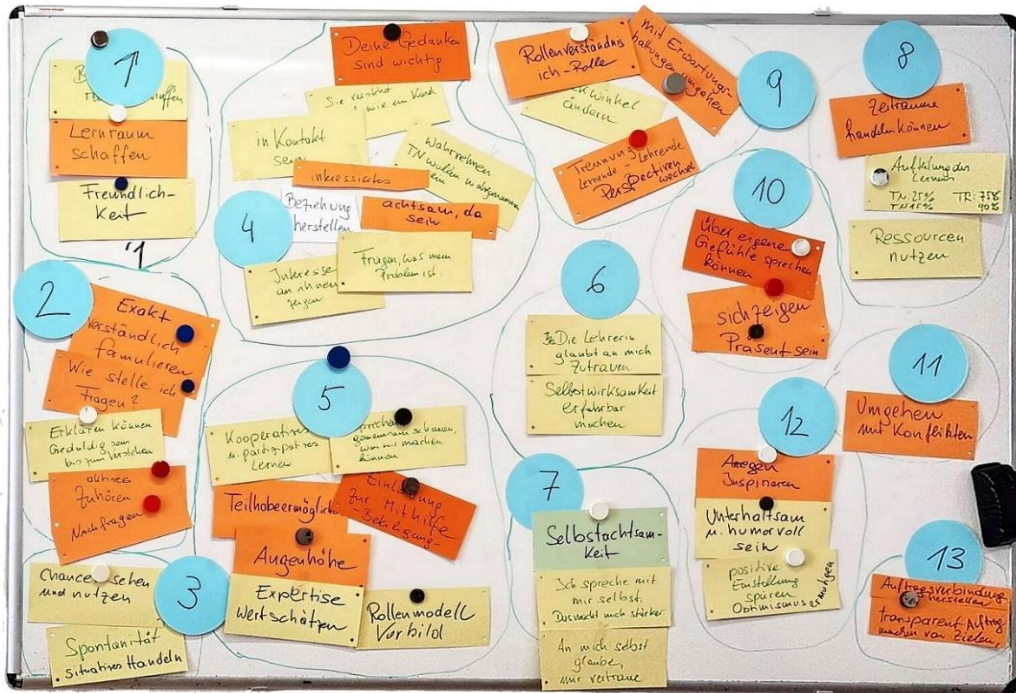
Derivations related to the teachers:

- Learners want to be noticed.
- Learners need interest, sympathy, encouragement and recognition.
- Learners need good didactic concepts to understand the content.
- Teachers must follow the same rules as learners.
- Learners are sensitive to the mental state and attitude of teachers.

**Third step** We ordered and sorted these cards (with terms, keywords, derivations, competencies). The clusters (= competence areas) were given numbers (1 - 13). (see Whiteboard image next page).

From this, four people in our group worked individually to formulate competencies of basic educators.

**Fourth step** After the end of the workshop, we merged the individual documents and labeled them K1 through K13 (the K columns denote competency areas) in the following chart:



Collection of competencies that have become visible, whiteboard image ordered.

	Group member 1	Group member 2	Group member 3	Group member 4
K1	Learning spaces	Create spaces		Learning space as Places of well-being
	Enables encounters with and between participants. Designs the space for learning. Welcomes participants into the learning space.	Recognises learning spaces as places of flourishing and perceives the learning space as a positive place. Plans learning spaces as intellectual and real meeting spaces. Designs real learning spaces.	Creates friendly learning spaces suitable for collaboration and encounters.	ABEs can create learning spaces. They can make these spaces pleasant places for people to meet and for people to learn. They can stimulate a friendly atmosphere.
K2	Communication	Talk and listen		Transfer of cognitive learning content
	Formulates accurately and understandably. Uses easy language, Explains concepts and relationships in a variety of ways. Repeats content using a variety of methods. Reviews own teaching. Asks in-depth and follow-up questions. Asks questions from a variety of perspectives.	Explains issues in a way that is understandable and appropriate to the participants. Makes exact choice of words. Asks specific, open and intellectually advanced questions. Clarifies unclear learning situations by active listening and asking questions. Explains interrelationships of complex issues in an understandable manner. Repeats slowly and clearly, paraphrases.	Explains patiently and accurately after listening sympathetically. Asks questions to provide clarity.	ABEs can formulate precisely and understandably (language level of the learners). They can patiently find explanations that lead to the understanding of learning content. They can use appropriate questions to capture what has come across to participants. They can listen actively and use the answers to the questions for further development of the lesson.
K3	Intuition	Act situationally		Respond to changing situations
	Acts in and out of the situation. Recognises and identifies connections. Evolves connections from simple to the complex ones.	Takes advantage of opportunities during instruction to make adjustments, responds appropriately. Seizes opportunities from the teaching situation to expand learning contexts.	Acts according to the situation (adequately) and recognises and seizes opportunities.	ABEs can detect changed framework conditions in learning situations and use these changes as opportunities for spontaneous change.
K4	Relationship	Establish and maintain relationships		Ability to relate and keep in touch

	Establishes a relationship with participants. Respects and develops the relationship.	Makes initial contact with participants in an authentic manner. Treats participants as human beings with respect. Expresses personal interest in participants and their learning progress.	Establishes relationships with the participants in a mindful and engaging manner. Asks for clarifications and difficulties (problems).	ABEs are able to build relationships with learners and maintain contact even as participants' life situations change. Are attentive and show interest. Can recognise and take into account problems in the participants' circumstances. Can open up to participants.
K5	Participation	Act cooperatively Enable participation		Appreciation and leading by example
	Creates opportunities for participation in the learning process. Works together with the participants. Organizes role changes between and with participants. Implements tools for appreciation. Negotiates learning and teaching goals with participants.	Demonstrates and uses cooperative teaching and learning opportunities with participants. Encourages participants to help and participate. Involves participants as competent experts in the classroom. Develops lesson content together with participants. Clings to agreements and rules.	Creates the framework for everybody to learn cooperatively and participatively. Enables participation by example.	ABEs enable participation through cooperative and participatory learning. They shape learning and teaching relationships at eye level. They can successfully invite participants to become involved in the learning process by valuing the expertise of the participants.
K6	Empowerment	Appreciation and encouragement		Promote confidence in self-efficacy
	Conveys confidence. Develops tools for self-measurement.	Assumes developmental potential in all participants. Describes participants' learning in positive terms. Encourages participants to pursue further projects. Communicates appreciatively. Builds confidence through encouragement.	Strengthens self-efficacy (of learners) through given trust and confidence in learners.	ABEs pay attention to themselves. Through reflection, they mobilize forces for their work. They trust in themselves and their development process.
K7	Self-care	Self-esteem		Take care of yourself
	Pays attention to oneself. Names one's own state of mind. Recalls successful experiences.	Perceives own person as competent. Sees value of own work.	Strengthens own self-confidence and that of learners through good coaxing.	ABEs pay attention to themselves. Through reflection, they mobilize forces for their work. They trust in themselves and their development process.
K8	Time	Dealing with time resources		Dealing with resources
	Merges content and time period. Notices new relevant content in the time period.	Estimates time frames for teaching sequences, duration of new content to be introduced. Involves participants in the time schedule. Estimates work and break times realistically. Adapts content to time resources.	Allocates time well, plans and uses it well to work in a resource-oriented manner.	ABEs have time in mind as a limiting frame and can use resources in a way that make learning outcomes visible to participants.
K9	Role understanding I	Role understanding		Dealing with the role as a teacher
	Identifies expectations of all stakeholders. Designs and reviews own role.	Identifies balance of power in one's own role. Reflects on the relationships between the trainer role and the participant role. Performs a role-related change of perspective.	Knows own place and role (in group and organization). Can change perspectives.	ABEs have a clear understanding of their role. They can deal with expectations. They can change perspectives. They can switch roles with their learners.
K10	Role understanding II	Authenticity		Being present and authentic
	Names own feelings. Shows himself as a whole person.	Talks about own feelings and presents him/herself.	Is present and talks about own feelings. Encourages others to talk about their feelings as well.	ABEs experience lessons presently. Can react spontaneously to changing situations. Can show their feelings. This makes the atmosphere in the classroom visible.

K11	Conflicts	Conflict skills		Conflict skills
	Identifies conflicts Represents conflicts. Implements conflict resolution tools.	Names conflicts transparently and presents unpleasant course situations. Works participatively with participants to find solutions.	Recognises conflicts, handles and resolves them.	ABEs have a repertoire of conflict-resolving strategies. They can de-escalate conflictual situations and use them productively.
K12	Role understanding III			Every day a new start
	Acts in a friendly manner. Recognises stimulating learning situations.	Designs lessons that are stimulating (K1 or K6).	Creates lessons optimistically, humorously varied, stimulating.	ABEs can stimulate through optimistic attributions, humour, and entertaining segments in the learning space.
K13	Communication II			Relationship to assignments
	Presents mission, role and objectives.		Creates links between mission and objectives. Makes mission and objectives comprehensible and transparent for the group.	ABEs make stakeholder mandates transparent to participants and make connections between mandates, objectives, and processes.

## 3.4 LESSONS LEARNED, OUTCOMES

### 3.4.1 Peer Learning is an Approach

By reducing our host role as ISOP to the necessary minimum, it was possible to initiate a process through collaboration and co-learning as part of a group, in which side paths and deviations from the planned were given space. The perception of everyone as learners and at the same time creators allowed us to leave the guidelines when a topic unexpectedly required more space. This way, both the learning group as such and each individual had an influence on the progress of the seminar and helped to shape it. Peer learning and "thinking together" were thus concept and process at the same time, so unforeseen developments were allowed to happen.

### 3.4.2 Involving Learners is Necessary for Success

The plan was to work based on the real work processes of our colleagues. By using Bloom's principles, we wanted to derive competencies from actions. As a result of the change of plan already described in detail due to the intervention of a colleague, participants in an Adult Basic Education course "accidentally" became co-creators and experts in our setting, which was originally intended only for teachers and thus influenced the further course. Following the original plan, we would have continued to work on the definitions of competencies even without this intervention. Now, however, the opportunity arose to include decisive statements by the learners themselves, which led us to competencies that could be directly and vividly linked to experienced actions. Without this influence, our results would have been different.

### 3.4.3 Experiential Knowledge Becomes Visible by Collaborative Learning Process

From the unplanned example we were able to work on together in our event, we could derive areas of competence or competencies that teachers *and* learners perceive as essential. Essential aspects of working with case examples are therefore: authenticity and deriving competencies from actions – instead of deriving actions from competencies.

## 3.5 PERSONAL REFLECTION

Claudia Miesmer

In retrospect, Bridging Barriers and its main part, planning and implementing an offer for further education for the Bridging Barriers project, presents itself to me as a *work in progress*. Incorporating new ideas and perspectives as well as discarding old plans and thoughts accompanied me. These processes happened before, during and after the planning and implementation of the pilot module. Statements from interviews with ABEs only caught my attention later in conjunction with the Key Modules in the summer of 2021, and then triggered new thinking. It is hard to make chronological breakpoints, as perceptions and inferences are coloured by personal filters of experience, depending on which snippets of the past are subsequently considered relevant and coupled with later knowledge.

### Learners' Barriers, Learning Barriers, Teaching Barriers

One of the original ideas of the project was to identify learning barriers that could prevent learners from progressing and to consider how these barriers could be overcome.

The interviews that took place more than a year earlier with basic educators revealed a recurring motif: In the interviews, it was frequently expressed that barriers were generally to be found on the side of the learners. Barriers were derived from educational distance, socioeconomic reasons or learners' lack of information. Perceptions seemed to revolve predominantly around deficiency and the "lack of something". Lack of learning progress – even during a course that was already in progress – was attributed to barriers that were causally located in learners and thus also mostly beyond the teachers' responsibility. However, compensating for this lack appeared to be a necessary future task of basic educators.

In the interviews, the lack of knowledge of course participants was discussed. But here, too, teachers often perceived this assumption as a "hidden" barrier on the part of participants. The reasons for this could only be discovered and removed by the trainers themselves as the course progressed. Again, "external" circumstances were held responsible for the lack of learning success. In addition to the attribution of these barriers, other external obstacles were also articulated: lack of sufficient course funding, time constraints, staffing and infrastructure bottlenecks. These deficiencies were described as structurally responsible for the failure to learn.

However, finding solutions is part of the Adult Basic Educator's toolkit. It is a strength of ABEs to look for options to overcome obstacles. They focus their efforts on necessary steps *towards the learners*: specifically tailored learning arrangements for professionals, special phonetics exercises, hiring dyslexia trainers, meticulous schedules for learners with no experience etc. ABEs strive for the best interventions, the most appropriate methods and the most adequate learning materials, and they expand their psychological and socio-educational knowledge. They believe that they only need to acquire that particular skill or competence so that learners can leap over the chasm of knowledge to *them*. However, the belief that obstacles are to be found in the learners themselves often persists. What Adult Basic Educators often do not do is question the location of the barriers. They seldom think about whether there might be obstacles that are perhaps not on the learner's side after all.

### Teaching AND Learning Barriers

So why are learning failures almost exclusively perceived as barriers of learners? One reason may lie in the project's questioning. The original planning did not consider teaching barriers at the beginning of the project. We don't get answers to questions we don't ask. Now, however, one of the targets of Bridging Barriers is to look at the teacher's own competencies. This also means working on one's own professional role and asking oneself whether there might be barriers in one's own understanding of teaching that produce learning failures. Implicit knowledge is also implicit non-knowledge. In the course of the project, the concept of teaching barriers developed.

So what kind of teaching barriers might those be? Lack of commitment can hardly be assumed: The great personal commitment of teachers in this field to find the best possible solutions even in difficult settings and to facilitate learning successes is evident in many cases. Could it be a lack of expertise? Despite the potential for improvement, Austria offers a wide range of professional training and continuing education opportunities that are well perceived and made use of.

### Asymmetries of Power, Understanding One's Own Role, Eye Level

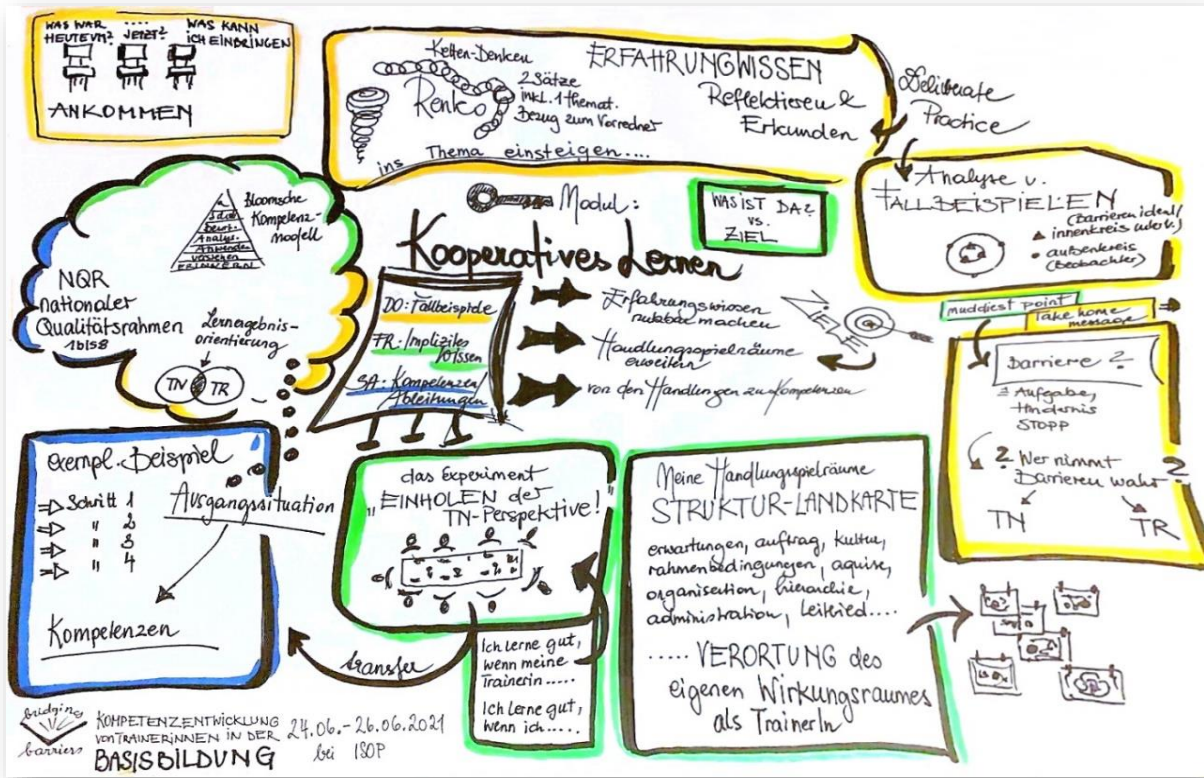
I think that reflecting the imbalance of power might be helpful in this context. In course settings, the roles of teachers and learners are usually clearly distributed: The "talking heads", i.e. the teachers, are generally part of the majority society; older, autochthonous, better earning, situated in rather secure economic circumstances and thus an unquestioned integral part of the population. They enjoy a higher reputation and appear to be wiser and more experienced than their mostly listening participants. In learning spaces, an imbalance exists from the very beginning: here the ones who know, there the ones to be taught. This imbalance, as an unrecognised "blind spot", can influence the attitude and behaviour of all participants. Thus, power imbalances even exist before the course begins and are consolidated during the course. It seems advisable for teachers to reflect more on their role and profession in this context. How a trainer confronts a learner, how he or she perceives and exercises his or her own authority, whether he or she is deliberate about his or her own power and uses or suppresses it, how he or she influences the atmosphere. This dimension, which promotes or inhibits learning success, can be overlooked or ignored, and then it may seem easier to look for the cause in the other person. Of course, power relations are not reversed just because teachers perceive them. Nevertheless, it is necessary to face this structural imbalance honestly and to think about possible effects in the planning and implementation of Adult Basic Education programs. If ABEs recognise and acknowledge that a priori existing imbalances can influence learning relationships, they will be ready to develop counter-strategies. These reflection processes should also be transparent for the participants in the sense of perceiving learning processes as a joint effort and shaping them successfully.

### Learning Objectives

The term "learning objectives" is rather fuzzy and we like to use it when we want learners to master a certain thing at the end of a course: grammar skills at a certain level, basic arithmetic etc. These learning objectives are theorized well in project descriptions or curricula. The participation of teachers is limited – mostly unasked and involuntarily – to the implementation, so that these learning goals can be achieved in a certain, limited period of time. What remains unconsidered is that once predefined specifications do not correspond to the "real" learners and their ideas. Thus, people come to the study rooms with their own self-defined learning needs and self-selected learning goals, or they often do not even know what they are searching for in the beginning. The ABEs themselves often do not know either, since the learners' wishes were sometimes not even addressed in advance or can, later on, no longer be perceived or taken into account. The term "learning objectives" seems to be better replaced by the term "teaching objectives". This is actually to be achieved. However, learners are responsible for and competent of their own learning. It is therefore necessary for ABEs to understand that successful learning is and shall be self-determined: Learning only works based on self-motivation and interest. The task of teachers is to follow their own scopes of action within the framework of the guidelines and to promote methods and models that make learning successful.

### Working on Relationship

Ideally, ABEs should be able to steer successful teaching-learning relationships in the sense discussed above. It should be possible to observe one's own powerful role as teacher and learning guide. Acceptance of the self-determination of the learners, the teachers' goodwill, interests and appreciation have a positive effect on relationships. Learning succeeds when teachers regard themselves as participants in a common learning process.



## Martin Leitner

Adult Basic Education is a Political Act.

My reflections refer to the process of cognition I went through in the pilot course, the training we planned and implemented as a part of the Bridging Barriers project, in interaction with my points of view. I have received the opportunity to reflect and question my attitude (Haltung) and points of view. It seems relevant to me to focus on two levels, the content level and, much more, the level of approach, procedure and methods in the planning and implementation of the pilot course.

The two levels are difficult to separate, because approach and methods are the visible expressions of professional competences. Competences are transformed into actions and become visible this way. One approach we had planned for our pilot course was to derive competences of basic educators from actions (by working on real case studies from our practice).

For me, the proximate connection between competence and action is a central aspect of competence-oriented Adult Basic Education. The description of competences in the form of descriptors, as we know them from curricula, also in the field of Adult Basic Education or the Bridging Barriers competence matrix, are formulated very generally in a language of theory. The competences described this way make it difficult to derive actions from them. What I learned when we dealt with the concept of competences in the pilot course is that competence descriptions have to be, in a way, formulated as instructions for action in order to be useful and helpful. Competence descriptions should therefore not be a measuring instrument of my professionalism or expertise, but an orientation aid that guides me to expand my possibilities for action as a basic educator. This principle should also be applied when curricula in Adult Basic Education are created.



At the end of the core module in our pilot course, we presented competences of basic educators derived from the statements of Adult Basic Education participants. This is described earlier in the handbook.

For me, it is crucial how a learning space, how the learning space of Adult Basic Education, is designed. On the one hand, of course, the physical space, the rooms, the infrastructure in which the teaching-learning process takes place, and on the other hand, the space in the sense of designing the teaching-learning process. We dealt with this in the pilot course by, among other things, creating a picture of the target group, we told each other (described!) our target group and made pictures from what we heard there. We presented ourselves and our scope of action in the respective organizational structure. We put the concept of peer learning to work in the pilot course. And we got the unexpected opportunity to learn from participants in Adult Basic Education what they need, expect and want from basic educators so that learning can be successful.

The approach of designing the learning spaces, the physical and the teaching-learning process together is an important precondition, I think, to prevent teaching-learning barriers from the start. This kind of participation is unfamiliar and perhaps strange to teachers and learners because teachers and learners have images in their minds how learning settings look like. In the pilot course, I experienced that cooperative learning, learning together and creating the joint learning, the learning process with all the deviations and turnings that open up in this process, are very beneficial and take me further in my own learning. I realized that I am not alone with my points of view, that I share practical knowledge, implicit knowledge with others, that I can name it and take it with me this way. I was involved.

One goal of Adult Basic Education is to enable (together with the) participants in Adult Basic Education to take part in society and democratic processes. For me, this is the second reason why participants in Adult Basic Education should help shape the teaching and learning process. As I said, they become equal participants in their own learning processes, and they have the opportunity to acquire or expand competences that make social participation possible, in addition, of course, to other factors. In our pilot course, we dealt intensively with the attitude (Haltung) of teachers in Adult Basic Education, with the understanding of roles and the power asymmetry in the teaching-learning process. This discussion made our discomfort with the concept of the *learning barrier* significant and brought us to the concept of the teaching-learning barrier. Teachers in Adult Basic Education are therefore also participants in the teaching-learning process. Learning is not only a matter of the users in Adult Basic Education, the learners, a term I refuse for the reasons mentioned above.

Already during preparation but also during implementation, we agreed on how important the distinct clarification of terms (naming) is to us. One's own attitude (Haltung), one's own perception is determined by how we use and, above all, value terms.

Formal, professional exchange – in whatever form, with whatever method – among basic educators is the best instrument for developing professional competences of basic educators. A simple and obvious truth that has become a standing statement in the discourse on Adult Basic Education, a hollow phrase. The experiences of exchange in the Bridging Barriers project that I have had bring this simple truth, this statement, to life.

Adult Basic Education is a political act.

## 4 THE PEER LEARNING EVENT IN ITALY

Matilde Tomasi and Elena De Zen, Il Mondo nella Città, Schio, Italy

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Adult Basic Education in Italy is not a formally defined field. It includes different experiences: from public school, active in this field through "CPIAs" (Provincial Centres for Adult Basic Education), to private organization experiences in teaching various adult courses.

The majority of participants who have been involved in the Bridging Barriers project's activities carried out in Italy are ABE teachers working both for CPIAs and for non-profit organizations. Our network of acquaintances and collaborators at a professional level is mostly made up of teachers of Italian L2. This is one of the reasons why we decided to target our pilot course at teachers of Italian L2, in addition to the fact that it is our daily work and, therefore, an area in which we feel we have experience and knowledge.

Our choice of setting up the workshop as an exchange of good practice stems from the importance we give to peer learning as a real opportunity for the individual subject and the peer group to discuss freely and develop intense exchange moments by giving priority to the horizontal dimension in the sharing of knowledge and experiences among the members of a group.

### 4.2 PLANNING

#### 4.2.1 Target Group

The Pilot Course was designed as a training and an exchange of good practice for Italian L2 teachers, as we have been working in this field for several years gaining experience and knowledge. The course registrations we collected were very diverse in terms of all teachers' geographical origins and years of experience. Most of the participants were teachers of Italian language both in Italy and abroad. Some of them taught Italian to foreigners in South America, the majority were teachers working with refugees and asylum seekers or other kinds of vulnerable migrants in Italy. They taught both in public schools and in private Adult Basic Education organizations. However, there was also a small group of people with no or little experience in this field but interested in the topics proposed or in doing this job in the future.

#### 4.2.2 Content and Objectives

Starting from the specific goals of our pilot course, we can summarise them as follows:

- to share and discuss the topics of the Bridging Barriers project
- to provide information on ABE in the different partner countries
- to create an opportunity for L2 Italian teachers to meet and reflect on their daily work, with a focus on supporting motivation, literacy in adult learners and managing intercultural groups
- to make participants experience and reflect on the importance of peer learning in our daily work
- to give participants new teaching tools through the exchange of good practice
- to start creating a local network among L2 Italian teachers

Regarding the contents, we decided to focus on:

- barriers for learners
- becoming aware of implicit knowledge of us as ABE educators
- working through case studies
- cooperative/peer learning

Once we had identified the target group and the course objectives, we thought about the specific course content, both for the online lessons and the in-presence workshop.

In the online meetings, we proposed the following topics:

- presentation of the Erasmus+ European project Bridging Barriers
- Adult Basic Education in Italy, Austria, Slovakia and Switzerland
- interviews with ABE teachers
- coordination for the 2,5 days' workshop

Concerning the workshop, the three main topics were selected after reading the interviews conducted with ABE teachers during the IO1. That is why we decided to focus on:

- 1st day workshop: Supporting motivation in adult learners
- 2nd day workshop: Literacy of adult learners
- 3rd day workshop: Managing intercultural groups

### 4.2.3 Methods, Models, Concepts for the Approach

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#### Peer Learning

Peer Learning can be defined as "an educational strategy aimed at activating a spontaneous process of transfer of knowledge, emotions and experiences from some members of a group to other members of equal status; an intervention that activates a process of global communication, characterized by a deep and intense experience and a strong attitude of searching for authenticity and harmony between the subjects involved." <sup>10</sup>

The perceived similarity between the individuals involved in peer learning activities is the basis of their effectiveness: feeling some commonality with the other people involved, sharing similar problems or common experiences with them promote a natural process of change. Peers, in fact, are seen as models by which to re-read one's own experiences and thus acquire knowledge and skills of various kinds on the one hand and modify one's own behaviour and attitudes on the other.

On this basis, we designed our pilot course, trying to apply the peer learning approach both in the online meetings and in the 2,5 day workshop in presence. Specifically, during the online meetings we asked some participants to prepare a short presentation on a topic they were experts in. We involved a retired teacher of the CPIA who has worked for years in this institution observing its transformations and changes; an Italian L2 teacher who has been working for many years in reception projects for asylum seekers and refugees; a colleague of ours who gave a short presentation on the importance of cooperative learning in our daily work, a topic he had explored in a paper during a university post graduate course.

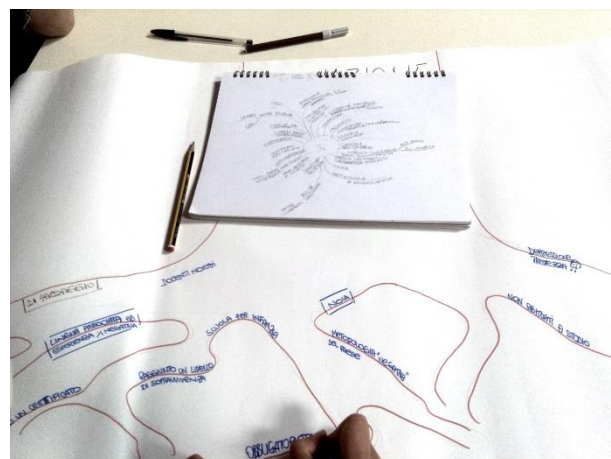
During the 2,5 days' workshop, we also proposed different activities based on peer learning methods. A few examples:

- "Case work": The group is divided in half, and each sub-group discusses a case taken from the interviews. One participant presents the case, the others discuss what could have been the possible intervention. Then each sub-group shares their reflection in a plenary session.

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<sup>10</sup> Panzavolta S., Peer education: l'educazione tra pari che passa conoscenze.  
<https://www.indire.it/content/index.php?action=read&id=1133>

- "The problem tree": Divided in two groups, we carried out a group reflection about causes and consequences of lack of motivation to learn in adult learners. The causes are symbolized as the "roots" of the "problem tree", the consequences as the "branches". We created the "leaves" for our "problem tree", writing down what can help learners increase their motivation.



### Work Based Learning

Course participants were asked to think up and prepare some activities to propose during the workshop or to bring some teaching materials to be presented and shared with other participants, aimed at exchanging good practice. In order to coordinate and organize the presentation of the activities, a couple of weeks prior to the workshop we shared a file that participants had to fill in with the activities or materials they would present during the 2,5 workshop.

### Blended Learning

The first part of the course was carried out online, both due to the restrictions of the pandemic situation and because we have received numerous inscriptions from people living far away or abroad. In doing this, we gave everyone the chance to take part at least in the first part of our pilot course. We chose Zoom as an online platform as it gives the option to work with breakout rooms, thus giving us the chance to divide the participants in small groups during some activities.



## 4.2.4 Country-Specific Methods und Models

### Good Practice Exchange

In our opinion, one of the most effective ways to learn how to teach is by observing other teachers and exchanging good practice in a "peer-learning" context. That is why we decided to propose the exchange of good practice in our 2,5 days' workshop as a way of working to implement the "peer learning" approach. At the same time, it was also a request that emerged from the interviews conducted with Italian ABE teachers. We believe that the exchange of good practice is a source of motivation and inspiration that has a positive effect on teaching activities, both for experienced teachers and people with little experience in this field (volunteers, practitioners). In addition, it can be the basis for creating a network among teachers who do the same job in different local institutions and organizations.

We asked the participants to possibly prepare an interactive activity to present the practice they decided to share; trying an activity firsthand is usually more effective than just listening to a

description. Actions support learning in a very effective way, they remain in our memory and give stability to what we learn. Acting in a group, in a relational dimension, has a motor and affective components that give body and strength to learning.

### Theatre Activity

In our reflection activities, we used an empathy activity inspired by the Theatre of the Oppressed method, specifically by Forum Theatre. The Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) was founded by theatre practitioner Augusto Boal in the 1970s. Boal was influenced by the work of educator Paulo Freire; TO techniques use theatre as a means of promoting social and political change.

### Autobiographical Storytelling

We implemented some autobiographical activities, as we often do in our language lessons in ABE context. We chose them among other exchange activities, because the autobiographical method unhinges the typical model of training where only the trainer is the holder of knowledge and it promotes a rebalancing of knowledge-power within the training process. At the same time, it stimulates self-reflection and possibly triggers a change in professional practice and attitude.

"Autobiography is in fact a real training methodology that, before developing knowledge and skills about something, aims at developing self-knowledge." (D. Demetrio)

In our practice, autobiographical activities are often introduced by some manual and/or creative activities. The time spent in a manual activity, focusing on the topic, allows the participant to reflect and to organize their thoughts about it. After reflecting and creating something, participants are usually more prepared and more willing to share their experiences with the group.

## 4.3 DESCRIPTION OF IMPLEMENTATION

### 4.3.1 Online Meetings

The first part of our pilot course took place online on the Zoom platform and was attended by ABE teachers and people interested in the course topics from various parts of Italy and abroad (Argentina and Peru). We organized four online meetings, conducted by us with support of an external facilitator, experienced in conducting group activities and reflections.

The presentation meeting aimed at presenting the Bridging Barriers project and its objectives as well as at involving participants in online reflection activities on some of the topics that have been discussed. The meeting started with a nice ice-breaking activity that allowed participants to introduce themselves, followed by a short presentation on Adult Basic Education and a reflection on the question which skills trainers working in this field should have. It continued with the presentation of the Bridging Barriers project and its expected intellectual outputs and the theoretical concepts behind the project (barriers to learning, deliberate practice, VQTS, peer learning). In the final part of the meeting, the facilitator proposed activities for reflection, first individually and then in a plenary session using the Mentimeter platform.

During the second online meeting, the focus was on the way Adult Basic Education is organized in the four countries of the project partners: Austria, Italy, Slovakia and Switzerland. The reference material consisted of the four case studies that each partner institution realized during the first phase of the project. As far as Italy was concerned, a historical excursus on Adult Basic Education from its origins to the present day was presented. In particular, there was a focus on the CPIA (Provincial Centres for Adult Basic Education) and its transformation over the years and a focus on the SAI network (Reception and Integration System), of which the association "Il Mondo nella città" is a member. The last part of the meeting was dedicated to individual reflection and subsequent plenary discussion on the competences that teachers working in the field of Adult Basic Education should have.

The topic of the third online meeting was the interviews with teachers working in the field of Adult Basic Education, carried out and collected during the first phase of the project in the four project partner countries. It started with a brief presentation of the structure of the interview in its different parts and then moved on to its contents. The interviews have been grouped according to the barriers to learning that emerged from the cases brought by the interviewees, so that common and cross-country issues could be easily identified. The next part was dedicated to the training needs expressed by the ABE teachers interviewed. This third day also ended with a moment of reflection on the topics discussed, again using the Mentimeter platform.

In the fourth and final online meeting, participants decided which cases to bring to the face-to-face workshop, aimed to identify the possible strategies to overcome the learning barriers through group activities and peer learning methods. Furthermore, this meeting was an opportunity for the participants to coordinate the activities to be presented to the workshop, again with a focus on exchanging good practice.

### 4.3.2 In-Presence Workshop

The in-presence workshop was organized over three days and focused on three different topics:

- supporting motivation in adult learners
- literacy teaching with foreign adults
- managing intercultural groups

#### First Day Workshop: Supporting Motivation in Adult Learners

The program of the first meeting included a number of icebreaker activities, a group activity aimed at creating a "problem tree" and a workshop activity.

Moments of individual work and reflection were alternated with moments of group regrouping and plenary discussion. The icebreaker activities focused on getting to know each other, in particular on professional roles and attitudes of all involved, and on expectations and fears concerning the workshop. Then we worked in groups on the "motivation" topic, using the "problem tree" technique described above. The closing activity was autobiographical storytelling. The topic was "Something or someone who/that helped me find motivation to learn". Each participant created a collage, and then we shared our stories. These stories were the base of reflection on what "solutions" we can add to our "motivation problem tree".

#### Second Day Workshop: Literacy Teaching with Foreign Adults



*Illustrated books*



*Literacy teaching materials*

In the second meeting, we started with an empathy activity. Our facilitator, who speaks Japanese, taught a surprise Japanese lesson. We used this activity to make participants empathize with their

illiterate beginner students during language lessons. After that, we reflected on how we felt and on how the lesson was given.

The rest of the morning was dedicated to case work, aimed at discussing and analysing some cases chosen during the last preparatory meeting. The group was divided in half, and each sub-group discussed a case taken from the interviews. One participant, who knew the case, presented it, and the other participants discussed what could have been the possible intervention. The presenter was told not to answer but to just listen to the discussion. Finally, each sub-group shared the reflection in a plenary session.

The afternoon was dedicated to the exchange of good practice. Each participant presented a good practice or a teaching tool that he/she found useful for literacy teaching. The presentations were either interactive or by explanation: some participants decided to make the others try out the activity, others just explained it. The presentations were prepared individually or in pairs during the "work based" part of the course.

The shared practices have been:

- teaching materials specifically created for illiterate student with learning/psychological issues
- ludic teaching activities
- a textbook for literacy courses created by a participant
- one activity from the "DILIT" method
- teaching materials from various textbooks
- Montessori tools used in adult literacy classes
- some participants brought illustrated books they have used in language classes as well as some publications from other language schools to show to the other participants

### Third Day Workshop: Managing Intercultural Groups

The third meeting followed the schedule of the previous one, with group work and activities in the morning, and presentation of materials, workshops and working methods that can be used with groups of intercultural students in the afternoon.

After an ice-breaking activity aimed at physical activation, we proposed a theatre activity regarding a dramatization of a difficult lesson. We asked some participants to play a class scene: one participant played the teacher, some other participants played the students. We gave each of them a short description of some "typical" student (the "insecure", the "bully", the "know-it-all", the "layabout") we usually have in our classes. We took these descriptions from the interviews (from our IO1). Other participants watched the scene and commented later, together with the "actors".

The rest of the morning was dedicated to casework: The group was divided into two sub groups. Each group received three examples, taken from the interviews, of difficulties in managing groups. They had to discuss and imagine possible solutions. Then each sub group shared their reflections with the other. In the afternoon, each participant presented a good practice or teaching tool that he/she found useful for managing groups. The presentations were either interactive or done by explanation:



*Name acronym*

### School newspaper



- workshop with the Theatre of the Oppressed method
- manual workshop: "name acronym"
- school newspaper
- artistic workshop created during lockdown
- reading activity
- focus group on the sense of purpose of attending school
- ice-breaking activity: "All that we share"

The final part was dedicated to plenary regrouping among participants to share reflections, fears, expectations about the training days. One of the participants is an expert in mind maps, therefore, with a view to peer learning, we asked her to lead the reflection part creating a collective mind map so all participants could learn the technique.

## 4.4 LESSONS LEARNED, OUTCOMES

Participants of our pilot course had the chance to:

- reflect their day-to-day professional practice, specifically on supporting the motivation in adult learners, literacy teaching with foreign adults and managing intercultural groups
- acquire new teaching tools through the exchange of good practice
- reinforce their awareness of the importance of peer learning and observing other teachers working as the most effective way to learn
- meet and connect with people from different organizations and countries and with different educational backgrounds and working experiences, laying the basis for the creation of a network of Italian L2 teachers

During the implementation of the pilot course, we faced unforeseeable events that made us reflect on the working group and the importance of continuity when participating in a course. As a matter of fact, the working group involved in online meetings and the workshop changed a lot. Initially, we received a large number of registrations for the course, but when we made it clear that the workshop was in presence, many people changed their minds or just stopped answering. That is why we arrived at the beginning of the course without knowing the exact number of people we would find. Some participants attended only the online meetings and not the workshop in presence because they live far away from the workshop location, others only attended a part of the online meetings because they live abroad and the time difference did not allow them to attend all meetings. Some teachers expressed their interest in participating in the workshop, but unfortunately, the scheduled days overlapped with the end-of-year exams at the schools where they work. In addition, some participants joined the workshop group just for a part of the activities. Because of all these different variables, it was quite challenging to manage the transition from the online to the in-presence phase.

At the same time, this issue probably cannot be avoided, given the structure of the pilot course. It had been designed to be a very long and demanding course, so it was very likely that participants would attend just a part of it. The pilot course itself was very long and demanding, thus a lot of potential participants were not willing to take such a big commitment in terms of time; many participants attended just some parts.



## 4.5 PERSONAL REFLECTION

Matilde Tomasi

The model of the pilot course designed by the Bridging Barriers project proved to have many strong points. The peer learning methods were effective in engaging participants in self-reflection and exchange. Moreover, they promoted the creation of informal networks among teachers, which gives an additional value to the participation in that kind of course. Teachers had the chance to really meet each other and share experiences; this could possibly be the basis for future collaboration.

The intense in-presence workshop was crucial to develop a mutual trust enabling reflection and sharing. After more than a year, when most of the interactions had been online, meeting in person was initially almost weird, but after the ice was broken, it proved to be essential and enriching.

There seemed to be a "webinar fatigue"<sup>11</sup> among participants: The pandemic situation has fuelled the offer of a large number of interesting online trainings, but most of them stick to a strict transmissive model, where the trainer does the talking and shows a presentation and the participants are passive most of the time. The interactions usually just happen in the form of questions the participants can ask the trainer; the interactions between trainees is zero or very limited. The transmissive, frontal lesson model can be used during in-presence training, too; but its limits are amplified by the online mode. "The online mode is deprived of all the empathic, human, kinesic, multimedial variables of face-to-face training"<sup>12</sup>. In addition, we can add, it is deprived of all those formal and/or informal moments in which trainees meet and share information, knowledge, and create professional relationships: group works, discussions or even coffee breaks.

The approach chosen for the project enabled us to emphasize on sharing and reflection activities; we had a facilitator who guided the activities with us, but we carefully chose activities that encouraged the participants to share their knowledge and reflection as well as some personal stories. Even in our online meetings we decided to limit the transmissive part and to give space to reflection and discussion, both in plenary and in breakout rooms.

This approach has also some risks: First of all, the peer-learning model could be perceived as lacking validation. Teachers, often very busy in doing their day-to-day job, could prefer to attend training offered by renowned institutions, with a well-known expert that would give them a teacher-centred-lesson, transmitting some knowledge. A peer-learning workshop could be considered of little use and not worth investing some of the participants' limited time and energy. Moreover, teachers working in public schools and institutions need to attend accredited training; peer-learning methods are not so common among them. A cultural shift is maybe taking place, though, since in the interviews we collected in IO1, a lot of teachers mentioned peer exchange among their training needs.

Another risk we noticed was that it is challenging to try to keep the training situation really among "peers". If the group includes some teachers that are more experienced than others are, and it is very likely that it does, some of them could feel entitled to take over the role of the trainer and "overwhelm" the others with their knowledge and advice. Creating the right atmosphere of mutual listening and trust is a delicate balance.

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<sup>11</sup> The concept is described in: Sharma, M.K., Sunil, S., Anand, N. et al. Webinar fatigue: fallout of COVID-19. J. Egypt. Public. Health. Assoc. 96, 9 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42506-021-00069-y>

<sup>12</sup> Balboni P., Formare i docenti di lingue: è possibile capovolgere lo schema? ItalianoLinguaDue, n. 1. 2021 <https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/promoitals/article/view/15851>

## Elena De Zen

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The Bridging Barriers project was significantly affected by the pandemic and the restrictions that were adopted. Most of the activities scheduled by the project, such as interviews or partner meetings, were moved to online. The same happened to the most important events open to the public, such as the International Workshop or the International Conference, which aimed at presenting the activities and the results of the project. Similarly, our pilot course was inevitably affected by the restrictions of the pandemic. In fact, the whole first part of the course took place online. One positive aspect of the online meetings was the possibility of bringing people from different cities and countries together, which would have been difficult to achieve if we had organized the pilot course in person. In doing this, we took a small step towards strengthening educators' networks in the field of Adult Basic Education, one of the general goals of the Bridging Barriers project. Moreover, we knew and learned to use some online tools to manage group discussions, which will be useful from now on in our daily work. On the other hand, work and discussions in groups lost their immediacy and richness of information due to more technical aspects such as the quality of the audio or video, respect for taking turns talking to avoid overlapping as well as sometimes the difficulty of picking up the body signals of our interlocutors. Body language is a tool that is as powerful as it is often unconscious. It allows the speaker and the listener to receive continuous feedback on the state of each other (whether they are listening, whether what is said is understood, whether they wish to retort) and to organize the "turns" of speech and the verbal exchange: gaze, posture, head nods. When we are online, this part of the communication is much more reduced.

A second reflection concerns the peer-learning approach, which was the basis for the pilot courses in the various countries. We decided to involve an external facilitator in the organization and implementation of both the online activities and the workshop. The facilitator is a teacher of Italian L2 like us, he is a colleague, he is a peer, who, on the one hand, helped us to conduct and moderate some activities (especially online) of individual and group reflection, and, on the other, represented an external point of view, a "participating" observer of the dynamics that were created in the various meetings, with whom we always discussed the course's progress. Sometimes being involved in activities does not allow you to have an objective view of what is going on; having an external observer giving you feedback allows you to highlight the positive or more critical aspects and reflect on them later. The peer-learning approach, especially during the face-to-face workshop, allowed participants to take off the teachers' "masks" that their roles sometimes impose and gave them the opportunity to share reflections without fear of judgement or having to prove something. From the very first icebreaker activities, the personal insecurities and difficulties that educators often encounter in their daily work as ABE teachers emerged, insecurities and difficulties that were seen to be those of all participants. This "intimate" sharing created a collaborative climate of mutual trust, which allowed everyone to expose themselves, both participants with little experience in Adult Basic Education as well as teachers with a longer working background. Participants with less experience benefited from peer learning and the exchange of good practice, because they could pick up tools, reflections and insights that may be useful for their future activities or choices; more experienced teachers had the opportunity to reflect on their daily practice with colleagues working in the same field, which is not so easy to do during every day work. Often there is no time to stop and reflect on our daily work, to question our inner attitude in the teaching and learning process and its role in creating and dismantling learning barriers and to focus on which skills we use to try to support students in their learning process. Often we are not even aware of our own skills and knowledge, so exchanging experiences with peers regarding common cases and situations can help us gain insight into competence development of Adult Basic Educators and describe the educators' competencies based on their activities.

## 5 THE PEER LEARNING EVENT IN SLOVAKIA

Radoslav Vician, e-code, Krupina, Slovakia

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The pilot course was based on the findings from research and interviews that highlighted the most important areas to be covered in Adult Basic Learning for us. In this light, we were able to identify the most important areas to be covered by Adult Basic Learning, the most important target groups of Adult Basic Learning as well as the most important skills of Adult Basic Educators.

#### 5.1.1 Areas of Adult Basic Learning

##### Imbalances in Skills

Skills imbalances are costly for individuals, firms and the economy as a whole as they lead to lower investment and lower overall productivity. Slovakia experiences shortages both among higher- and lower-skilled occupations. There are also strong skills mismatches among younger workers and tertiary educated workers. The low responsiveness of the secondary vocational education and training (VET) and tertiary education system have contributed to skills shortages and skills mismatches, whereas emigration and brain drain have been major drivers behind shortages.

Slovakia has opportunities to reduce skills imbalances by:

- Improving the dissemination of information on labour market and skills needs. Strengthening the responsiveness of students and their families to labour market needs.
- Strengthening the responsiveness of secondary VET and tertiary education institutions to labour market needs.
- Moving from "brain drain" to "brain gain".

##### Low Participation in Adult Learning

Adult learning is particularly important for Slovakia. The Slovak economy is strong and catching up with higher-income countries. Employment and wages are growing and the unemployment rate is historically low. Nonetheless, Slovak production and exports are concentrated in a small number of manufacturing industries and the risk of job automation is particularly high. In this context, adult learning is, and will continue to be, essential for boosting the skills of adults and can generate a range of personal, economic and social benefits. More effective Adult Basic Education and training will be needed to maintain or increase the level of skills to keep pace with these rapidly changing conditions. Slovakia has opportunities to foster greater participation in adult learning by:

- Improving the governance of adult learning.
- Increasing participation among adults out of work.
- Supporting the capacity of employees and firms to engage in adult learning.

##### Weak Use of Skills at the Workplace

There has recently been growing awareness of the fact that how well employers use skills at the workplace may be just as important as the skills their workers possess.

The skills of adults are not used to their full potential in Slovakia, and the use of most types of employees' information processing as well as job-specific and generic skills could be intensified. The use of reading skills at work in Slovakia is below the OECD average, while the average literacy proficiency of adults is above average, and the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) skills could be strengthened. Despite the strong link found between the intensive use of

skills and the adoption of high performance workplace practices, such as flexibility at the workplace or teamwork, Slovak firms are adopting high performance workplace practices at a lower rate than their counterparts in most other countries.

Slovakia has opportunities to strengthen the use of skills at the workplace by:

- Creating the conditions to facilitate the adoption of high performance workplace practices in Slovak firms.
- Providing incentives and support to Slovak firms for the adoption of high performance workplace practices.
- Enhancing the governance of policies and strategies that affect skills use.

### Target Groups of Adult Basic Learning in Slovakia

Above described areas of adult basic learning helped us to identify the following most vulnerable target groups in need of basic adult learning:

- Socio-economically disadvantaged learners – particularly represented by Roma population.
- Long-term unemployed – represented by Roma population and low-skilled youth and adults.
- Low-skilled employees – represented by youth and adults in direct danger of losing their work due to automation of jobs and increased need of digital skills.

### Important Skills of Adult Basic Educators

The skills identified as most important for Adult Basic Educators in Slovakia were the results of a number of interviews organized in the project. In our case, these were very much target group oriented and formed the basis for the design of our pilot course. In fact, there were a number of areas identified as important for Adult Basic Educators, but three of them turned out to be the most common and most critically evaluated ones by the educators. In short, these were:

- Ability of Adult Basic Educators to motivate learners to engage and successfully complete their educational process, especially with the most vulnerable groups (socio-economically disadvantaged learners, long-term unemployed and low-skilled employees) who do not have much understanding of the importance of their education.
- Skills of Adult Basic Educators concerning psychological approaches towards the above identified target groups, as their successful education is often based on an individual adaptation towards learners.
- Practical experience of Adult Basic Educators in managing individuals and groups in Adult Basic Education.

## 5.2 PLANNING

### 5.2.1 Target Groups

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Our group of pilot course participants consisted of nine educators within the age from 26 to 49, i.e. persons with various degree of experience. The group was organized already in the summer of 2021, however, due to Covid-19 situation, we managed to meet physically only in October 2021.

### 5.2.2 Content and Objectives

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The entire pilot course was planned in the form of seven modules, but at the end, we decided to simplify the modules, use the opportunity for face-to-face interaction and reduce the modules to three. Two of them without physical presence, the last one as a real meeting of educators and organizers of the pilot courses. The following chart presents the details of the pilot course organization:

Title	Topics	Hours	Methodology
Kick-Off/ Introduction	Presentation of Bridging Barriers project Presentation of participants Presentation of pilot course Resources for pilot course	1	The kick-off/introduction was planned to be organized in the form of a short online meeting securing that the participants are aware what the project and pilot course will be about, what kind of resources will be used and that it will also serve as a platform for introducing each other.
Self-study	Exploration of resources, particularly: Competence development (Dreyfus), Deliberate practice framework (Ericsson), VQTS competence matrix, other resources in Slovak language.	12	It was planned that in this phase the pilot course participants would be given time for accustoming themselves to the most important educational materials used for the project and pilot course. The educational materials are available online, so each participant had a chance to download them and use them according to their needs.
Workshop Organization	<b>Topic 1:</b> Motivational factors in ABE Icebreaker, group building, case studies, involvement of participants in group activities. <b>Topic 2:</b> Psychological Factors of ABE Icebreaker, theoretical background, case studies, involvement of participants in group activities. <b>Topic 3:</b> Individual and Group Management in Adult Basic Education Icebreaker, theoretical background, case studies, involvement of participants in group activities.	3+4+4	The actual workshop was planned as a face-to-face course with defined topics over three days. The format was defined as fairly informal and based on peer learning, first presenting theoretical background and then continuing with exchange of experience and case studies contributed not only by the pilot course organizers but also by the participants. Topics of the workshop were defined in the phase of research and based on the outcomes of interviews with experts in Adult Basic Education. However, the plan was also to keep them flexible and focus on those topics that would turn out to appear as the most important for the pilot course participants.

### 5.2.3 Methods, Models, Concepts for the Approach

#### Peer Learning

The actual workshop was based on a predefined concept and facilitated by the organizer. Nevertheless, the methodology used was very much concentrated around peer learning. It was planned that we would use some theoretical background and icebreaker activities and then continue with the active involvement of participants. The format for this involvement was planned in the form of case studies presented by the participants, role playing – modelling situations in Adult Basic Learning, exchange of experience between participants, individual and group assignments and active discussion moderated by the facilitator.

#### Debriefing

The debriefing methodology was planned to be used in the first part of the pilot course that was organized online. The methodology was based on a simple introduction of the project, the pilot course and resources available for the pilot course’s participants. It was also planned that the facilitator and participants would introduce themselves to each other. Another debriefing methodology was used during the actual face-to-face workshop. The overall workshop was planned to start with an icebreaker and a debriefing activity of introducing the facilitator and participants to each other.

#### Self-Study

In the case of self-study, the methodology planned was very simple. Participants of the pilot course were given an opportunity to use online resources gathered from the project’s website, to consult with the facilitator in regards to the content and to organize mid-session meetings if the need would arise.

## 5.3 DESCRIPTION OF IMPLEMENTATION

### 5.3.1 Kick-Off/Introduction

As planned, the debriefing methodology was used in the first part of the pilot course organized online. There was, in principle, no deviation from the planned methodology. The facilitator organized an online meeting where registered participants met at the beginning of July 2021. All nine participants were present. The kick-off/introduction started with introducing the facilitator and participants, each person introducing herself/himself. Afterwards, the facilitator continued by introducing the Bridging Barriers project, its goals and expected outcomes. Next on the agenda was introducing the pilot course, its aim and planned content. Resources available to the participants were also introduced to them, either those available directly as learning resources on the website of the Bridging Barriers project or as links to other resources in Slovak language. Finally, the explanation was given to participants how to utilize these resources during the self-study phase.

### 5.3.2 Self-Study

The self-study phase was organized with a very simple methodological approach, again, more-or-less as planned. The participants were given sufficient time to familiarize themselves with the resources used for the pilot course. In particular, Competence Development (Dreyfus), Deliberate Practice Framework (Ericsson), the VQTS competence matrix and additional resources in Slovak language. According to the participants, all of them studied these resources. Minor deviation existed in the area of consulting, as none of the participants used the option to ask questions during the time given for self-study, neither was the facilitator asked to organize an additional online meeting for the support of self-study.

### 5.3.3 Workshop Organization

The workshop of the pilot course was expected and eventually turned out to be the most important part. First of all, it gave the facilitator and the participants an opportunity to meet face to face during the first week of October 2021. The workshop was organized in a natural environment in the village of Pribylina, surrounded by mountains and nature. These settings were chosen as they allowed a relaxing environment and full participation of all participants during the entire three days. We could therefore continue with the planned activities of the workshop, and the following is the summary of the methodology used for each day of the workshop.

#### Day 1

Welcome	Participants were welcomed by the facilitator, introduced to the venue and got acquainted with the detailed program of the workshop.
Icebreaker	Once all participants were present, welcomed and acquainted with the workshop program, the activities started with an icebreaker serving as an introduction to each other. This was done in the form of an interactive game where participants and facilitator were randomly paired with the mission to learn as much about their partner as possible. Afterwards, they introduced not themselves but their partner.
Theory	The theoretical phase of day one focused on motivational factors in ABE. The theory was built around five main factors that can affect the motivation of an adult learner: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of curriculum;</li> <li>• Relevance of topics;</li> <li>• Interactive classroom and management;</li> <li>• Progressive assessment and timely feedback;</li> <li>• Competent advising and quality instruction;</li> </ul> The theoretical background was presented by the facilitator.
Peer Learning	The most important part of day one continued after the theoretical phase and started with the discussion of the eight main factors for motivating adult learners. Participants were then

	given free time to meet in groups of their choice and to return with possible improvements that can be built around these eight motivational factors or to add their own. The next phase was again a discussion about the outcomes and, particularly, the presentation of the participants' own experiences with regard to motivation of adult learners.
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### Day 2

Icebreaker	Day two started with an icebreaker of a different and unexpected kind – a lesson in juggling. It was unexpected because it was seemingly totally unrelated to the topic of the workshop. The participants were introduced to the theory of juggling with three balls, then given silk scarfs and encouraged to try it themselves. Afterwards, we continued by juggling with small balloons and finally with juggling balls.
Theory	The theoretical part of the second day concentrated on psychological factors of Adult Basic Education. As a matter of fact, we did not use any theory but derived these factors from the discussion during the first day. It turned out to be more peer learning than a theoretical introduction. In groups, the participants themselves defined the most important psychological factors of Adult Basic Education. In fact, the first thing was that they redefined it as psychosocial factors and agreed on five most important: Socio-economic status; Perceived value of Adult Basic Education; Readiness to participate in Adult Basic Education; Stimuli for participating in Adult Basic Education; Barriers to participation in Adult Basic Education.
Icebreaker	After the brainstorming theoretical activity, another icebreaker followed. This time, we decided to give the participants some time for refreshing their minds, to relax, enjoy the natural environment surrounding the venue and took them for an easy hiking tour around the place. No particular tasks were expected from them.
Peer Learning	The final part of the second day was once again built on continued discussion of psychosocial factors in adult learning. Again, the participants were given free time to meet in groups of their choice and to return with possible ideas on how to work with these factors but, especially, to present their own experiences, either individually or in groups.

### Day 3

Icebreaker	We once again decided to surprise the participants and gave them a choice of icebreakers. What they actually chose was continuing with juggling exercises.
Theory	The theoretical part of day three was supposed to be built around individual and group management in Adult Basic Education. However, upon the participants' request, this was replaced by continued peer learning work on the topics of day one and day two. One of the reasons for this choice was also that, according to participants (and the facilitator agreed), individual and group management in Adult Basic Education is actually a part of the motivational factors.
Peer Learning	The peer Learning process of day three of the workshop could be easiest defined as unmoderated discussion and exchange of experience among facilitator and workshop participants. The participants themselves wanted to learn from others how they coped with various challenges in Adult Basic Education. This could have gone on for hours but had to be terminated as the workshop was getting to its end.
Icebreaker	Again juggling, and again, upon the participants' requests.

## 5.4 LESSONS LEARNED, OUTCOMES

Although the word competences was not mentioned in this report yet, the entire pilot course was, in fact, evolving around competences of Adult Basic Educators. Particularly those dealing with Adult Basic Learning, where it appears that the challenges of competences of educators are even multiplied. In our case, we focused on specific competences that were identified as the most critical ones in the specific Adult Basic Education environment in Slovakia. In our context, this education would be more precisely specified as Adult Basic Skills Education rather than Adult Basic Learning. This, obviously, puts

also some requirements on the Adult Basic Educators who need to have proper competences in order to provide their learners with effective education.

The three main areas we identified as critical concerning competences of Adult Basic Educators in Slovakia were:

- motivational factors in Adult Basic Learning
- psychological factors of Adult Basic Education
- individual and group management in Adult Basic Education

At the end, the pilot course covered only the first two areas, as the third one appears to be a sub-category of motivational skills in Adult Basic Education. Moreover, the second area redefined psychosocial factors in Adult Basic Education as it covers also social aspects of Adult Basic Education that need to be taken into consideration by educators and to be reflected in their skills.

#### 5.4.1 Motivational Factors in Adult Basic Learning

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The following list illustrates the most important lessons learned from the pilot course concerning competences of Adult Basic Educators when it comes to motivation of learners in Adult Basic Education:

##### Quality of Curriculum

A competent educator should be able to build a curriculum addressing all the following elements:

- An effective curriculum should provide essential skills that enable students to build their personal confidence, deal with social pressure and avoid or reduce risk behaviour.
- This means, competence-wise, such a curriculum should include
  - communication,
  - refusal,
  - assessing accuracy of information,
  - decision-making,
  - planning and goal-setting,
  - self-control,
  - self-management,

all concerning both educators and learners.

##### Relevance of Topics

Competence-wise, a good educator should take the fact into consideration that the topics of education must be relevant to their audience and thus be able to:

- reconsider the content of education based on the particular target group.
- analyse current teaching practices and learning goals.
- re-examine the links between goals and course design.
- develop appropriate teaching strategies and approaches.
- gather new data.
- tailor educational products to the specific needs of a particular target audience.

##### Interactive Classroom and Management

In this area, we particularly discussed the elements an interactive classroom and management should include, and the results are the following:

- Design and implementation of classroom rules and procedures.
- Consistency regarding expectations.
- Reinforcement of appropriate behaviour.
- Neutrality of educators towards learners.



### Progressive Assessment and Timely Feedback

Assessment and feedback were also considered as crucial motivational factors and should reflect on the following areas:

- Assessment should be progressive, i.e. diversified over time and not depend on a single final piece of assessment.
- Students are most likely to benefit from feedback if they receive it before they move on to their next assignment.

### Competent Advising and Quality Instruction

Good educators should have competences in advising and instructing:

- Be knowledgeable about the characteristics and needs of their students.
- Be accurate and timely in their response to the students' needs.
- What does this powerful classroom instruction look like?
- Provide explicit and systematic instructions with lots of practice.
- Be clear and consistent.
- Respect routines, procedures and expectations.

## 5.4.2 Psychosocial Factors of Adult Basic Education

Regarding the psychosocial factors of Adult Basic Education, the topic was completely redefined by the participants and the facilitator and it was learned that good educators should have the following competences:

- Taking into consideration the socio-economic status of learners. In practice, this means accommodating various groups of individuals in education, whether they come from a working environment, are unemployed or socially excluded. Good educators should be able to address individual needs and approaches towards each person in the educational process. This also requires some psychological skills as well as skills in group and individual management.
- The perceived value of Adult Basic Education is a factor that may largely influence success of adults involved in education. They need to understand the meaningfulness of their educational process, and good educators should have the competences to convince them of the importance of their involvement in education.
- Readiness to participate in Adult Basic Education/stimuli for participating in Adult Basic Education/barriers to participation in Adult Basic Education – Unfortunately, the discussion on the previous topics was so intense that while we identified these three areas as crucial, there was not enough time to go into detail and also analyse these three crucial factors. As such, these areas remain for further research and exploration but are certainly issues of importance when it comes to psychosocial factors of Adult Basic Education.

## 5.5 PERSONAL REFLECTION

### Radoslav Vician

As the professional aspects of competences of Adult Basic Educators were already covered, I would, in this part, like to focus on accompanying features used in our pilot course that we observed as contributing to successful Adult Basic Education.

#### Learning Format

From the beginning, our pilot course and the workshop in particular were designed in a very open format. Of course, there was a structure presented to the participants to give them a picture of what they could expect and how this would be achieved. Nevertheless, once the structure was

implemented, we let the workshop flow in its own direction, and today we can claim that this was a very good decision leading to success. It turned out that the participants themselves got naturally in the direction of peer learning. Theoretical background became less important; what mattered most were discussion, brainstorming, real life case studies and individual experience. This way, the participants but also the facilitator learned a lot from each other and the facilitators could direct the workshop towards a cooperative and productive atmosphere.

### Accompanying Activities

The importance of accompanying activities was highlighted by the success of the introduced icebreakers – particularly the activity of teaching the participants the art of juggling with three juggling balls. What one could observe when this activity was introduced turned out to be the issues one can often notice in Adult Basic Education:

- Doubt about the meaningfulness of the activity – questions about how this relates to the pilot course, how this will contribute to one's personal professional growth or: Why are they forcing us to do such a crazy thing?
- Challenges in the eyes of the minority of participants.
- Fear of the majority of participants – I cannot do this, I will look like a fool, why are they making me do this, I want to leave.

However, once we moved on and replaced juggling balls with silk scarfs that the participants gave a try, we could observe a development of confidence. The participants realized there is a starting point, a not so difficult one, that can actually bring them to a successful end. Some of them already discovered their "hidden skills" and were eager to continue in a more difficult way. This was given to them, obviously, in the form of small balloons and later actual juggling balls. As another lesson learned, some of the participants discovered that individual pace is also one of the keys to success. Jumping directly from scarfs to juggling balls was not much beneficial to them; they realized they needed to proceed step by step in their educational process.

At the end, this educational activity had two additional effects. The first one was the participants' realization that they need repetition and practicing, and for this reason, this same icebreaker was repeatedly asked for. The second one was a funny observation when, even in periods of free time, we were witnessing participants practicing their juggling skills not with fear or shame anymore, but with an eagerness to learn something new.

### External Factors

In this part, I will not focus on the surrounding environment that was inspiring but on one element we tried to examine and that also turned out a success. We encouraged the participants to take their kids with them, and at the end, we had three children taking part in the workshop activities. They did, of course, not participate in the professional parts – it would probably have completely bored them – but they were a great stimulus in our icebreaker activities. Being children, they tried out everything first, did not care much about success and found fun wherever they could. This, apparently, encouraged also adults to get engaged without fear and to consider the icebreakers (which were in fact also educational activities) a fun part of the workshop. Obviously, the involvement of children in adult learning is not always a possibility or feasible solution, but in our case, it, so to speak, paid back in gold. Finally, here is our happy group on the last day of workshop:



## 6 THE PEER LEARNING EVENT IN SWITZERLAND

Cäcilia Märki and Lea Pelosi, SVEB, Zürich, Switzerland

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of the pilot course was to create a framework for reflection on relevant competences of facilitators in Adult Basic Education. On an immediate level, this meant giving those professionals an opportunity to reflect on, to make explicit and to document their (tacit) knowledge and their competences. The long-term benefit could be to rely on these insights for creating and promoting useful educational settings in a field not even at the margins of public attention.

The main components of the mentioned framework were (1) the notion of *learning barriers* as a kind of marker for the complex challenges with which one has to deal in Adult Basic Education, (2) the concept of *deliberate practice* as an approach meant to explain the development of expertise, which should be examined from the point of view of the professionals as well as the participants in Adult Basic Education, and (3) *collaborative learning* as an approach to reflective learning processes which we also considered relevant for facilitators as well as participants in basic skill education.

Considering this framework, we asked ourselves some questions to be answered at least in part during the pilot course.

*What are relevant competences for facilitators in Adult Basic Education?*

*What is the relationship between the expertise of the participants as learners in the pilot course and the expertise of their participants in Adult Basic Education?*

*What are we talking about when we talk about "learning barriers" in Adult Basic Education?*

*How does the notion of deliberate practice apply to the participants of the pilot course and how to the participants in Adult Basic Education?*

*What is needed for collaborative learning to be productive?*

*What does the casework show to be important for the conception and implementation of ABE?*

*What follows for the education and further qualification of facilitators in Adult Basic Education?*

### 6.2 PLANNING

#### 6.2.1 Target Group

We planned to invite experienced professionals to the pilot course to assemble a wide range of expertise and to work with a large bundle of competences. Having scheduled the pilot course at the beginning of the summer holidays, some of the experts we invited could not attend. That is why some of the participants were actually much less experienced than others. The participants did not have to pay for the course but agreed to engage in collaborative learning settings and to contribute to the development of a European competence matrix.

We limited the number of participants to 12. One of the persons on the list did not have any teaching experience and could eventually be a participant in Adult Basic Education. He showed up irregularly. Two participants attended only the kick-off (one due to health issues and one without explanation) and one person joined after the kick-off.

## 6.2.2 Content and Objectives

The pilot course comprised of a *Kick-off* and a *three-days-workshop* three weeks later. In between, the participants worked on a *transfer assignment* which consisted of subject-matter-related and methodical preparation (competences, learning barriers, deliberate practice, collaborative learning) as well as the choice of case studies to work on during the workshop.

The objectives of the Kick-off were primarily to get to know each other and to create the confidence necessary for productive collaboration settings. Moreover, the participants were given opportunities to familiarize with the "instruments" and the issues of the collaboration: project framework, theoretical notions, methodical approaches, casework.

The objectives of the transfer assignment were to deepen the theoretical knowledge and to reflect on the implications of the methodical approach as well as to get to know specific methods for collaborative learning and to connect the theoretical framework to the practical experience.

The objectives of the three-days-workshop were to reflect on those kinds of learning barriers that are relevant in Adult Basic Education, to become aware of competences relating to planning and implementing concrete didactical settings, to reflect on one's own competences and attitudes as a facilitator in Adult Basic Education as well as to experience collaborative learning and to evaluate it – for the workshop and for one's own practice. Each day was labelled differently: "knowledge", "skills", "attitude" – relating to different kinds of resources building competences<sup>13</sup> and respectively focused on situational analysis, interventions, and reflection on professionalism/attitudes.

<b>Kick-off (4 hours)</b>
Introduction / Familiarization: My (work-related biographical) path to this workshop
Overview workshop / questions & concerns of the participants
Definition of competence / Ko-Re-Model: Implications for practice, for professional self-understanding, for this workshop (input and short exchange in plenum)
Learning and learning barriers: Areas, manifestations (input and exchange of experiences in mumble groups)
Collaborative learning (Assignment for "mini lab" in small groups: What is it? How is it related to my experience? How could it work in the workshop?) ----- or ----- Deliberate Practice (Assignment for mini lab in small groups: What is it? How is it related to my experience? How could it be related to the contents of the workshop? What do I think about the distinction between expertise and "ordinary" competence?)
Sharing – with the option of making more extensive communication or discussion needs available for the further process of the workshop (documentation of results).
Transfer assignment (explaining and answering eventual questions)
Feedback

<b>Kick-off (4 hours)</b>
Check-in: What do I want to use the workshop for?
Pool for questions and topics for further discussion (based on the transfer assignment) with short comments / explanations
Collection of cases
Lab 1: Situation Analysis (Reflecting Team)
Sharing / Collecting material for documentation: How did we proceed & what did or didn't work well? What were the thematic learning barriers? Which competences did we "pinpoint"?
Interim evaluation: Please more of... / Please less of ... / Please continue ... / Please not again ...

<sup>13</sup> Le Boterf, G. (1994): *De la compétence. Essai sur un attracteur étrange* [About competence: Essay on a strange attractor], Paris; Le Boterf, G. (2000). *Construire les compétences individuelles et collectives*, Paris

<b>Day 2 (6 hours)</b>
Check-in: Looking at yesterday – Which competence in dealing with learning barriers do I attribute to myself, which to another person (cards, labelled front and back)?
Method input on request: Inner team, Storytelling
Lab 1/2: Situation analysis/interventions respectively options for action (Reflecting Team, Inner Team, Storytelling)
Sharing / Documentation
Debriefing case work (dealing with method)
Lab 2: Interventions / Options for action (Reflecting Team, Reframing, Storytelling)
Sharing / Documentation

<b>Day 3 (6 hours)</b>
Check-in: What is still left hanging?
Topics / Questions – What should the facilitator allocate space/time for?
Learning barriers – What are we dealing with? (Brainstorming) What competences are required to deal with this? (competence profile of trainers)
Lab 3: Attitude – Professionalism, standards
Sharing / Documentation (Flashlight: Where/how was my attitude questioned in a productive manner?)
"Competence gossip": The participants attribute competences to each other in pairs and react to attributions.
Evaluation of the labs: methodical, thematic
Identification of competences (bearing in mind the competence profile mentioned above, considering attitudes as well as taking into account the situation)
Balance/personal outcome: A personal competence that has become tangible for me/ A competence that I would like to develop further
Feedback: The workshop ..., because ...

### 6.2.3 Methods, Models, Concepts for the Approach

#### Peer Learning

Even as there was a facilitator planning and framing the workshop, peer learning was a core dimension of the workshop setting. The main aspects are listed and explained in the following.

#### Settings of "explicit" collaborative learning

##### Mini-Labs

Knowledge acquisition during the Kick-off would partly take place in small groups of peers discussing inputs (controversially) and relating them to their experience.

##### Labs

Case studies would take place in small groups of participants without the intervention of the facilitator. The groups would decide about the case, the method to apply, the presentation of results. The need of some "meta-talk" (with or without the facilitator) to assess the productivity of the process for all participants involved could emerge, but this would also be a learning experience.

##### Sharing

Since the casework would not take place in the plenary, there would be sequences with the purpose of making the main results available for the other participants and for documentation.

## Debriefing

Most of the participants were expected not to have much experience neither with structured casework and the related methods (see below) nor with settings of explicit collaborative learning. Therefore, exchanging opinions on a meta level about the challenges and the opportunities experienced would be a learning process.

### Other forms of peer learning

- Eventual discussions about controversial attitudes and approaches
- "Competence Gossip"
- Learning from the other person's perspective on my acting and reflecting in a specific situation

And finally, there needs to be noted that the facilitator also was a peer who is an experienced professional in Adult Basic Education.

### Work Based Learning

Casework is of course a form of work-based learning. The choice and adaptation of cases suitable for the labs would generate learning for most of the participants not specifically used to casework.

During the interval between the Kick-off and the workshop, participants would have opportunities to bring their reflections on learning barriers into their practice, which would eventually, also generate a learning process about the possible differentiation and identification of learning barriers. Hopefully, there would be transfer of insights into practice after the workshop.

### Blended Learning

We did not plan any online settings, because we thought that the three-days-workshop in presence would allow for an informal exchange during breaks and eventually at the end of the days. We expected to get the participants in touch and in confidence with each other more directly in presence, which we considered an important precondition for fruitful and open exchange in the labs.

## 6.2.4 Country-specific Methods und Models

The above-mentioned labs were designed explicitly for the pilot course. For the casework taking place in those labs, the participants were provided with methodical inputs and models for collaborative learning (*Reflecting Team*), situation analysis (*storytelling, reframing, inner team*), interventions (*4-factors of TZI, cube model of Cohen / Smith and Reddy*) as well as with questions aiming at the reflection of attitudinal factors and professional self-understanding. The method of *flipped classroom* was a means to limit the input to what mattered for the participants.

## 6.3 DESCRIPTION OF IMPLEMENTATION

### 6.3.1 Kick-Off

At the beginning, some of the less experienced participants seemed to be insecure about getting enough input for a worthwhile workshop experience. However, the sharing process after the mini-lab showed that most of them realized the potential of the setting.

The most frequent reactions related to the potential of the diversity in the group, the requirement of openness to deal with perspectives different from one's own, the importance of conscious communication and the potential the setting offered to develop communication and collaboration competences as well as the awareness of the product-process-overlap.

The facilitator took notes about relevant issues while listening to the participants talking about their practice and their experiences. Some of the terms and questions appearing on the list were useful references in discussions and exchange during the workshop:

- diversity of groups in Adult Basic Education – normality or exception?
- shame
- How to speak about barriers if there is no common language?
- the facilitator's barriers
- relationship between barriers and conflicts
- the facilitator's expectations / how much time does a process take?
- the impact of online settings
- the challenge to point out competences and resources of participants which facilitators don't expect/know
- How to cultivate my curiosity as a facilitator in Adult Basic Education
- the role of empathy
- Are changes of attitude possible?
- the facilitator's influence on settings and institutional frameworks
- the importance of patience
- self-confidence
- motivation as a general term – what exactly does that mean?
- To which extent does a facilitator have to "demonstrate" a benefit if a participant doubts it?
- What are we speaking of when we use the term "objectives"?
- the importance of just observing the participants

The feedbacks at the end showed that most of the participants were getting excited about the opportunity to make this kind of learning experience and that at least part of them realized it would also be an opportunity to become aware of relevant resources and competences – their own as well as those of the others.

### 6.3.2 Workshop: Day 1 – 3

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To underline the emphasis on collaboration and self-commitment, the participants were asked what they thought they would "use" the workshop for. The answers ranged from more theoretical aspects (learning about methods and concepts) to practical ones (widening the range of options in dealing with challenges in Adult Basic Education) to the expectation of having many opportunities for self-reflection, change of perspective, learning from the perspective of others.

Questions and issues were collected on a pin-board and were integrated where they best fitted into during the three days.

The concrete process planning was framed by what is documented in the section above. Moreover, it took into account the actual issues coming up in the labs. Therefore, the duration of the single labs, questions for the sharing process, the need for debriefing, the timing of inputs etc. were decided on the spot. The distinction between analysis, intervention and attitude became partly blurred by the specific casework, but it nevertheless permitted to differentiate the questions concerning the sharing process and, thus, to eventually change focus and perspective after intense discussion.

The participants were regularly invited to make the competences explicit that they realized to be relevant in the situations they worked on. At the beginning, this took place in the plenary in order to share guidelines for the "detection" and assessment of competences. Later on, the explication took place in the labs and was presented afterwards.

At the end, the participants were also asked to make a list of learning barriers they came across during casework. This list turned out to be quite long and included several barriers the facilitators themselves were responsible for.

For the evaluation, the participants were asked to personalize the competences they had realized to be relevant: To think about competences they thought to display to a great extent, others they wanted to develop next, and the ones they had experienced in their peers.

## 6.4 LESSONS LEARNED, OUTCOMES

### 6.4.1 Making Competences Explicit

Even if the notion of competences is widespread and formally defined, the explication of competences emanating from the manifold insights "produced" in the casework was far from self-evident: What is really a competence, what a resource needed to perform competently in a given situation? The experience in the pilot course reflected the often-discussed difficulties in assessing competences due to the gap between competence and performance. It was a "fruitful" struggle, though. It made clear that competences in the field of Adult Basic Education develop primarily in practice, experiencing the particularity of each participant, each barrier, each learning framework etc. Moreover, it made clear that even if certain competences can be spelled out and would be attributable to several facilitators in the field, these facilitators would not show the same degree of competence in a specific situation. That means that for the development of a competence matrix for Adult Basic Education the steps of competence development are on the one hand a relevant specification and on the other hand a "measure" hard to translate or implement into the formation of facilitators in Adult Basic Education. This was also reflected in our experience that awareness of these kinds of differentiation also grows with experience. This means that the more experienced facilitators are, the better they can reflect and assess their own competences and the more they can address lack of competences and consciously develop them, maybe adopting deliberate practice.

Another learning element tied to the explication of competences concerned the structuring of casework. As mentioned above, experienced facilitators can assess their competences in a more differentiated manner than others, and this also means that they are focusing more easily on resources, meaning the competences performed in a given situation – by themselves as well as by others, whereas less experienced facilitators are more likely to figure out what one "should" do in the situation described. Competence formulations following this kind of approach are often quite general even if derived from a specific situation. Thus, the decision to let the participants of the pilot course work in small self-organized groups had the advantage of having them work on more different cases overall, such as giving them the opportunity for an extended and intense experience of collaborative learning, but went along with the "disadvantage" of less control over resource-orientation in the casework. Although it is far from sure that more control would have resulted in more resource-orientation, it would be worth a try to experiment with other ways of structuring the casework.

In any case the pilot course allowed us to make explicit a wide range of competences displayed in and relevant for settings of Adult Basic Education. The list represents the assembled results of the sharings that took place after the sessions of collaborative casework.



Openness	<p>Facilitators (F) accept that there are different types of learning and that learning (one's own and others') comes with obstacles/challenges.</p> <p>F meet the participants' surprising or unconventional behaviour in a non-judgemental, curious and relaxed way.</p> <p>F communicate openness also through body posture.</p> <p>F understand challenging situations as fields of research or experimentation.</p>
Recognising one's own limits	<p>If F find barriers to learning that they cannot overcome, they seek help.</p> <p>F reflect on the limits of their own willingness to engage.</p> <p>F identify their own learning barriers.</p> <p>F identify their own expectations as possible barriers.</p>
Resource-orientation	F recognise the participants' potentials and promote them in a targeted way.
The ability to accept criticism	<p>F ask the participants about the impact of the lessons and allow for different opinions.</p> <p>F use the feedback to plan the further learning process.</p>
Flexibility of roles	<p>F know the different roles they can play in learning situations.</p> <p>F take on their roles in a way that is appropriate to the situation and the participants.</p>
Collaboration	<p>F enable participants to have their say; they give the participants responsibility.</p> <p>F give the participants opportunities for self-assessment – and, depending on the situation, develop the instruments needed with the participants themselves.</p> <p>F create an atmosphere of mutual trust: they take each participant seriously in his/her particularity, listen to the participants / give them attention.</p> <p>F talk openly about challenges.</p> <p>F reflect on objectives together with the participants and adapt them if necessary.</p> <p>F collaborate with the participants in dealing with learning barriers, they take the participants' expertise seriously.</p>
Appreciation	<p>F recognise different learning paths and strategies and use them for targeted support.</p> <p>F arrange appropriate learning situations.</p>
Willingness to experiment	<p>F try out new things and evaluate the effect together with the participants.</p> <p>F give up habits if necessary and try out new things.</p>
Design learning arrangements	<p>F create an atmosphere in which individual learning can take place.</p> <p>F enable a broad spectrum of approaches to a topic.</p> <p>F set situational priorities.</p>
Conscious communication	F formulate questions and instructions consciously and according to a given situation.
Willingness to learn	F allow themselves to be challenged by difficulties or see challenges as opportunities for their own development.
Observation	F observe situations in a precise and differentiated way.
Ability to reflect	<p>F regularly question their procedures.</p> <p>F regularly create space in class for individual and group reflection – depending on the situation, they develop the instruments for this together with the participants themselves.</p> <p>F are aware of the fact that learning barriers do not usually have a single cause: they use self-reflection in order to recognise their own contribution; they generate different types of hypotheses and offer a wide range of didactic-methodical options.</p> <p>F recognise and use emotionality as a resource for reflection.</p> <p>F reflect on their own approach to other people's attitudes.</p>

## 6.4.2 Learning Barriers and the Notion of Expertise

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The insight that learning barriers are not only something pertinent to some participants of Adult Basic Education but essentially something affecting the facilitators as well was pivotal. While facilitators are at least partly used to detect and analyse barriers limiting the development of their participants, it resulted to be much more demanding to become aware of one's own learning barriers. The workshop contributed to some of the participants realizing and admitting the fact that even very experienced facilitators can contribute to learning blocks with their own barriers.

This is significant under several aspects. First, it is the perhaps most complex illustration of how much attitude and self-reflection of facilitators matter in Adult Basic Education. And while self-reflection can be – though not quite easily – translated into different kinds of competences, attitude is a very fuzzy term. One could denote it a result of reflection and thus of a certain kind of competence. Yet, it would be difficult to further qualify it as the result. One could therefore adduce some sufficiently general competences such as openness, flexibility and so on to integrate attitude into a competence matrix. However, as competences appear in the form of performances showed in concrete situations, the general exemplification of attitudes would be likely to dissolve into more concrete ways of responding to complex demands. One could also rely on Le Boterf's definition of competence and declare attitude to be one kind of resource of competences. However, what the term attitude showed to be covering in the use made of it during the workshop had a much broader range of meaning than in Le Boterf's concept. Thus it became clear that attitude and perhaps to a certain extent a specific attitude is something required for experts in Adult Basic Education, but that it is neither simple to define nor easy to assess and develop.

Second, the issue of facilitator-related learning barriers opened the way to another challenging aspect of Adult Basic Education: the expertise of the participants and how to integrate it into planning and implementing settings of Adult Basic Education. It became clear that admitting the existence of competence and expertise in participants is one thing, and letting it be a resource for the concrete shaping of learning settings is another. It requires to develop ways to communicate with participants speaking other languages than the facilitator, to be willing to partly give up the control over the learning process, share responsibility, admit one's own limits, reset the goals and the planning, invest in individualization etc. All this is very demanding, and facilitators who are "novices" in the field are mostly not prepared for this. The problem is not only person-bound or related to the kind of formation requested or available for people who want to develop such competences. It is also a question of the socio-political status Adult Basic Education has and therefore how much money is invested in education, programs, concepts, evaluation.

Third, the way the confrontation with the notion and the phenomenon of learning barriers took place during the workshop is indicative for how the participants dealt with the workshop's theoretical and methodical framework. Of course, there were some participants mainly interested in the specification of terminology and methodical expertise. However, most of them considered the theoretical and methodical framework to be a structure more or less useful to make practical experiences and develop ideas to deal with practical challenges. The acquisition of knowledge could have been pushed more than it had been, and perhaps not doing so had the disadvantage that the "struggle" with the concepts of competence, collaboration vs. cooperation, learning barriers, deliberate practice and the "correct" implementation of a collaboration method like *reflecting team*, *inner team* or *reframing* wasn't "resolved" yet at the end of the workshop. On the other hand, the workshop focused on competences and therefore on the reflection of the participants' practice. The handout offered theoretical and methodical input for those interested, and the *flipped classroom* as well as the open planning offered the opportunity to bring questions and comments into the workshop. Thus, learning comprises the

renewed awareness of the difficult decision to which extent controlled acquisition of knowledge is of importance for developing competences.

### 6.4.3 Collaborative Learning and Self-Organization

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Though the labs were pre-structured and well prepared, the participants had quite a lot of choices and decisions to make in terms of self-organization. This was an opportunity for them to make a wide range of different experiences with settings of collaborative learning, which they considered an advantage. Of course, the self-organization at times took some resources and attention from the subject matter of the case studies. However, if the idea of the participants in Adult Basic Education as experts for their learning is to be taken seriously, the organization of collaboration is a competence that facilitators in this field need to develop. Therefore, the regular presence of meta-communication during the workshop (contracting, deciding about next steps, process evaluation, priority setting etc.) was mostly perceived as a framework for co-construction that could, in principle, be transferred to the practice of Adult Basic Education.

### 6.4.4 The Heterogeneous Group of Participants

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The pilot course showed something we know from research on peer-learning: The more competent the participants were, the more they could benefit from the offered framework – or at least the more they were able to work on the development of their competences in a differentiated and structured manner, whereas for less experienced participants who couldn't rely on structured reflection learning was different: from a wake-up-call to some concrete ideas transferable to their own practice. Most of them realized that there were differences and that more experienced facilitators had a more differentiated range of instruments and perspectives for the analysis and intervention in challenging situations. Most of them perceived this as motivation to develop their own competences. It is possible though that there were one or two participants for whom questioning themselves went along with self-doubts and insecurity.

There was a wide range of answers to the question how the participants planned/expected to "make use" of the workshop. Since the workshop was "multi-layered", it offered a wide range of opportunities to work on individual issues.

### 6.4.5 What Follows for the "Quality" of Adult Basic Education

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#### Qualification of Facilitators in Adult Basic Education

Competence is the ability to cope with concrete situations. A situation is more complex than its model or simulation. Therefore, qualification and competence development necessarily imply practical experience and related reflection. Since reflection itself is a central competence, it has to be developed "by doing". Qualification of facilitators in Adult Basic Education therefore has to offer opportunities and support for reflection. In this regard, casework and collaboration are a useful component of learning for facilitators. Even if the concept of deliberate practice in its formal structure is shaped on specific kinds of expertise (musical performance, sports), it can be a useful reference for structured combination of experience or practice with reflection. Since this is the case not only with facilitators but also for participants in Adult Basic Education, the ability to structure reflection has to be taken in consideration regarding the qualification of facilitators.

Even the most competent performance goes along with blind spots. The external perspective can help becoming aware of them. Sitting in on concrete learning settings – be it by peers or competent supervisors – can offer opportunities for insight and situational learning.

The workshop showed that the expertise of participants in Adult Basic Education has to be more than an abstract reference. The qualification of facilitators could therefore imply settings of "professional exchange" between facilitators and participants.

Adult Basic Education is not always taking place in specific settings labelled as such. It rather happens often to be an "occurrence" or an aspect of language courses, job coaching, and professional training. This means that not only "facilitators in Adult Basic Education" need the competences addressed in the *Bridging Barriers Project*. The importance of the openness to unexpected learning processes, individualization and differentiation of learning settings, the willingness to address participants as collaboration partners and the competence to structure the reflection of learning processes could be generally stressed more than it usually is the case in qualification settings for facilitators.

### Concepts and Formats of Adult Basic Education

From what is described and commented on in the previous sections ensues that the quality of Adult Basic Education relies on formats, which allow individualization, investing time in experimenting, meta-communication and reflection such as the involvement of participants in specific course planning. The pilot course and its reflection also showed that the quality of Adult Basic Education depends on the opportunity for exchange and feedback available for the facilitators. If this is not possible "on the job", it should be made possible by other means: cooperation of institutions, peer-groups, workshops, sitting in by external professionals etc.

And finally, it ensures that Adult Basic Education could be something taking place in "regular" qualification settings if facilitators have the competence to address individual needs, experiences and learning paths.

## 6.5 PERSONAL REFLECTION

### Lea Pelosi (Facilitator)

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I will add only few further remarks.

I once more found the conviction confirmed that the development of competences is mainly a matter of practical experience and differentiated reflection. By differentiation I mean the plurality of aspects but also dealing with ambivalence and ambiguity such as the opportunity to be confronted with blind spots. This differentiation can be supported by structures (questions, transparent settings etc.) but also by exchange and feedback.

I was initially reluctant to use the model of deliberate practice as a reference because it is tied to a context of acquisition of expertise and excellence not easily comparable to the complex of competence relevant in the context of Adult Basic Education. Furthermore, the literature on deliberate practice is often describing quasi-linear learning processes, which is not what I know from my experience in Adult Basic Education – neither in the qualification of facilitators nor in the acquisition of basic skills. Nevertheless, I found it interesting to translate parts of the structure the model suggests into the conception of the pilot course and the concrete reflection of the case studies.

The pilot course was conceived as a format of, so to speak, "structured openness". There were moments I asked myself if the preconception of the structure is necessary and if my role as a facilitator is needed or if what has happened and resulted would have happened and resulted also without my contribution. Considering the exchange between the experienced facilitators, collaborative learning of peers without the preconceived framework could have been very fruitful, too. Considering the



feedbacks of the less experienced participants, I think it was helpful to offer a basic structure open to transformation and situational adaptation, as it permitted them to delegate part of the responsibility (all-over-organization) and focus more on content. From this point of view, the pilot course was a valuable experience in reflecting on kinds or extent of structure for reflective and collaborative learning under different circumstances.

I realized once more what an amount of competences is needed for planning and implementing complex learning settings in Adult Basic Education and how these competences often aren't acknowledged in terms of working conditions or addressed explicitly in qualification formats.





**bridging**



**barriers**

