



**GRUNDTVIG INTERNATIONAL  
NETWORK OF COURSE  
ORGANISERS**

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## **Competence Oriented Learning and Teaching in Adult Education Courses**

### *Learning in a changing Europe in a changing world*

The position of Europe in the World is changing. The European president Herman van Rompuy explains this by using the theatre as a metaphor. "As compared to the past", he says: "the stage has become more crowded; the audience has come closer to the stage and the rules of the play have changed". Europe has increasingly numerous and powerful competitors on the world stage. The public demands democratic decision making and the power play between the superpowers has shifted away from predominantly military competition towards economic power play. In the research and development sectors activities seems to move west to America; in the mass production of goods Asia seems to take over; Europe is in crisis even in sectors it wished to play a major role in. Revitalisation is needed.



Europe wishes to articulate further its future role on the world stage. The public will need to take an active and constructive role in the processes of policy making and decision making required. European citizens will have to play their part in the developments needed.

### *Personal development*

Adults are facing the changes as well. To them the world offers challenges, opportunities and sometimes threats. In the midst of all that, they wish to develop themselves, to realise the perspectives they are aiming for. Adult learning is not for economical and political purposes only; it is a means of self development, of expression of ones own freedom, potential and identity. Adult learning and adult

education seek to find the balance between personal actualisation and societal development.



### *Adult life long learning is needed*

To face the challenges of the changing world people will need to learn throughout their whole lives to develop what needs to be developed, to adapt to new situations and to elaborate further the things that require innovations or changes. The European commission has stated in many of its publications the necessity of promoting life long learning and implemented an action under that very name to support initiatives in this field. People will need to be supported in their process of life long learning and in the acquisition of the competences needed to do so.

Adult education is of vital importance in bringing about the changes needed in view of global developments. Several studies in adult learning and adult education support this view and point out that in order to allow adult education to play this crucial role, the sector needs to professionalize.



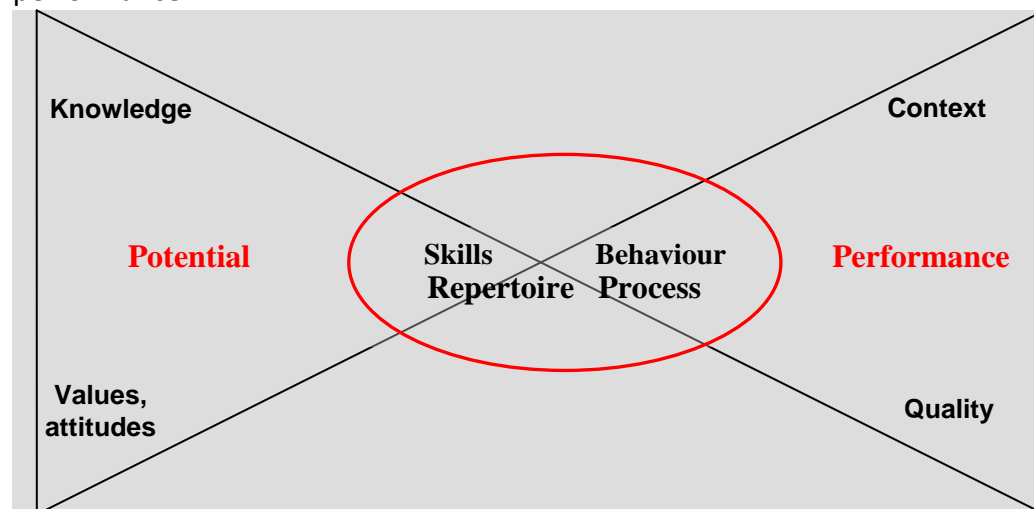
### *Adult education needs to be of high professional quality*

Educating adults is a specific field of expertise; it will have to meet high standards, ambitions and expectations. This will only be possible if the profession of adult education sees itself, and is seen as a professional domain with its own professional structures; standards; quality policies and professional development programmes. The sector needs to organise itself at a European level. The Ginco network is an initiative to do exactly that. It brings together the professional players in the Adult Education sector to analyse, discuss, and develop the quality of professional

development of Adult educators in Europe in its global context, and to establish a higher level of professional competence among the educators at work in this sector.

### *A competence oriented approach to learning*

Adult life long learning requires a competence approach. This implies that learning is leading to actual change of performance. In traditional approaches to teaching and learning the emphasis was on learning activities that would raise the level of knowledge, attitudes and skills. These three components however merely represent someone's potential. In a competence oriented approach we focus more on improving a person's actual performance in an actual situation. We focus on providing the feedback and inputs needed to help the person raise his/her level of performance.



In the scheme presented above we see the traditional emphasis in the left part of the scheme and the performance oriented part in the right half of the model. A competence oriented approach includes both: It provides people with the competence to do things at a high quality level in a real context (the performance part) based on an integral base of appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes.

### *Competence oriented education*

Competence based learning and competence based education do not consist of traditional teaching situations. They are based on the idea that the learners learn by experience and discovery. This concept has an impact on how learners may be educated. The idea is that adult learners need to be actively involved in the learning situation. They learn best in meaningful contexts, and in co-operation and interaction with others and with their environment. Thus they enable themselves to acquire knowledge, construe knowledge, and check and cross-check their newly constructed ideas with those of others. Of course this implies no denial of the importance of teaching; it emphasises the necessity of teaching in a highly responsive and learner-centred way without neglecting the obligation of showing learners new horizons and perspectives, and enthusiasm for things they may never yet have heard of.

Competence based learning requires an approach to education that differs from the traditional approaches to teaching. In competence based education we stress the

importance of powerful or rich learning environments that enable learners to engage in meaningful learning processes.

### *Key features of a competence oriented approach*



The most distinctive features of this approach may be summarized as follows:

- *Meaningful contexts*  
For learning to take place it is recommended that educators create or look for meaningful contexts in which learner will experience the relevance and the meaning of the competences to be acquired in a natural way.
- *Room for initiative and creativity*  
In order to acquire competence(s) it is required that the learners are given room to take initiatives. It is a vital condition since competence implies taking initiatives, being creative, seeking to fulfil ones own ambitions.
- *Constructive learning*  
The philosophy of competence based education has its roots in the social constructivism that pervades our views on learning these days. Learning is conceived as a process of constructing one's own knowledge in interaction with one's environment, rather than as a process of absorbing the knowledge others try to transmit.
- *Cooperative, interactive learning (with peers, teachers and other actors.)*  
The basic idea behind competence based education is to help learners develop and construct their own knowledge and seek ways to make optimal use of other people's competence in their own learning itinerary. This is what social constructivism is about. Co-operation and interaction are both domains of learning, and vehicles of learning
- *Discovery learning*  
Open learning processes require learning that may be characterized as active discovery as opposed to receptive learning. This does not imply that learning content should not be made available and accessible. It means that the way of acquiring this knowledge or these competences, cannot be just a process of providing information, but should always be embedded in a discovery based approach.
- *Reflective learning*  
Competence based learning requires, apart from a focus on the key competences, also an emphasis on the learning processes as such. By reflecting

on one's own needs, motivation, approach, progress, results etc. one develops learning competences/strategies that may be considered meta-competences.

▪ *Personal learning*

In the competence oriented theories learning is conceived as a process of constructing one's own personal knowledge and competences. Information, knowledge, strategies, only become meaningful for a person if they become an integral part of his/her own personal body of knowledge and competences. In education this implies that learners need to be able to identify with the contexts, the people, the situations and interests which are included in the learning domains involved.

Active learning in a realistic situation, in which you have a distinct and valuable role, makes the learning process a worthwhile event with personal results that will prove to be useful in many other contexts. The process which leads to competence acquisition involves five basic elements: motivation, room for initiative, action and reflection.

**From learning to act  
towards acting to learn**

*Competences of life long learning*

The European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning identifies and defines eight key competences necessary for personal fulfillment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability in a knowledge society:

1. Communication in the mother tongue;
2. Communication in foreign languages;
3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
4. Digital competence;
5. Learning to learn;
6. Social and civic competences;
7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
8. Cultural awareness and expression.

Each of the competences mentioned include elements of initiative, creativity, decision making, risk assessment, decision making and self management of feelings.

*Competences of the Adult educator*

To facilitate competence oriented learning adults need to be competent as well. The GINCO tools and training project focuses on the development of such competences. The target group consists of Grundtvig course organisers and trainers. Within this article however we focus on the trainers only, since here we stress the importance of competence oriented learning and teaching/training. Competence

oriented adult educators need to have a number of competences. Here we summarise a few of them. Competence oriented adult educators:

- are sensitive to, and able to connect with learners and with their needs during learning meetings;
- are able to motivate learners both in the sense of giving expert information as well as in radiating their own enthusiasm;
- are capable in personalising information (turn it into stories of people one may identify with);
- are good inquisitive learners demonstrating their learning abilities as a model;
- are skilled teachers and able to demonstrate their ability if needed;
- can listen perceptively and empathically to their learners;
- can observe accurately the behaviour of the learners in practice situations and during learning sessions;
- are open minded in their evaluation and judgement of the behaviour and personal characteristics of the learners;
- are able to give adequate feedback (given the needs of the learners during learning sessions)
- find a balance between comforting and confronting
- are able to work strategically and systematically both during sessions as well as during preparations
- are aware of the theories they use, of the underpinning of their actions and act accordingly;
- are able to reflect upon their work and on its (practical and) theoretical basis;
- are able to deal with diversity of many kinds (gender, cultural, style, age, stage, social background);
- are able to be analytical evaluative and critical towards their own work.

### *Epilogue*

In the project GINCO tools and training we elaborate further on this to include also the developers and organisers of Grundtvig in-service courses. The project, its tools and training offers seek to equip Grundtvig course organisers (organisers, managers, developers, facilitators and trainers) to allow them to create optimal competence oriented learning conditions for adult learners in international Grundtvig courses.

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