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CRITICAL THINKING FOR EMPLOYABILITY

**TRAINING FORMAT FOR EDUCATORS AND YOUTH
WORKERS**

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Abstract

This Training Format is designed to equip institutions and operators in the Youth field with non-formal education methods to empower young persons with disabilities.

The format will be geared towards developing critical thinking and empowering existing operators to act as educational advocates for young people with physical disabilities and slight cognitive impairments, with the ultimate goal of providing them with the necessary skills to be included in the labour market and society and to address the causes of negative stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion.

This training format provides a variety of activities, such as ice-breaking games and team-building exercises, to foster collaboration and communication. Theoretical knowledge about critical thinking and background information on educational needs is provided to equip educators and youth workers with the necessary skills and competencies. There are also several co-design methodologies which are tailored to specific groups. Exercises to develop critical thinking skills and good practices for doing so are also covered. Lastly, the role of educators in supporting co-creation dynamics and assessing competencies modules is discussed.



1. Context

DIS-employability is a 24-month strategic youth education partnership involving 5 European organizations; ASOCIATIA BABILON TRAVEL (Romania), NGO NEST BERLIN EV (Germany), MINE VAGANTI NGO (Italy), EDUFORMA SRL (Italy), and INNOVATION FRONTIERS IKE (GR) working with various target groups including people with disabilities.

Action Type: KA220-YOU - Cooperation partnerships in youth.

Project Title: Supporting The Employability of Young People with Disabilities

Duration: Start: 01-11-2021 End: 01-11-2023

The project aims to provide people with disabilities with useful employment skills by developing critical thinking to promote their inclusion in the labour market. Critical thinking is considered an important methodology for the development of employability skills. People with high critical thinking and reasoning are likely to be innovative, bringing new ideas and creative solutions to even the most difficult business challenges. “UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” recognizes the right to work and employment as a fundamental right.

The project addresses and overcomes systemic barriers to participation in education and the labour market concerning people with disabilities.

The **main tangible and intangible results** and activities of the DIS-employability partnership project are:

- Educational format based on NFE conceived as a term of reference for stakeholder institutions to put in place a specific educational offer aimed at training operators working with the youth target in implementing/supporting co-creation programmers in providing valuable skills involving young people with and without disabilities.
- Guidebook providing orientation and methodological guidance for operators in the implementation of enhancing critical thinking skills programs involving people with disabilities.
- International Pilot Event successfully implemented with the involvement of educators/trainers from partner organizations, Local Programs implemented in each partner country and multiplier events.
- Web Platform in multiple languages, including E-Modules for the self-development of operators across partner countries and Europe.
- Meaningful insights for policy-making authorities for improving sectoral policies/offers in the field of youth education and disability employment.
- People with disabilities in partner countries encouraged to greater participation in education, social and working life.
- The general public sensitized to develop more inclusive attitudes towards disability.
- Consolidated framework of cooperation.



People with disabilities must overcome the barriers experienced as a result of the disability, and they should be provided with useful skills to tackle the challenges faced in the labour market because of their situation.

The project focuses on the current situation of young people with disabilities and workers in Romania, Greece, Italy and Germany.

From the internal aspect, DIS-employability partners compose cohesive cooperation based on the complementary expertise of partners (Disability Support, Non-Formal Education, Digital Learning) grounded on a common interest and concern on the topic. All the partner organizations work with young people with disabilities facing cognitive as well as physical disabilities as part of their wider audience of targets. Partners are based in countries where the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the realms of education, social participation, and employment is a priority issue whose declination, at the same time, takes different shapes based on the varied public/private arrangements of support and peculiarities of people with and without disabilities conditions creating, therefore, a composite and balanced landscape of the more comprehensive challenge of disability in Europe.

All the partners of this project have a strong interest in improving their positioning in the field of employability, social inclusion and empowerment of young people with disabilities. For small and medium organizations, it seems that individual efforts in this regard are ineffective. By joining efforts with similar organizations, they can scale up their level of intervention. For this reason, there is a strong alignment between the aim of the project and the partners' strategic objectives.

The project desk research on best practices provides a person with knowledge about the workforce and labour of young people with disabilities, inclusion strategies/programs, educational or labour market on local and national levels, existing legislation and available learning materials/courses/formats/modules for people with disabilities in labour and social integration in five partner countries.

The Training format "Critical Thinking for Employability Format for Educators" is drawn up from research reports from each partner country and includes materials that can be used for educational purposes and work with young people with disabilities.



2. Aim of the training format

Within the framework of the project priorities, partner organizations from 5 countries intend to comply with the priorities as follows:

Inclusion and diversity.

The DIS-employability project addresses the urgent need to ensure that all people with disabilities have the right to participate actively in the community's civil, political, economic, social and cultural life, like everyone else, to reduce the risk of social exclusion they face. Face systemic barriers that limit their full participation in society. For these reasons, initiatives need to be targeted at these vulnerable people who need to overcome barriers resulting from disability or incapacity and provide them with valuable skills to deal with problems that are mostly faced in the labour market due to their situation/lack of education or experience. Work, considering the labour market and work as a key factor in inclusion in the community.

It is desired to **increase employment opportunities for young people**. The DIS-employability project will enable young people to improve their literacy, numeracy and digital skills, as well as other key competencies, and move to higher qualifications, including through skills identification and testing or customized learning offers.

The focus is on providing employability skills through enhancing critical thinking as an essential educational/socialization vehicle for promoting the interaction of people with disabilities and encouraging their inclusion in the labour market. The reason behind the idea of developing critical thinking skills is that critical thinking is considered central to the development of employability skills since people who are high on critical thinking and reasoning are likely to be innovative, bringing new ideas and creative solutions to even the most demanding business challenges. The capacity to engage with the cognitive capacities of critical thinking successfully and positively has become the benchmark of employability for many diverse industries across the globe and is considered critical for the development of informed decisive global citizenship. Nowadays, preparing people for the workplace requires new instructional approaches to develop a matrix of interrelated skills, and it is important to ensure that people with disabilities are equipped with twenty-first-century skills such as problem-solving and analytics, decision-making, organization and time management, risk-taking and communication.

To reach the goals stated and address the difficulties presented, an educational format based on NFE should be implemented that provides operators and institutions working in the youth field with high-quality educational offerings. This would be used as a reference term to facilitate the co-creation of programs that would empower young people with disabilities by developing their critical thinking skills, such as creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, introspection, learning, problem identification, problem-solving, and information analysis.



The format aims to develop critical thinking skills and, in particular, to empower existing operators as educational advocates for learning processes involving young people with disabilities (physical disabilities and mild cognitive impairments) in collaboration with youth.

The Format was designed to address the educational needs and barriers to overcome of young people with disabilities in order to help them integrate into the labour market. Through structured research, existing labour and social integration practices were identified and used to create a non-formal education-based learning format. This format allows youth operators/institutions to create inclusive learning processes that enable people with disabilities to develop critical thinking and become active participants in self-improvement processes, with constant rehearsals and feedback from their peers. This will empower disadvantaged students to gain authority and recognition in the process and its outcomes and spread positive messages about disability and inclusion.

Specific educational modules of the Format:

- Ice Breaking and Teambuilding.
- Theoretical knowledge about critical thinking, its meaning, and why it's so essential in the labour market.
- Background information on the educational needs (in terms of skills and barriers to be overcome), social inclusion and stereotyping faced by young people with disabilities and how to counter it through creative expression and interaction in the frame of employment.
- Soft skills, transversal skills and competencies based on the 8 elements of critical thinking and how to foster their acquisition/development in targets: Reflection, Analysis, Acquisition of information, Creativity, Structuring arguments, Decision making, Commitment, and Debate.
- Management of group dynamics in programs, including people with and without disabilities.
- Co-design methodologies customized to performers' groups composed of people with and without disabilities.
- Co-Designed critical thinking exercises as a method of shedding light on and deconstructing narratives/stereotypes about disability.
- Good practices of developing critical thinking skills involving people with disability from Europe and the World.
- The role of educators in supporting co-creation dynamics within a group comprising people with and without disabilities.
- Development of autonomous tools of education in developing critical thinking.
- Assessment of competencies modules. The Format will be impacting the relevant sectors of Youth education as an instrument of general applicability (across countries and sectors)

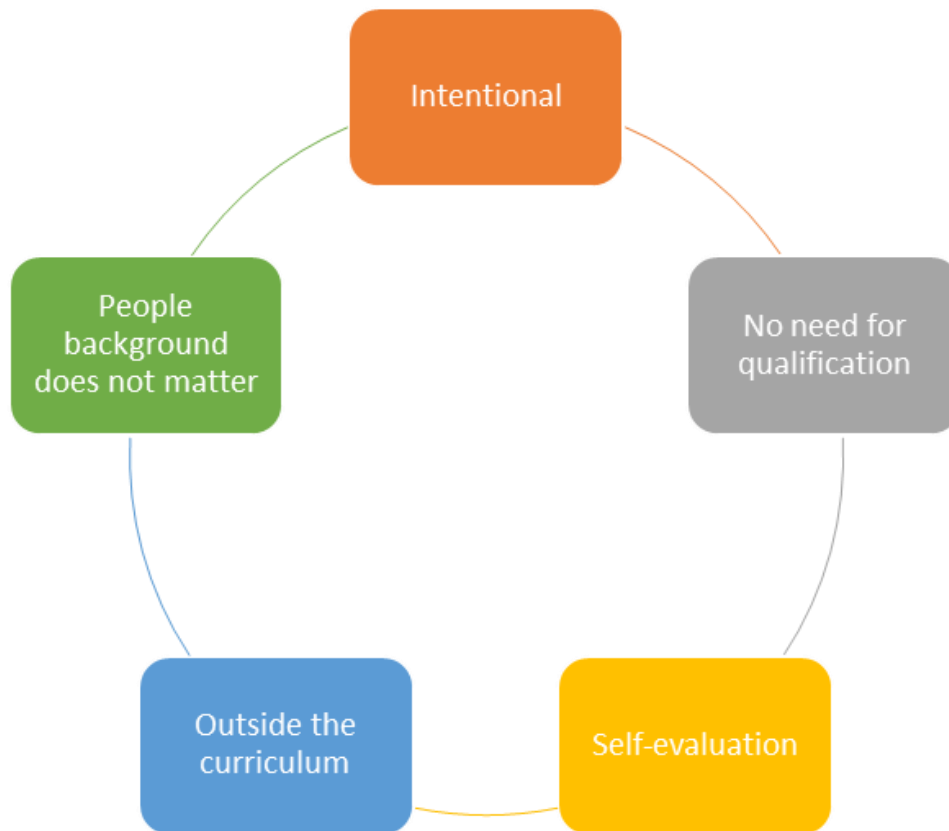


3. Methodology

WHAT IS NON-FORMAL EDUCATION?

Education outside the traditional classroom is referred to as "non-formal education (NFE)." Community education, adult education, lifelong education, and second-chance education are all terms that are frequently used interchangeably with non-formal education. It includes everything from home-based education to government programs and community initiatives in the educational field.

A strategy for non-formal education has been implemented in which student attendance is optional. Non-formal education is a planned, voluntary, learner-centred, and adaptable educational strategy since it does not require official certification or crediting. Curriculum and teaching methods have become more adaptable as non-formal education has developed. Non-formal education can occur in various settings outside of schools and other educational institutions.



NFE provides a set of essential social experiences that are beneficial to every child, young person, and adult and combines the other types of education by promoting the following aspects:

- Valuing students' free time,
- Educational and social inclusion,
- Opportunities for students to develop their life experiences with many daily learning environments,
- Individuals' participation,
- Adaptable ways to meet individuals' needs and interests,
- Workshops for individuals to practice and develop their skills, talents and capacities in art, sport, music or in other fields,
- Skills and the training of young people to become active citizens,
- Organisational, self-care, critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills.

ADVANTAGES OF NFE

- Flexibility in organization and methods;
- Acknowledging the importance of education;
- After-school programs;
- Community-based organizations;
- Can lead to greater confidence in formal classrooms;
- Develop the participant's values;
- Help to define the participant's role in the society

HOW TO APPLY NFE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Non-formal education is so diverse that it has many traits in common with other components, especially lifelong learning. Education of children and teenagers outside of the conventional educational system is the aim of non-formal education. Every child deserves to be included in a regular school, so it should be prioritised.

Non-formal education should focus on core principles as formal education. These core principles are:

- **Relevant** to the learner's life and the needs of society and will be so in the future.
- **Appropriate** to the learner's development level, with new content and experiences being introduced when the learner is ready.



Flexible in what is taught and how it is taught, and to the needs of the different learners

Participatory in that learners are active participants in their learning and that they and their families and communities are involved in running the non-formal education programme.

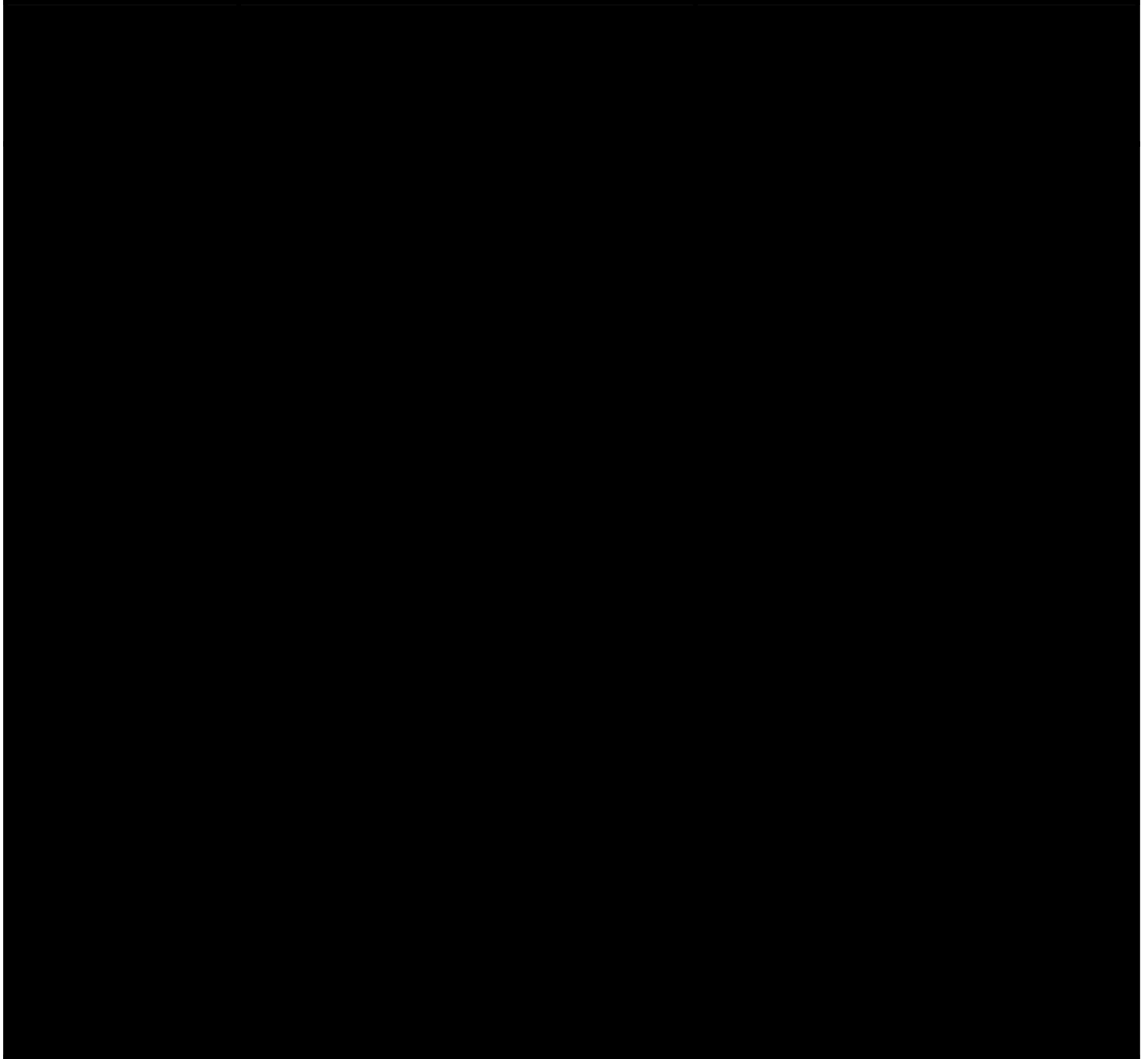
- **Protective-** protects children from harm and protects their rights to survival and development.
- **Inclusive** of all children regardless of background or ability, respecting and utilizing their differences as a resource for teaching and learning.
- **Quality:** Non-formal education programmes have the potential to be of exceptionally high quality because they can respond more easily to the needs of individuals and specific groups in the community.

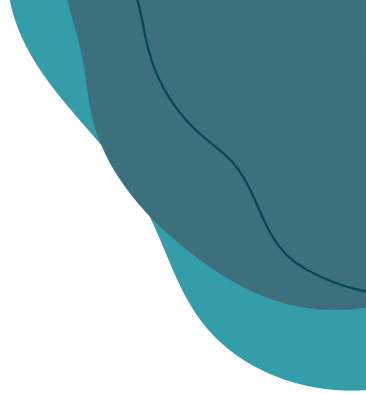
Non-formal education curricula frequently have greater flexibility and can be easily modified to suit the needs of individuals because they lack the rigid restrictions of formal schools. Non-formal education programmes include people with disabilities and consider their needs during programme planning. Programs for non-formal education provide excellent opportunities for students with disabilities to be educated in a school with their peers without disabilities. Governments and ministries can organise together with non-formal education facilitators to ensure that teaching materials are accessible, that the environment is calm and welcoming, and that students are supported in their learning. Supporting the Braille alphabet, Mor's alphabet for people with slight disabilities and sign language is a big step for people with disabilities to participate in NFE. People with disabilities should participate in non-formal education programmes and learn literacy, numeracy and other skills which contribute to better living conditions.



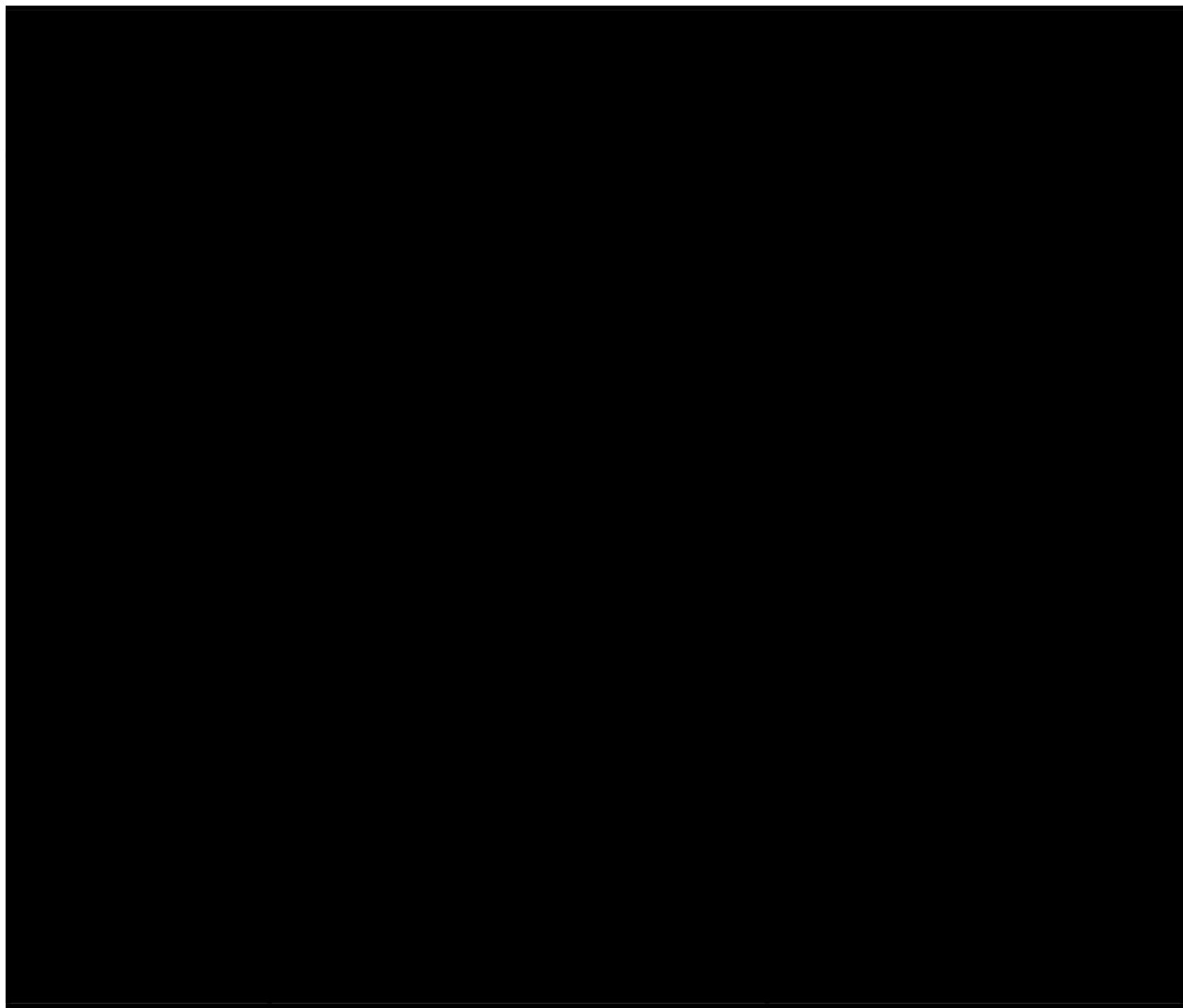
4. Ice Breaking Games/Team building

2 TRUTHS ONE LIE





YOU ARE LOOKING FOR SOMEBODY WHO





YOU ARE LOOKING FOR SOMEBODY WHO

3. The instructor chooses a participant to ask our question, "You are looking for somebody who..." and picks one sentence from papers then continue (i.e., I am looking for somebody who has a goldfish.).

4. The participant having a goldfish can raise his/her hand, and the game can continue until the last participant ask the question.



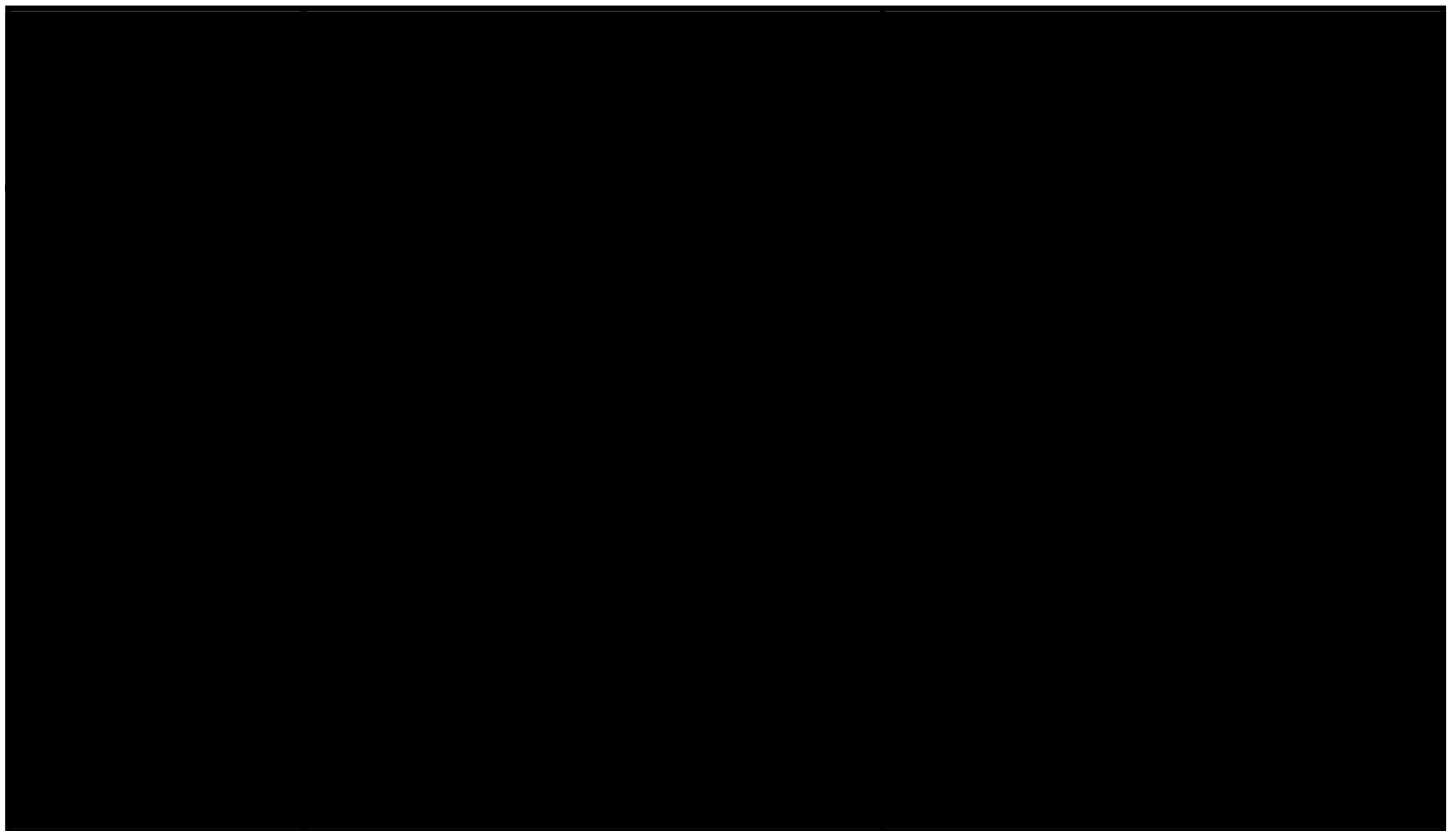
5. Theoretical knowledge about circular thinking

Critical thinking is a valuable skill that involves analysing, evaluating, and synthesizing information to make informed decisions and judgments. It requires one to approach ideas, arguments, and evidence with an open and sceptical mind rather than simply accepting them at face value.

Theoretical aspects of critical thinking involve understanding the different components and processes involved in critical thinking, such as identifying assumptions, evaluating evidence, and considering alternative perspectives. It also involves understanding the various fallacies and biases that can interfere with critical thinking and learning how to avoid them.

Theoretical models of critical thinking often emphasize the importance of logic and reasoning, as well as the ability to recognize and navigate cognitive biases. By developing these skills, individuals can become more effective problem solvers, decision-makers, and learners in academic and real-world contexts.

This workshop aims to provide theoretical knowledge about critical thinking and how to apply it in daily life. The workshop will be designed as a non-formal education activity.





Implementation:

During this part of the workshop, the facilitator will use different methods to teach theoretical knowledge about critical thinking. This part can be divided into the following subsections:

1. Define critical thinking: The facilitator will now define critical thinking and discuss its elements. Participants will learn about the different types of critical thinking and the importance of each type.

2. Barriers to critical thinking: The facilitator will discuss the barriers to critical thinking and the factors that hinder our ability to think critically. Participants will learn about cognitive biases and the different types of fallacies.

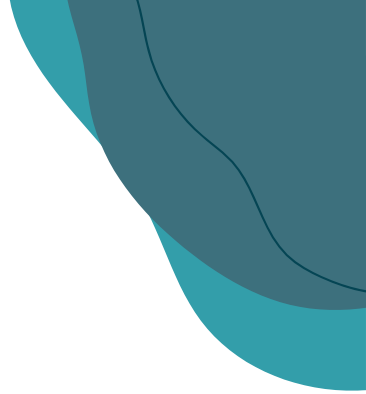
3. Practice critical thinking: The facilitator will provide participants with real-world scenarios to practice their critical thinking skills and recognize different types of fallacies. Participants will work in small groups to analyse the scenarios and present their findings to the rest of the group.

Real-world scenarios: The facilitator will provide real-world scenarios for participants to practice their critical thinking skills and the ability to recognize fallacies.

Feedback: The facilitator will provide feedback to participants during the practice sessions to help them improve their critical thinking skills.

Materials: video projector; flipcharts and markers; each group will receive examples of real-life scenarios and a “poster” with description of types of fallacies.





	<p>Debriefing:</p> <p>During the debriefing, the facilitator will ask participants to share their thoughts and feelings about the workshop. The facilitator will also ask participants to discuss how they can apply the critical thinking skills they learned in their daily lives.</p>	
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Conclusion:

The theoretical knowledge about critical thinking workshops will provide participants with a deeper understanding of the concept of critical thinking and its importance in daily life. The facilitator will use different methods to teach theoretical knowledge and provide participants with opportunities to practice their critical thinking skills. The workshop will be designed as a non-formal education activity, with an introduction, implementation, and debriefing.



6. Background information of the educational needs

Educational needs refer to the specific requirements that individuals have in order to learn and develop effectively. Understanding these needs is crucial for educators, as it allows them to design and deliver educational programs tailored to their learners' unique needs.

The importance of background information in identifying educational needs cannot be overstated. This information includes factors such as the learners' age, previous educational experiences, cultural background, learning styles, and socio-economic status.

The importance of background information on the educational need is even more important when it comes to special education needs. Special education needs (SEN) refer to a range of learning needs that require specialized support and interventions. These needs can include physical, cognitive, sensory, and behavioural disabilities, as well as developmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorder.

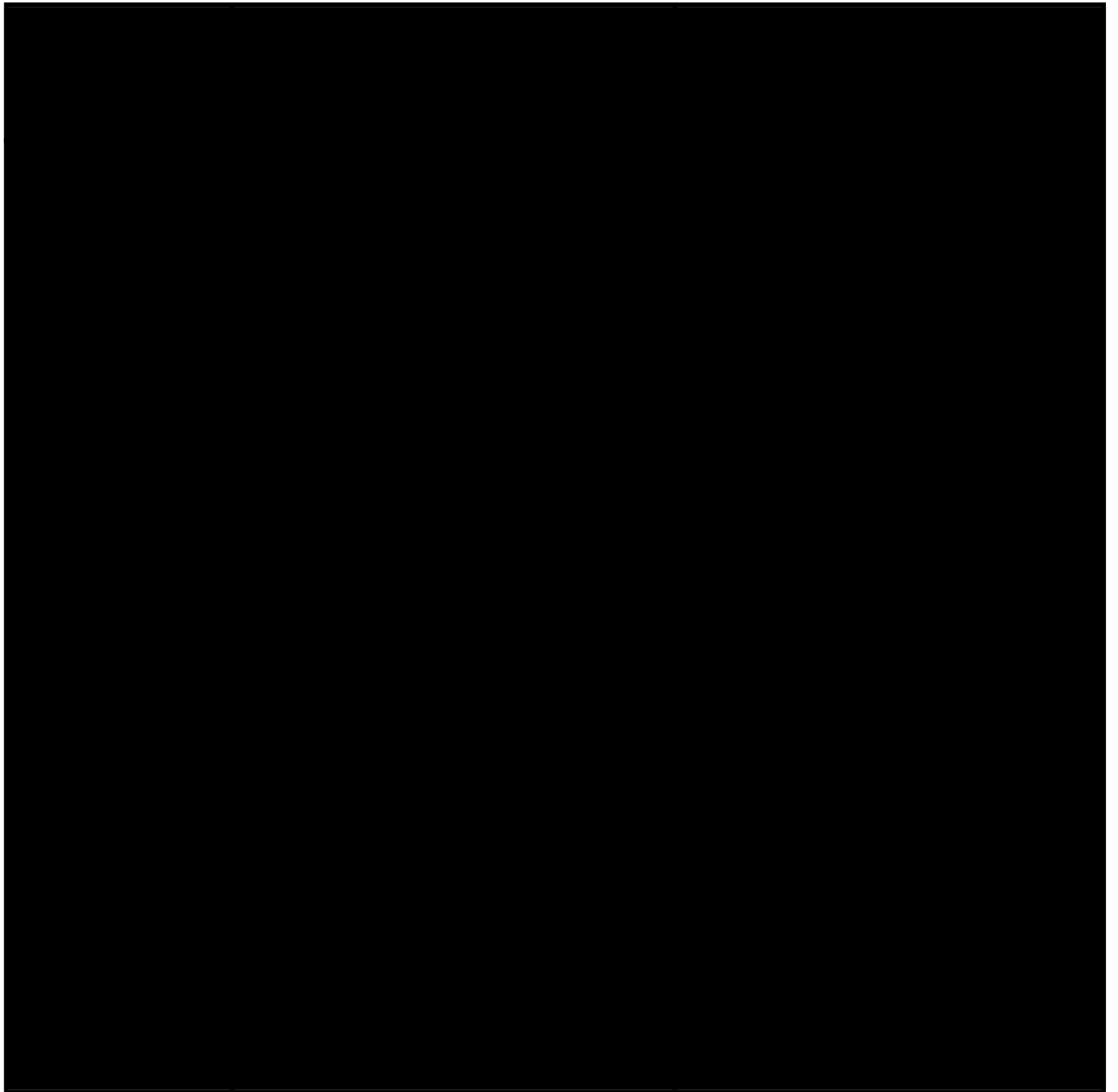
In addition to understanding the unique needs of learners with SEN, educators must also be aware of legal requirements and guidelines related to the provision of special education services. This includes ensuring that learners with SEN have access to appropriate accommodations and support services and that their educational program is designed in a way that promotes their learning and development.

Additionally, understanding educational needs helps to ensure that educational resources are being used effectively. This includes not only ensuring that learners have access to the necessary materials and tools but also that the educational program is designed in a way that maximizes the learning outcomes for all learners.

Educators can support learners with diverse learning needs by taking a proactive and individualized approach to identifying and addressing educational needs to achieve their full potential.

This workshop aims to provide participants with theoretical knowledge about the background information of educational needs and an opportunity to apply and analyse the theoretical knowledge they learned to concrete special educational scenarios. In some cases, the facilitator can ask to develop special needs educational programs.







Practical part:

1. Step one: The facilitator will divide the participants into small groups of 4-5 people, ensuring that each group has a diverse mix of individuals.

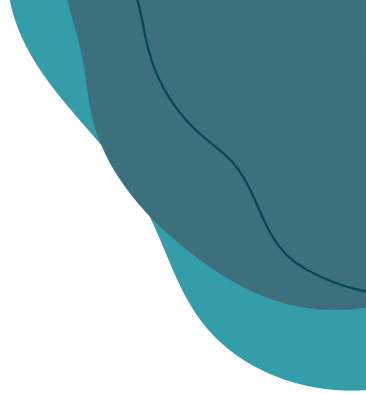
2. Step two: The facilitator will provide each group with different scenarios that describe a group of learners with specific educational needs. These scenarios will be designed to reflect the diversity of educational needs, including cognitive, affective, and physical needs.

3. Step three - group work: Each group will work together to analyse the scenarios and identify the educational needs of the learners. They will discuss the factors that influence these needs and how they can design an educational program that meets these needs.

In some cases, if the participants are from the educational field/trainers etc., they can be asked to develop together a specific educational program for the educational needs of the learners from the scenarios.

The facilitator will support the groups to be creative and come up with initiatives and new ideas for designing educational programs.

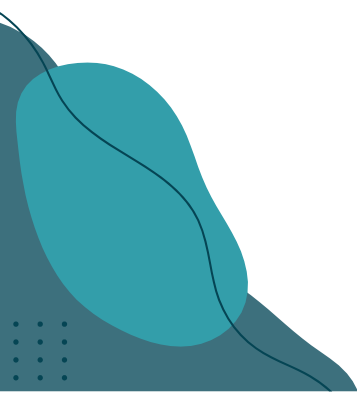




	<p>Debriefing:</p> <p>Presentations: Each group will present their findings to the rest of the workshop participants. The facilitator will encourage group discussions and provide feedback to help participants improve their understanding of educational needs. The facilitator will also ask participants to reflect on what they learned and how they can apply it in their educational practice.</p>	
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Conclusion:

The practical group workshop on the background information of educational needs will allow participants to apply the theoretical knowledge they learned about educational needs. The facilitator will use different methods to help participants apply their knowledge, including scenarios, group work, and presentations.



7. Soft skills, transversal skills and competences

Introduction:

Improving the soft skills, transversal skills, and competencies of young people with disabilities requires a focused approach that addresses both their specific needs and their individual strengths.

An effective way to do it is to encourage self-awareness, helping young people with disabilities understand their strengths and weaknesses, interests, and learning styles. This can help them identify areas where they need to improve and where they can excel.

Communication skills are essential for success in any field and are a key point in employability strategies. Young people with disabilities may need additional support to develop their communication skills, such as speech therapy, sign language classes, or assistive technology. Teamwork skills are crucial in almost any job, and young people with disabilities can benefit from opportunities to work collaboratively with others. This can be achieved through group projects, volunteer work, or sports teams.

Encouraging problem-solving can help young people with disabilities develop their critical thinking skills and come up with solutions to unique challenges they may face. Opportunities to lead projects or mentor others can help them build their confidence and develop their leadership abilities.

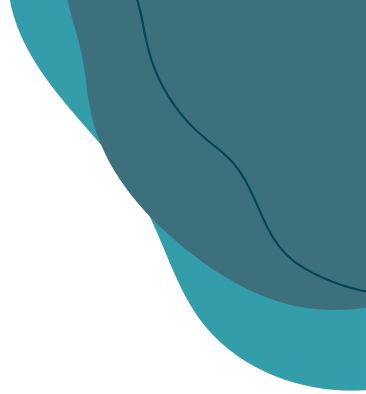
Joining different trainings can help to develop specific skills related to a particular job or industry. This can help them gain employment and become more independent, and a constant learning process helps young people with disabilities to continue to grow and develop throughout their lives.

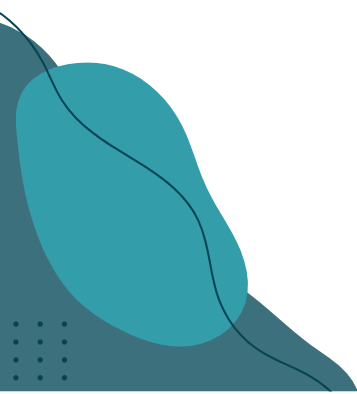
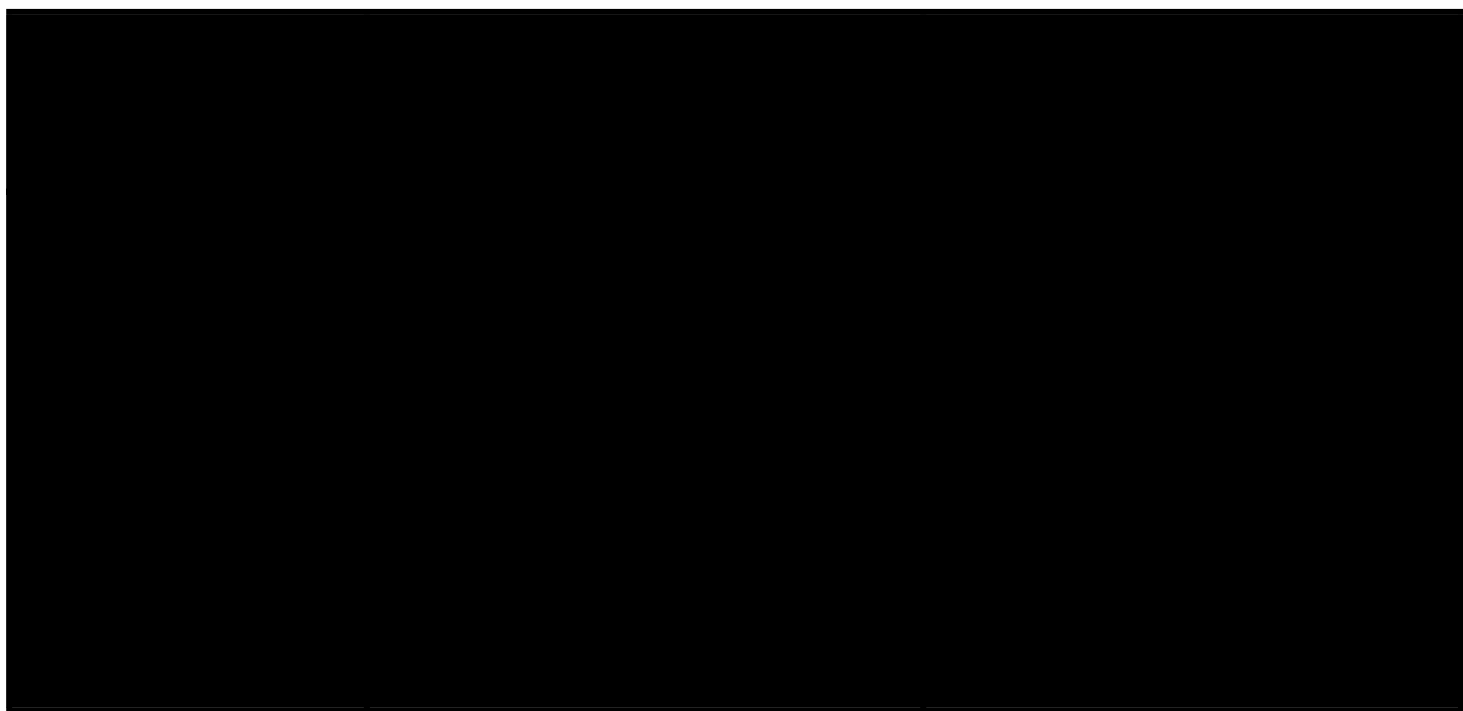
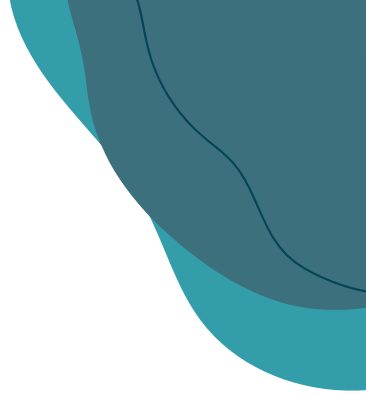
Type of workshop:

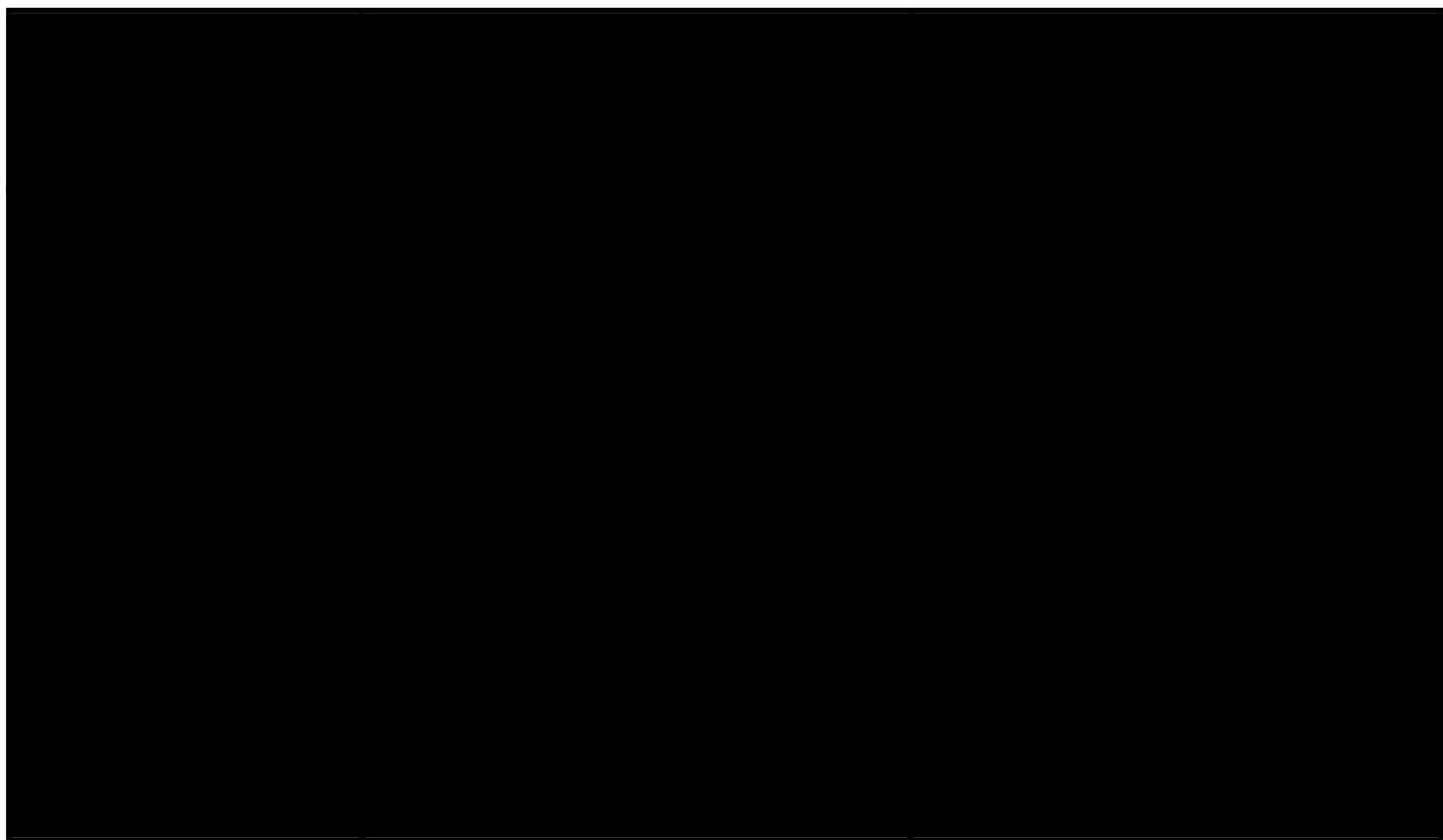
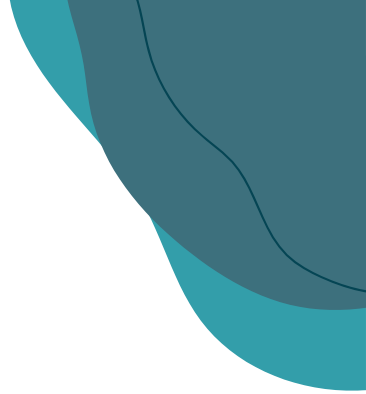
The workshops training format should be elaborated as group sessions.

For the development of each session, the following aspects should be considered: Workload, Description and Delivery.









8. Management of group dynamics

Introduction:

Managing group dynamics is an essential aspect of supporting the employability of young people with disabilities. In this context it is fundamental to create an environment where all members of the group feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas, it is also important to encourage open communication and respect of different perspectives. This will help ensure that everyone feels valued and considered, which can lead to more productive and positive interactions. By recognizing that each person in the group have unique strengths and challenges and being mindful of these differences is possible to find ways to support each individual in achieving their goals.

It is important to encourage group members to work together to achieve common goals. This can help build a sense of community and a sense of belonging. It can also help ensure that everyone is working towards the same objectives, which can lead to more efficient and effective outcomes.

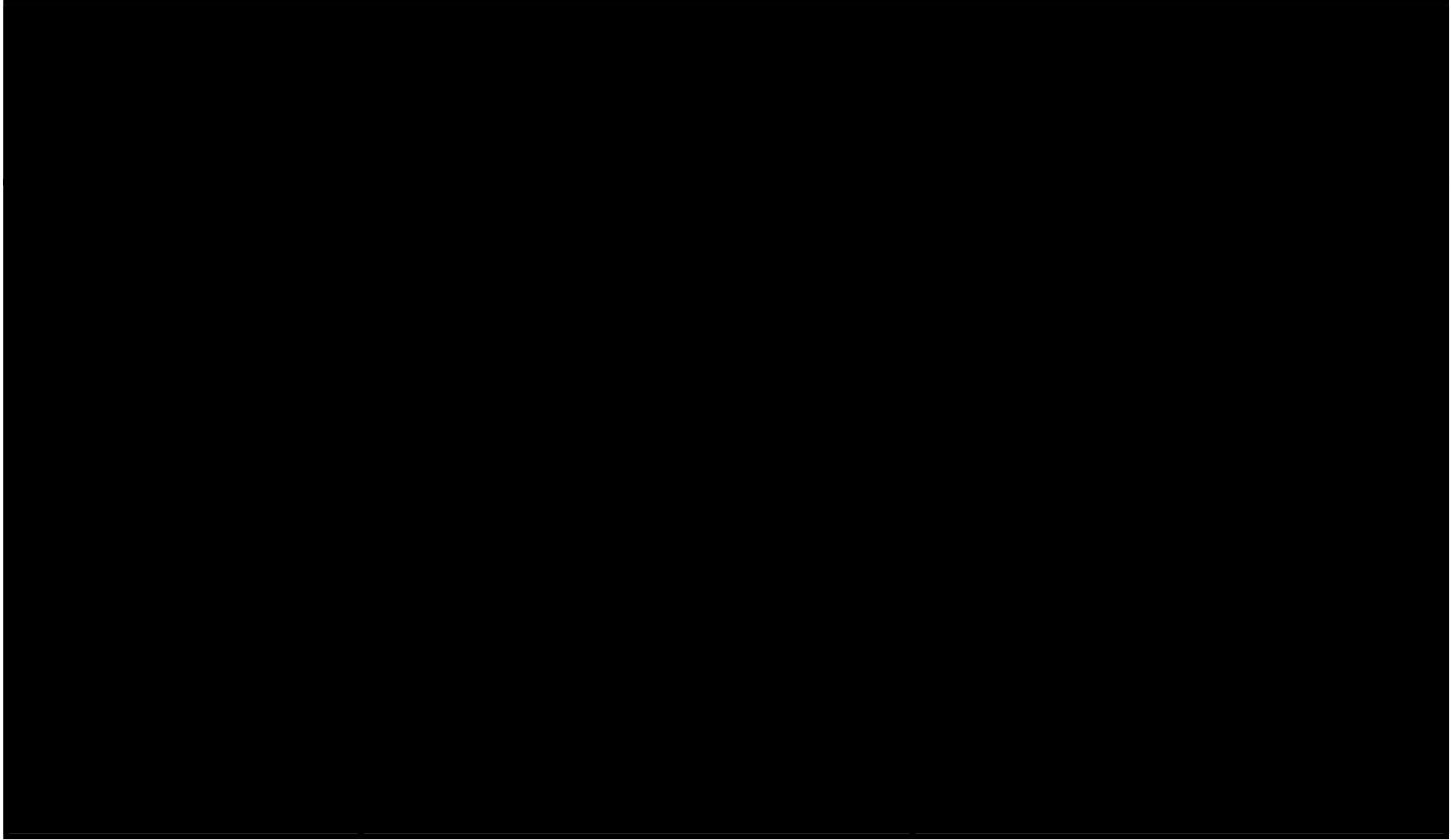
Another key aspect is also to set clear expectations for the group's work and behaviour. For example establishing ground rules for communication or outlining specific tasks and deadline in addition a feedback to the group and to individual members should be provided, this can help identify areas of strength and areas that need improvement. It can also help encourage continued growth and development.

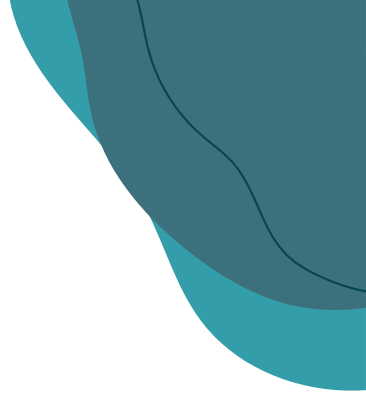
Type of workshop:

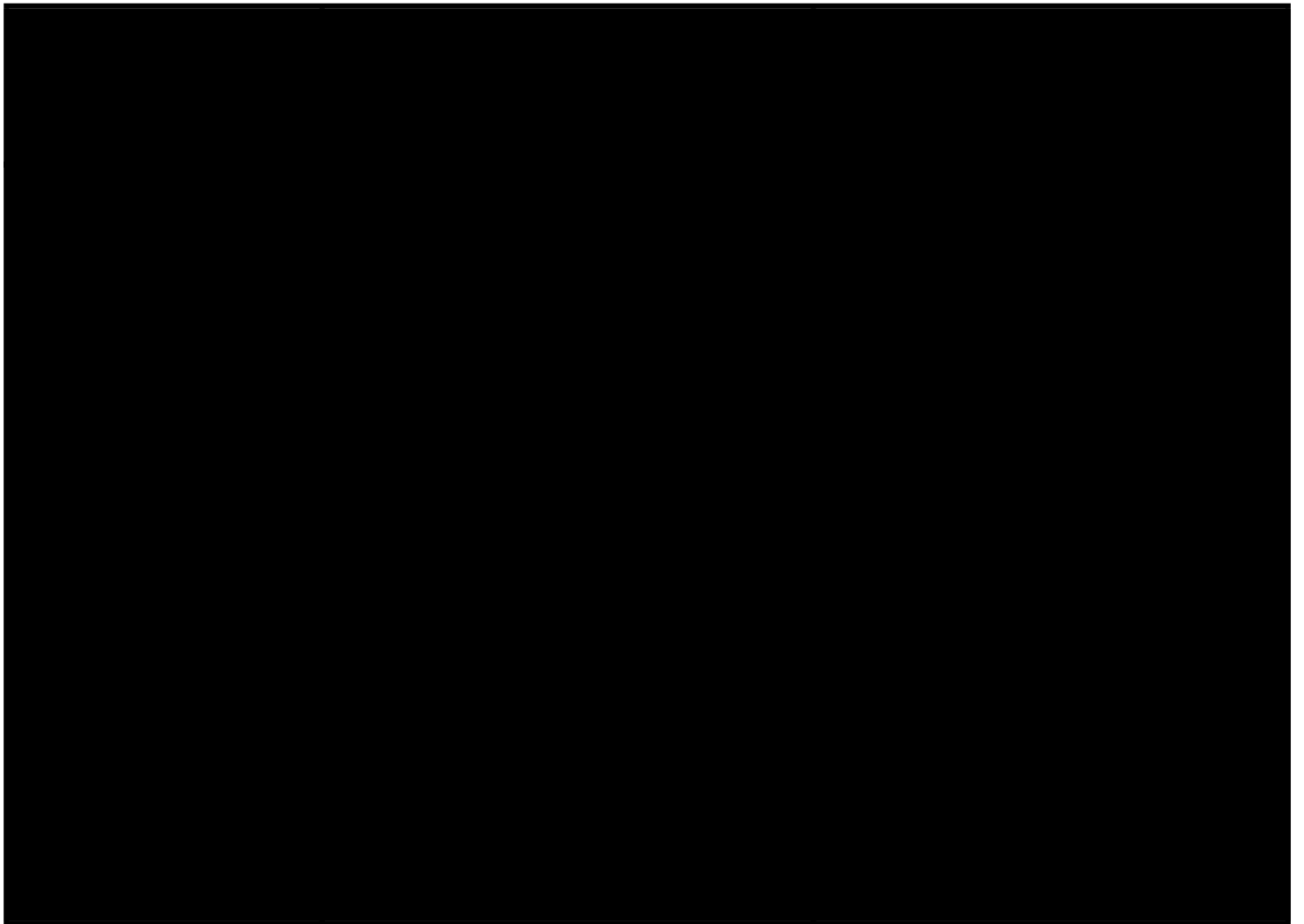
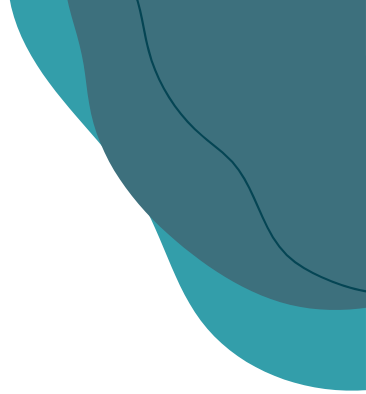
The workshops of the training format should be elaborated as group sessions.

For the development of each session the following aspects should be taken into account: Workload, Description and Delivery.









9. Co-design methodologies customized to performers' groups

Introduction:

Employment is a critical component of social inclusion and economic participation, and young people with disabilities face significant challenges in accessing and maintaining employment due to various barriers, including discrimination, lack of access to education and training, and limited opportunities. Co-design methodologies can support the employability of young people with disabilities to play a vital role in addressing these challenges.

Customized co-design methodologies involve involving young people with disabilities in the design process of solutions that address their specific needs and challenges. This process ensures that the resulting solutions are inclusive, accessible, and relevant to their needs, promoting their empowerment and engagement in the design process. By doing so, they can gain confidence and self-esteem, which are crucial factors for employability.

One of the key advantages of customized co-design methodologies is that they result in better outcomes for young people with disabilities. By involving them in the design process, designers can gain new perspectives and insights into their specific needs and challenges. This process can lead to innovative solutions that are more effective and sustainable, thereby increasing their chances of finding and maintaining employment.

Another important benefit of customized co-design methodologies is that they promote inclusion and accessibility. Young people with disabilities are often excluded from design processes, resulting in solutions that do not address their specific needs and challenges. Customized co-design methodologies also promote relevance, ensuring that the resulting solutions are relevant to the needs of young people with disabilities.

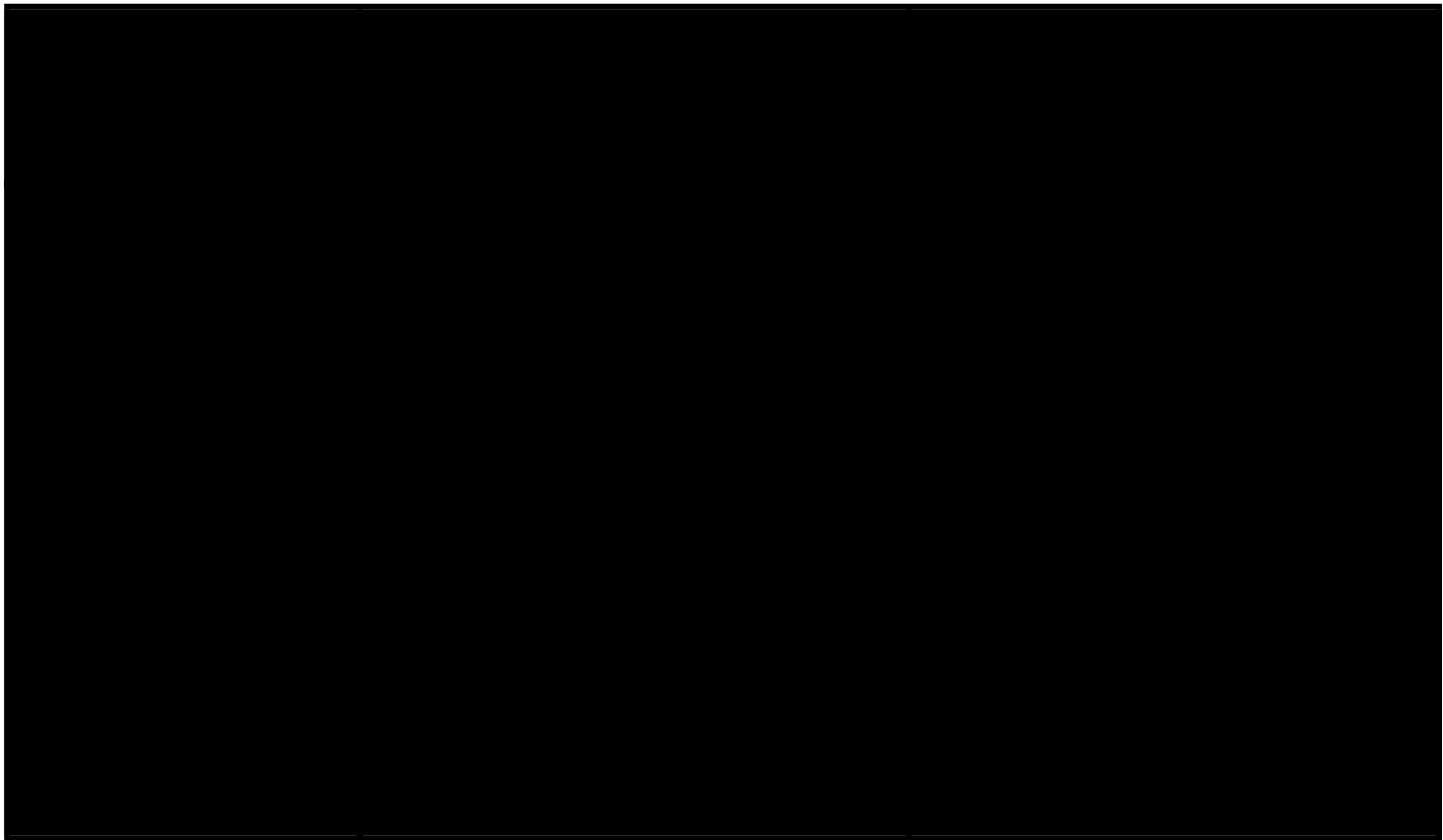
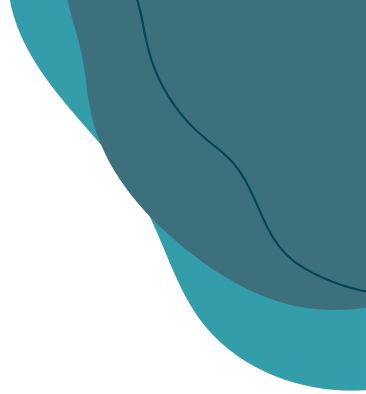
In conclusion, co-design methodologies customized to support the employability of young people with disabilities are critical to addressing the challenges they face in accessing and maintaining employment.

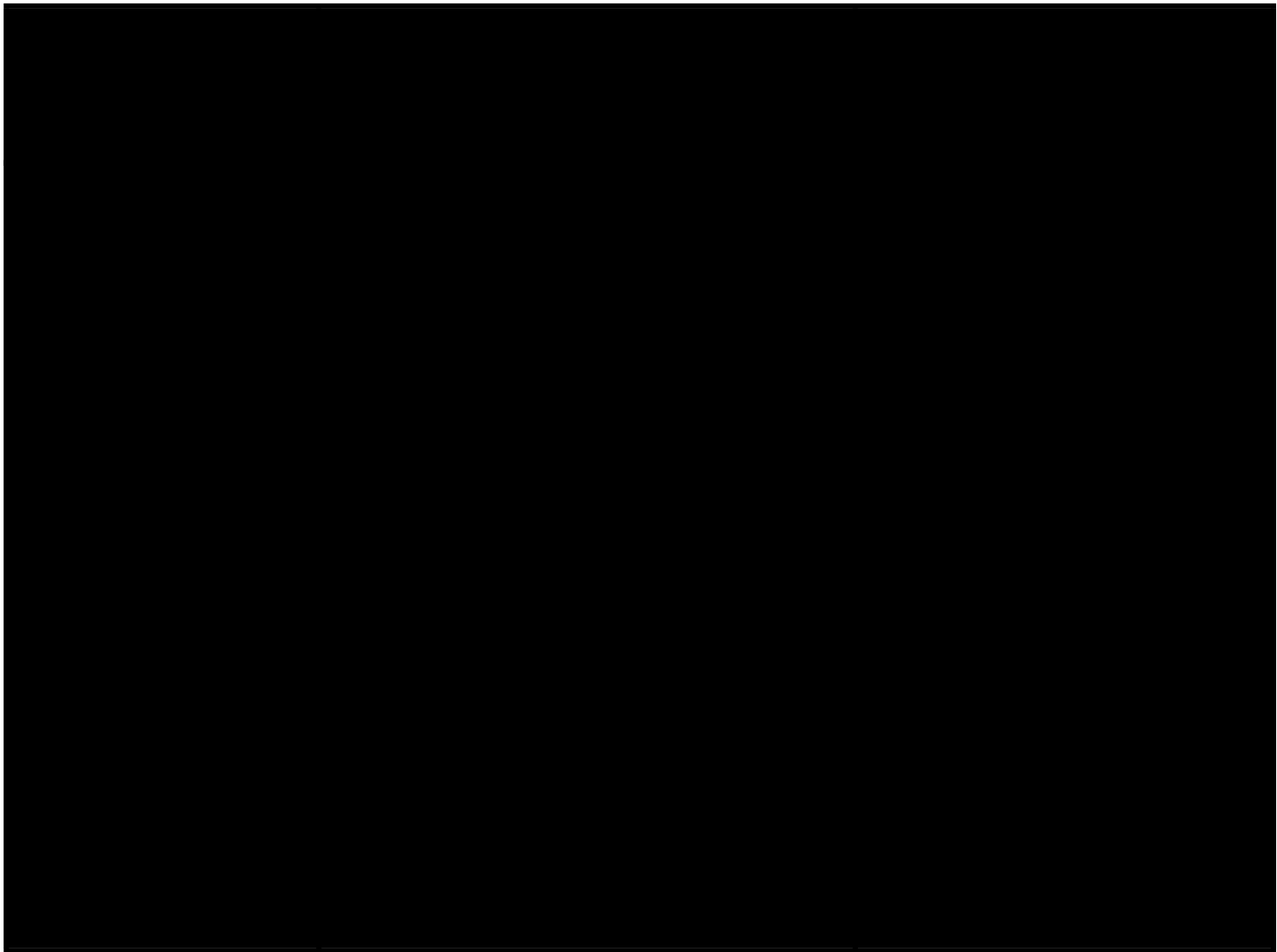
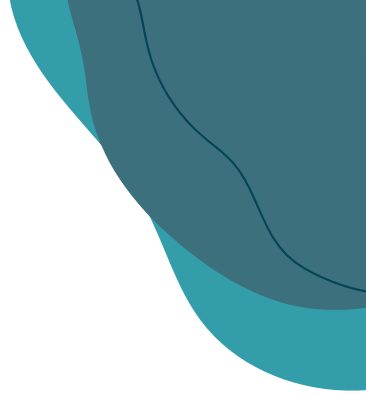
Type of workshop:

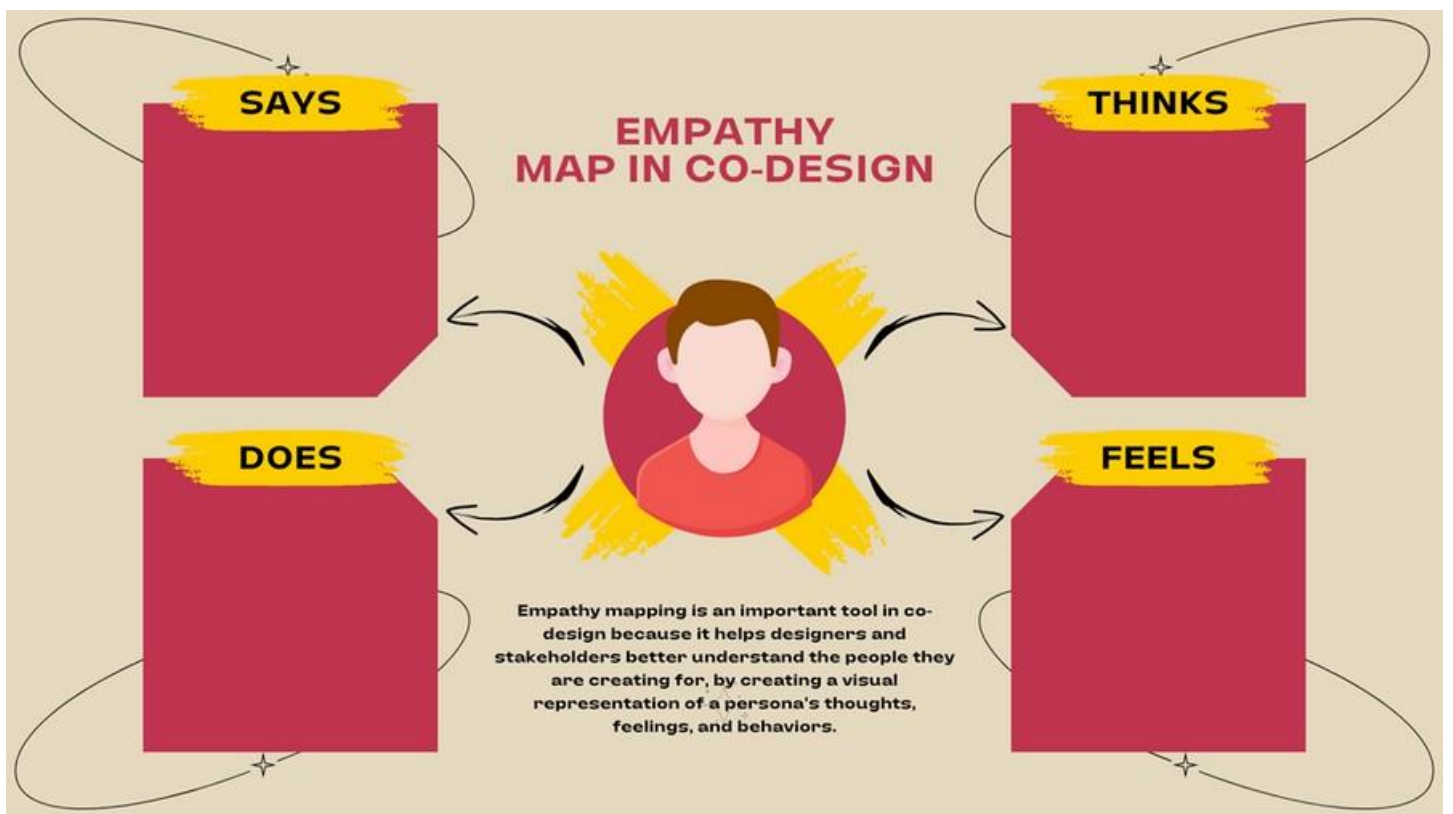
The workshops the training format should be elaborated as **group sessions**.

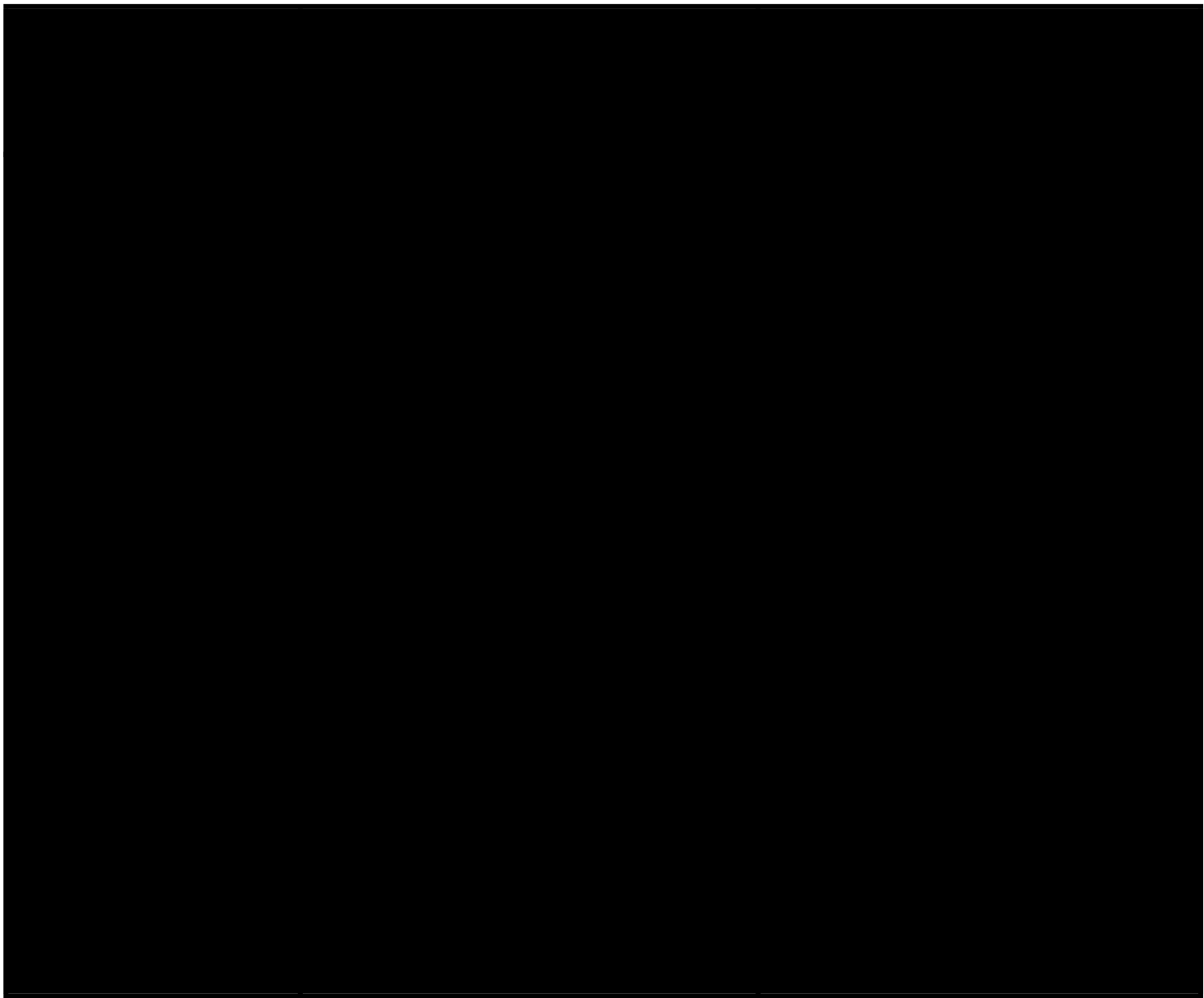
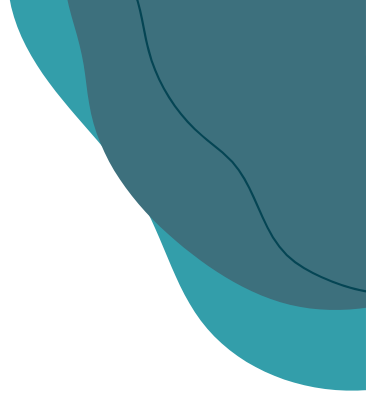
For the development of each session, the following aspects should be considered: Workload, Description and Delivery.











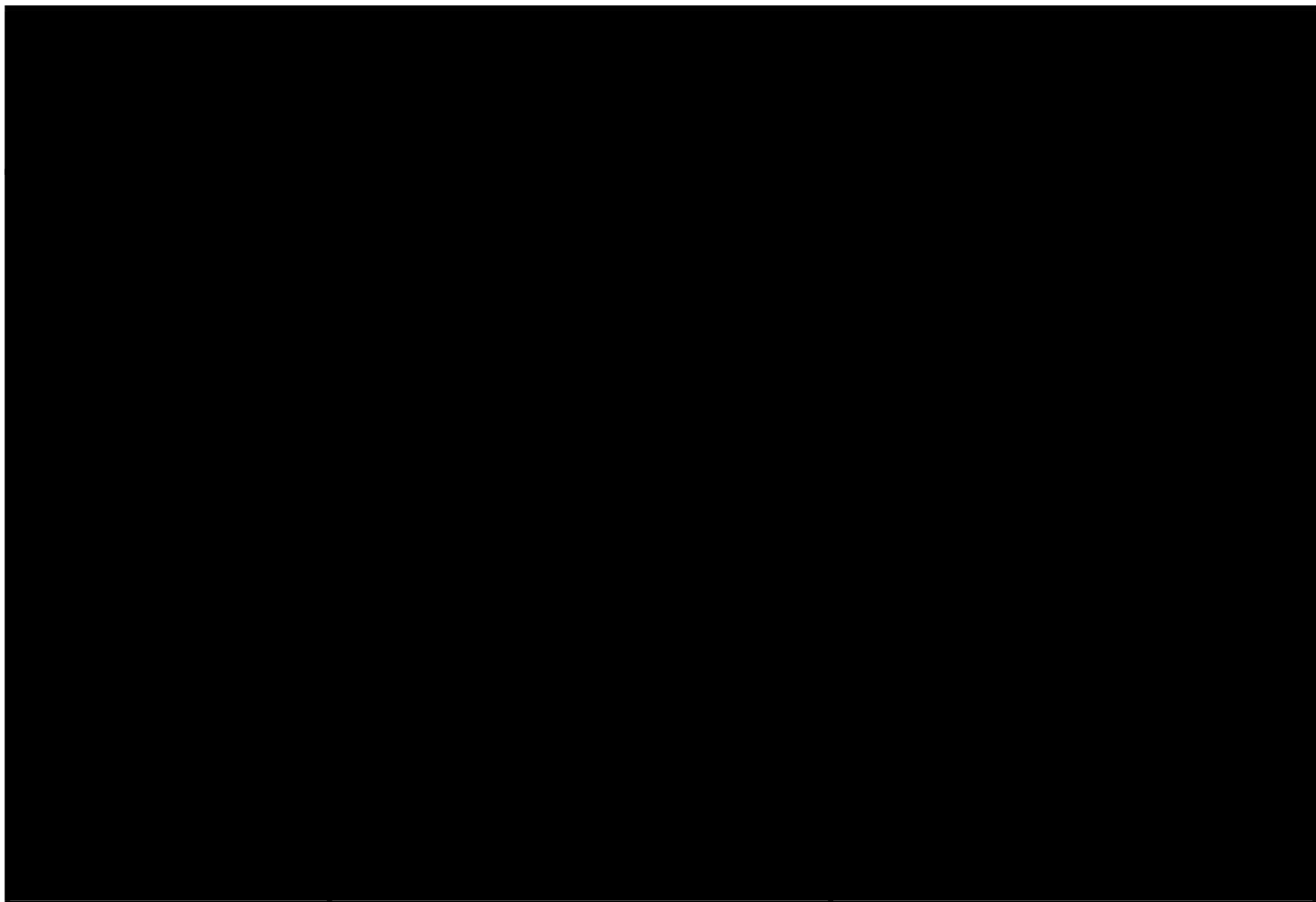
10. Co-Designed critical thinking exercises

There are various types of exercises that can be used to develop critical thinking skills. These exercises mainly aim at the acquisition of practical skills that allow people to reason correctly and to understand and evaluate the reasoning of others.

Here is an example:

Session 1. CAGED THOUGHTS





11. Good practices of developing critical thinking skills

Trainers need new skills and abilities to handle complex and more diverse group situations.

The adjective "critical" attached to the noun "thinking" indicates, as can be guessed, a form of "slow", meditated, reflective, active, rational thinking which is opposed to "fast", intuitive, immediate, emotional thinking, thoughtless, irrational and passive.

In short, being a critical thinker involves pausing before making a judgment or decision and rationally examining proofs, evidence, reasons, pros and cons of courses of action; thinking about hypotheses and possible alternative courses of action and, finally, evaluating them.

Here is a list of good practices to follow to develop critical thinking skills:

1. Evaluate your own opinions: Before developing a critical thought about what surrounds us, the advice is to start by yourself trying to evaluate the possible advantages and disadvantages every time you are about to make a decision.
2. Getting used to reasoning by drawing up a list of pros and cons can be an excellent exercise to avoid the possibility of making a wrong decision.
3. Remove prejudice: a useful exercise is to face our own prejudices. We can all have some prejudices about a colleague or a friend. Engaging in evaluating the point of view of others and identifying and removing some barriers can help to have a more detached point of view on the other, favouring the development of critical thinking.
4. Accept the mistake: evaluating each situation with detachment and writing down the pros and cons are excellent exercises; however, they do not completely protect against mistakes. Every human being makes mistakes, even those with an excellent critical spirit. In order to prevent the ability to analyse, observe and evaluate situations from turning into presumption, it is always necessary to keep in mind that the mistake is around the corner.
5. Divide the problem: A classic exercise useful for developing a critical spirit consists in tackling a big problem by dividing it into many small problems or many small intermediate steps to be achieved. Working on minor issues one step at a time allows you to easily manage even large and complex situations that may seem impossible to solve.

If we talk about critical thinking, we must also talk about bias.

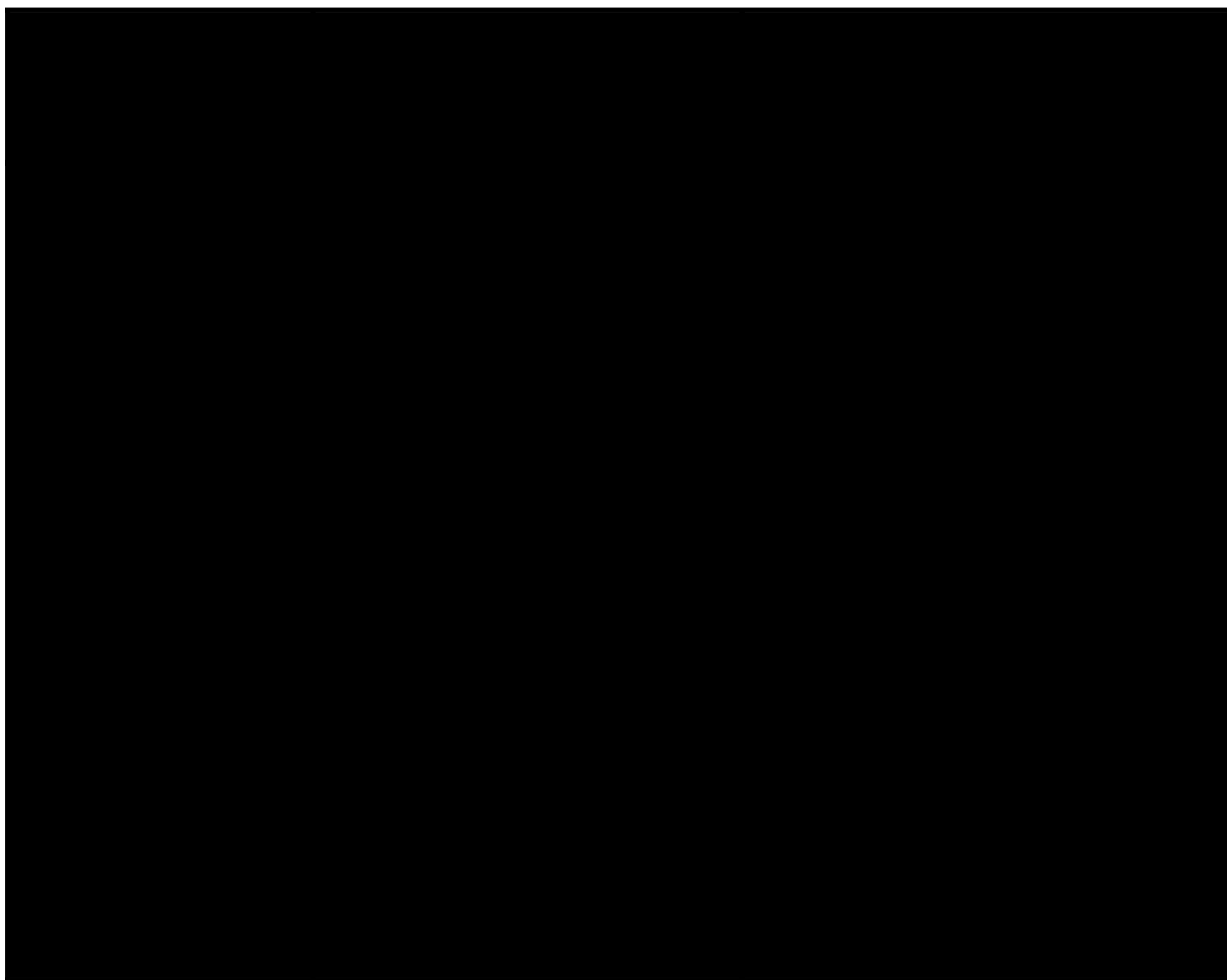
Biases are "judgments (or prejudices) that do not necessarily correspond to reality, developed on the basis of the interpretation of the information in the possession, even if not logically or semantically connected to each other and, therefore, they lead to an error of evaluation or lack of objectivity of judgment."

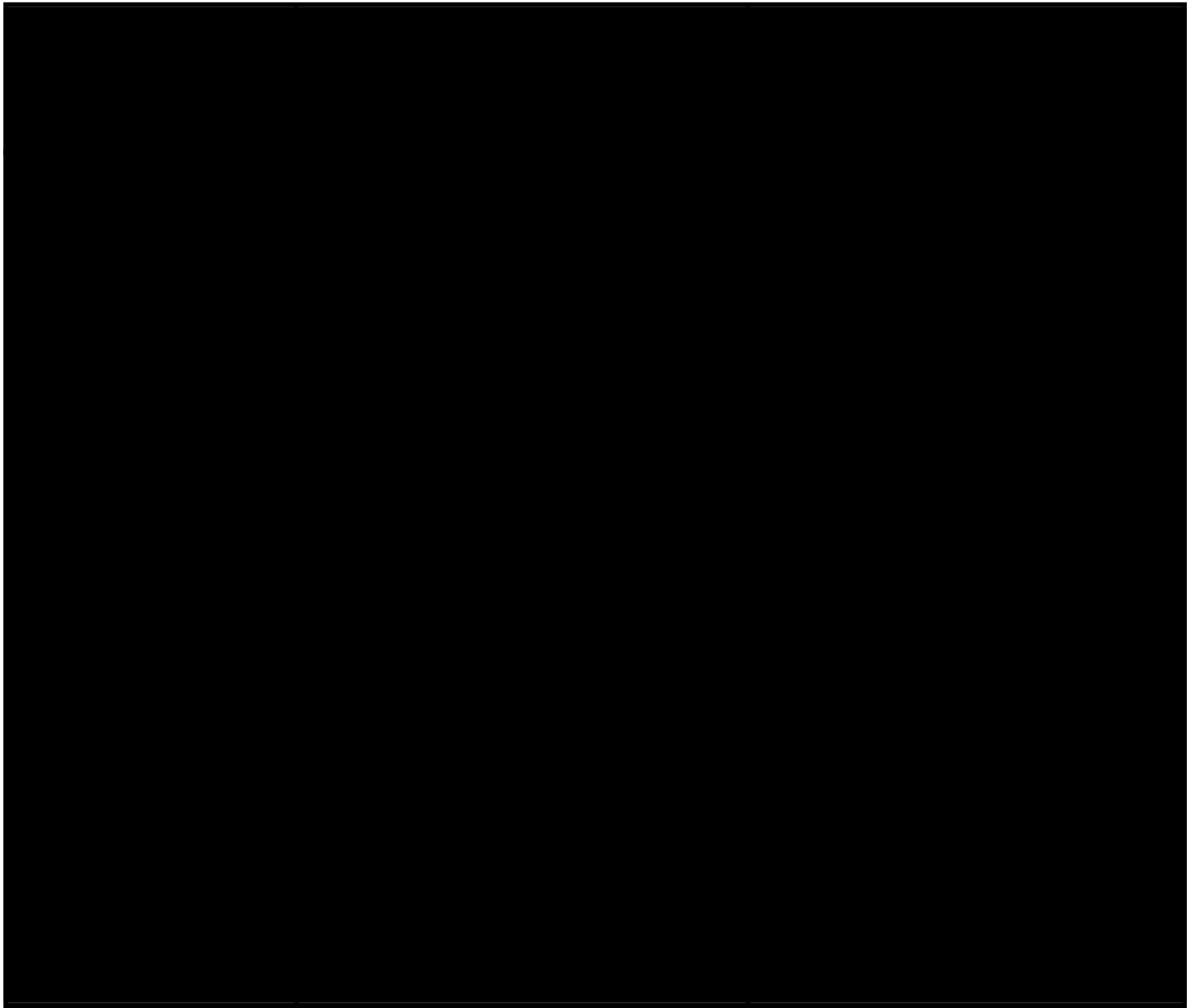
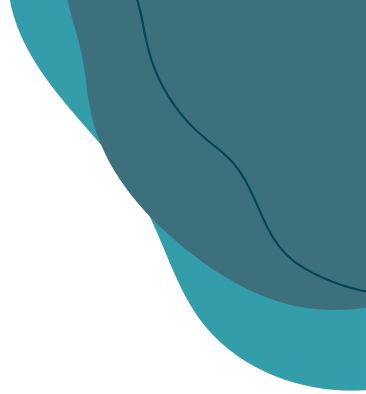
Translated, cognitive biases represent the way our brain distorts reality. Over the centuries, people have learned to take some mental shortcuts. These shortcuts are mostly correct and allow us to interpret reality quickly and efficiently. However, there is a percentage of these heuristics that lead us down dead ends into erroneous conclusions about the world around us: cognitive biases. People have identified dozens and dozens of cognitive biases, and a new misjudgement is discovered every year.



Therefore, the goal is certainly not to get rid of these "mental concepts": it is impossible, they are part of our nature. However, even just knowing them and being aware of them can help us through critical thinking to have a new point of view, push us not to surrender to the status quo and make a huge difference in our personal growth path. Here is a session for developing critical thinking skills:

Session 2. PHOTOVOICE





12. The role of educators in supporting co-creation dynamics within a group comprising learned with and without disabilities

Development of a training format for institutions and operators working in the Youth field who are interested in enhancing their abilities to provide education that fosters critical thinking skills for young persons with disabilities. The aim of the training is to equip the participants with useful skills that will enhance the inclusion of young persons with disabilities in the labour market and society and address stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion phenomena. The training focuses on empowering existing operators to become better educational supporters of learning processes involving young persons with disabilities, particularly those with physical disabilities and slight cognitive impairments. The training will utilise non-formal education methods to achieve its objectives.

Introduction:

This training is designed to provide educators working with people with disabilities with the necessary skills and tools to enhance the inclusion of young persons with disabilities in the labour market and society.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes the right to work and employment as a fundamental right. However, in Europe alone[1], approximately 100 million EU citizens live with a disability, and their well-being is affected by various barriers, such as inaccessible physical environments and transportation, the unavailability of assistive devices and technologies, non-adapted means of communication, gaps in service delivery, and discriminatory prejudice and stigma in society.

The Report on Disability and Work, elaborated by the International Labor Organization in 2019, showed that lower employment and education levels cause the poverty rate for those with disabilities to be 70% higher than the average, while the unemployment rate for around 4 million people in the European Union who have Intellectual and relational Disabilities is more than twice as high as for the general population.

Given this context, it is essential to provide education that fosters critical thinking skills for young persons with disabilities. This training aims to equip the participants with useful skills that will enhance their ability to provide such education and address stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion phenomena.

The training focuses on empowering existing operators to become better educational supporters of learning processes involving young persons with disabilities, particularly those with physical disabilities and slight cognitive impairments. We will be utilizing non-formal education methods to achieve our objectives.

[1] Article 13 of the Treaty on European Community empowers the EU to legislate to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Directive 2000/78 / EC emphasises the need for anti-discrimination measures, particularly occupation and employment. In this context, the European Commission has provided support to people with difficulty finding or retaining employment and has adopted an action plan on equal opportunities for people with various degrees of disabilities leading to a sustainable and functional approach and to the elimination of social exclusion.



This training will be conducted in a group setting, which will provide an opportunity for participants to exchange ideas, experiences and learn from each other. We hope that this training will help you become more effective educators in supporting co-creation dynamics with people with disabilities, and we look forward to working with you.

Notes

'In most job adverts companies look out for problem-solvers and team workers, people who think outside the box.

People with disabilities are natural problem solvers because they have to adapt in a world that is not designed with them in mind. They have developed strategies and skills because the world hasn't given them another option.

Tip: Write down all of the reasons you are a good job candidate.

Tip: In the new world environment of big skills shortages, employers need employees who are flexible, adaptable, innovative, problem solvers, are used to work from home or hybrid work forms. There needs to be a shift in the narrative about people with disabilities, viewing disability not as a deficit but as an indicator of resilience, pragmatism and competence. By underlying what are the things that make them able to overcome their circumstances and compete on a field that is tilted against them.

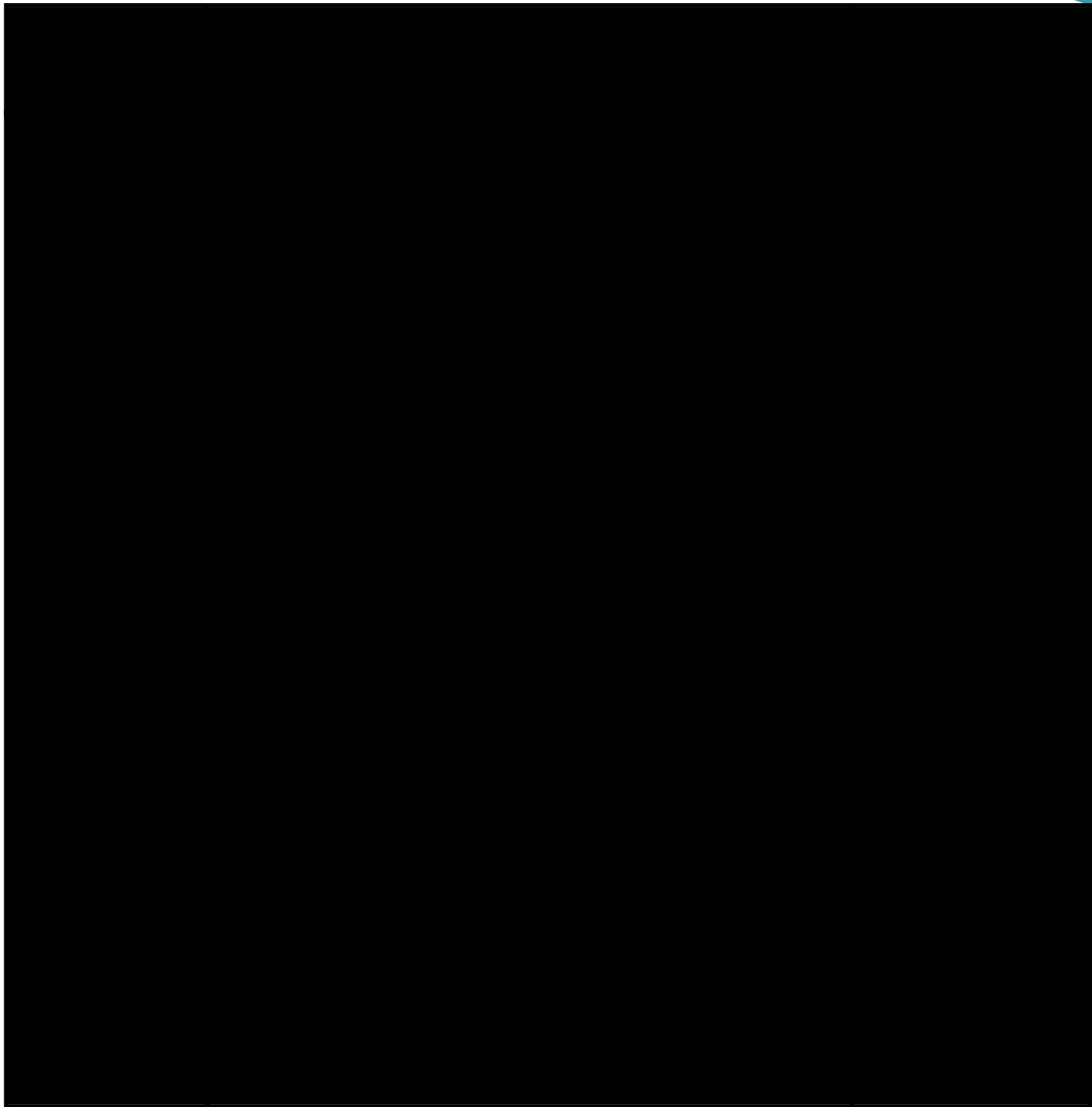
Tip: You will never look at what you cannot do. You'll focus on what you can do and there's so much.

Type of workshop:

The workshops of the training format should be elaborated as group sessions.

For the development of each session the following aspects should be taken into account: Workload, Description and Delivery.





Barbara Oakley's Learning How to Learn method.

Introduction

The Learning How to Learn method can be particularly helpful for people with physical disabilities by focusing on their strengths and leveraging them to overcome challenges. Individuals with physical disabilities often have unique perspectives and skills that can be valuable in the learning process, and by building on these strengths, they can achieve academic and personal success. Developed by Barbara Oakley, a professor of engineering, the method is designed to help learners of all ages and backgrounds improve their ability to learn and retain new information.

For example, individuals with physical disabilities may have developed exceptional problem-solving skills, creativity, and resilience through their experiences. The Learning How to Learn method can help them to recognize and build on these strengths by providing them with strategies that work with their unique learning style and needs.

One technique that may be particularly helpful for individuals with physical disabilities is using visual aids and diagrams to help organise information and facilitate learning. This technique can be especially effective for individuals with visual impairments or other physical limitations that make it difficult to read or write. By using visual aids, such as mind maps or diagrams, learners can create a visual representation of the information they are learning, making it easier to process and remember.

Another technique that can be helpful is the use of positive self-talk and mindfulness practices to reduce stress and anxiety during the learning process. Individuals with physical disabilities may experience additional stress and anxiety due to the challenges they face. Still, by using techniques such as deep breathing or mindfulness meditation, they can learn to reduce their stress levels and focus on the task at hand.

According to the Learning How to Learn method, the brain has two distinct modes of thinking: the focused mode and the diffuse mode.

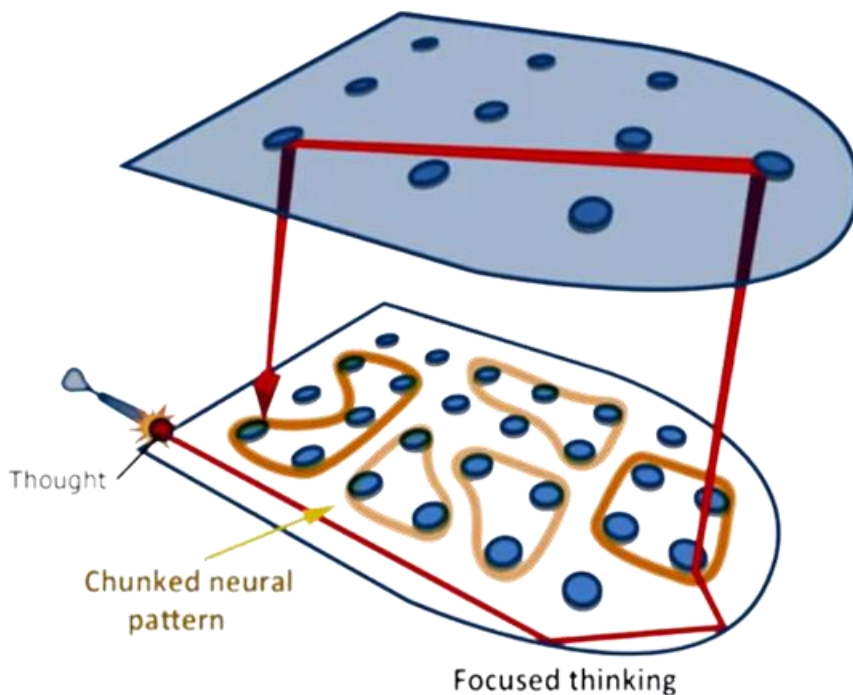
The focused mode of thinking is what we typically use when we are consciously focusing on a specific task, such as reading a textbook or solving a math problem. During this mode, the brain is highly focused on the task at hand and actively processes and stores information in short-term memory. However, the focused mode can also be limiting, as it can prevent us from seeing the big picture or making connections between different concepts.

On the other hand, the diffuse mode of thinking is a more relaxed mode of thinking that allows the brain to connect different concepts and ideas. During this mode, the brain is less focused and more open to new ideas and insights. This mode is often activated during activities such as daydreaming, taking a walk, or engaging in a non-demanding task.



The Learning How to Learn method emphasizes the importance of switching between these two modes of thinking to enhance learning outcomes. For example, learners can use focused mode thinking to actively learn new concepts and information and then switch to diffuse mode thinking to make connections between different ideas and integrate the new knowledge into their existing mental framework.

The method also highlights the role of the brain's neuroplasticity, which is the brain's ability to change and adapt in response to new experiences and information. This means that learners can actively shape and strengthen their neural connections through practice, repetition, and the use of effective learning strategies.



Use a variety of learning techniques - No single learning technique works for everyone. The Learning How to Learn method teaches learners to use a variety of techniques to improve their learning outcomes. These techniques include repetition, chunking, visual aids, and analogies, among others.

Overcome obstacles to learning - Everyone faces obstacles when learning, such as procrastination, distraction, and self-doubt. The Learning How to Learn method provides learners with tools and strategies for overcoming these obstacles and staying motivated.

Make learning a habit - Learning is not a one-time event; it's a lifelong process. The Learning How to Learn method teaches learners how to make learning a habit by setting goals, creating a routine, and maintaining a positive attitude.



Specific Techniques Taught in the Learning How to Learn Method

Here are a few examples:

Pomodoro Technique

This technique is a time-management strategy that can help learners focus on their tasks and avoid burnout. It involves breaking up your study time into 25-minute intervals, called "Pomodoros," with short breaks in between. During each Pomodoro, you focus on a single task or topic without interruptions. After the Pomodoro, you take a short break (typically five minutes) to rest and recharge. Here's an example of how to use the Pomodoro Technique:

- Step 1: Choose a task you want to complete (e.g., reading a textbook chapter).
- Step 2: Set a timer for 25 minutes.
- Step 3: Work on the task without interruption until the timer goes off.
- Step 4: Take a five-minute break to rest and recharge.
- Step 5: Repeat steps 2-4 for as many Pomodoros as necessary to complete the task.

Feynman Technique –

This technique is a method for understanding complex concepts by breaking them down into simple explanations. It involves four steps:

- Step 1: Choose a concept you want to understand (e.g., the process of photosynthesis).
- Step 2: Write down a simple explanation of the concept in your own words.
- Step 3: Explain the concept to someone else, using your written explanation as a guide.
- Step 4: Identify any gaps in your understanding and go back to the source material to fill them in.

Metaphors and Analogies

This technique involves using metaphors and analogies to help learners understand complex ideas by comparing them to something they already know. For example, you might compare the structure and function of the human brain to a computer. Here are some examples of how to use metaphors and analogies:

To understand the concept of a cell membrane, you might compare it to a fence that surrounds a house, allowing some things in and keeping others out.

To understand the concept of a chemical reaction, you might compare it to baking a cake, where the ingredients (reactants) are mixed together and transformed into a new substance (product).

To understand the concept of natural selection, you might compare it to a game of "survival of the fittest," where the organisms best adapted to their environment are more likely to survive and pass on their genes to the next generation.



13. Assessment of competences module

Scale answer questions

Did the training meet your expectations?

(1 - Not at all, 5 - Completely)

How useful were the contents of the training in enhancing your competences in engaging young people with disabilities in educational programmes of empowerment?

(1 - Not useful at all, 5 - Extremely useful)

How well did the trainers deliver the content of the training?

(1 - Poorly, 5 - Excellent)

Was the training methodology (NFE) effective in your learning experience?

(1 - Not effective at all, 5 - Very effective)

Did the training address the set of knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for educators to support the acquisition of critical thinking skills in young people with disabilities?

(1 - Not at all, 5 - Completely)

Did the training provide adequate knowledge and skills to enhance your ability to manage group dynamics in critical thinking skills programmes involving both individuals with and without disabilities?

(1 - Not at all, 5 - Completely)

Did the co-design methodologies customized to performers' groups composed of young individuals with and without disabilities provide useful insights into fostering critical thinking skills?

(1 - Not at all, 5 - Completely)

How useful were the co-designed critical thinking exercises in deconstructing narratives/stereotypes about disability?

(1 - Not useful at all, 5 - Extremely useful)

Was the information presented about good practices involving people with disabilities from Europe and the World relevant to your professional development?

(1 - Not at all, 5 - Extremely relevant)



Did the training contribute to your ability to support co-creation dynamics within a group comprising learners with or without disabilities?

(1 - Not at all, 5 - Completely)

How well did the training prepare you to develop autonomous tools of education in developing critical thinking skills for the employability context?

(1 - Poorly, 5 - Extremely well)

How would you rate the overall quality of the training?

(1 - Very poor, 5 - Excellent)

How interested are you in developing competencies to engage young people with disabilities in educational programmes of empowerment?

1 - Not at all interested, 2 - Slightly interested, 3 - Moderately interested, 4 - Very interested, 5 - Extremely interested
- Slightly familiar, 3 - Moderately familiar, 4 - Very familiar, 5 - Extremely familiar

How confident are you in supporting the acquisition of critical thinking skills involving young people with disabilities?

1 - Not at all confident, 2 - Slightly confident, 3 - Moderately confident, 4 - Very confident, 5 - Extremely confident

How important do you think it is to foster the acquisition and development of soft skills, transversal skills and competencies related to critical thinking for young people with disabilities?

1 - Not important at all, 2 - Slightly important, 3 - Moderately important, 4 - Very important, 5 - Extremely important

How important do you think it is to provide useful skills to young people with disabilities for integrating themselves in the labour market, also through interaction with adult peers without disabilities?

1 - Not important at all, 2 - Slightly important, 3 - Moderately important, 4 - Very important, 5 - Extremely important

How satisfied are you with the content and delivery of the training programme?

1 - Very dissatisfied, 2 - Somewhat dissatisfied, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Somewhat satisfied, 5 - Very satisfied



On a scale of 1 to 5, how well do you feel the training prepared you to engage young people with disabilities in educational programs of empowerment?

On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied were you with the overall organization of the training activity?

Open-ended Questions:

What did you find most helpful about the training?

What aspects of the training could be improved?

How has this training activity changed your understanding of critical thinking and its importance in the workplace for people with disabilities?

What specific strategies or techniques did you learn that you will use in your work with young people with disabilities?

In what ways do you plan to apply the knowledge and skills gained from this training in your professional work?

What additional resources or support would you like to have access to in order to further develop your skills and knowledge related to working with young people with disabilities?





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