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EUROPEAN PROJECT

European Report on the Pilot Testing of a Training Program to Develop  
Enterprising Skills in People with Learning Disabilities

PARTNERS:



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## Introduction

The BE (Business Enterprise) Inspired Project is aimed at promoting business enterprise and entrepreneurship for adults with learning disabilities (ALD), through the development, testing and dissemination of a business enterprise training program that is tailored to the psychosocial, educational and developmental needs of ALD.

The main outcome from the BE Inspired Project was the training course that is now presented, following the phases of its development, adaptation, testing and dissemination. This accredited training course encompasses three units (Unit 1 – Enterprise and Enterprising Skills; Unit 2 – Personal Qualities and Abilities for Business; Unit 3 – Opportunities and Risks in Running a Business), which essentially focus on the acquisition, development and evaluation of skills and key-competencies that are best understood as means of empowering ALD, enhancing their self-determination, and ultimately improving their quality of life.

Subsequently to the project phases of **training needs analysis** and **adaptation of training materials**, a phase of **pilot testing** has been conducted in the participating countries. The organization of the pilot testing across countries was organized as follows: Unit 1 (Enterprise and Enterprising Skills) was tested in Portugal, Northern Ireland and Spain; Unit 2 (Personal Qualities and Abilities for Business) was tested in Finland and Spain; and Unit 3 (Opportunities and Risks in Running a Business) was tested in Spain. All pilot tests were carried-out between March and June 2014.

Participants in the pilot testing were organized in two groups: one group was composed by at least 10 ALD, who had attended the sessions for the implementation of the course unit(s) in their country; another group integrated a minimum of 5 stakeholders (e.g., trainers, vocational education and training [VET] specialists, employers), who expressed their views on the training course following the presentation of its materials. Results from those pilot tests were then systematized in a national report, provided by each participating country. Subsequently, the present international report was achieved through the compilation, integration and overall discussion of the results observed cross-culturally, thus allowing a comprehensive discussion on the course's adequacy, applicability, strengths and weaknesses.

The current international report is structured in three main sections: the first section describes the evaluative, subjective perceptions on the course, which were provided by ALD that attended the training sessions for the course module(s) or unit(s) in one of the participating countries; the second section presents the results from the assessment of the course by trainers and other stakeholders (usually VET specialists, family caregivers and employers); and finally, a third section summarizes the main observed results and highlights their major implications for the course's further development and improvement.

## Section I – Assessment of the Course Modules by Trainees

### 1. Participants

The sample for this pilot validation study comprised 41 adult individuals with a LD. The dimensions of each country's study sample are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Number of participants in the training course modules

Module	Countries	Number of Trainees
1 – Enterprise and Enterprising Skills	Portugal	31
	Northern Ireland	
	Spain	
2 – Personal Qualities and Abilities for Business	Finland	21
	Spain	
3 – Opportunities and Risks in Running a Business	Spain	11
		<b>Total N = 41*</b>

\* Spain was the only participating country to test the three course modules in a sample of 11 ALD. Therefore, the dimension of its sample only accounts once for the size of the overall sample.

### 2. Perceived importance, adequacy and impact of the training course

The majority of the participants (>50%) enjoyed participating in the training sessions of modules 1 and 3 to some significant extent. The exception to this trend was for module 2, where most participants expressed their little enjoyment in attending those sessions.

As for the length of the training course, most participants considered it adequate for module 1, too long for module 2, and too brief for module 3.

The large majority of participants (>80%) assessed the amount of practical exercises as adequate, and enjoyed those practical training exercises across all modules.

Also the majority of participants (>90%) reported the experience of positive subjective changes following the course attendance, such as feeling more informed, more reassured, more confident, more creative, more responsible and more hopeful. The exception to this was the pilot testing conducted in Spain, where 9 of its 11 participants consistently reported feeling more scared following the attendance of the course.

Nearly all participants (>90%) expressed their willingness to participate in other similar training initiatives if they had the opportunity to do so.

When asked for reasons to support that interest in attending similar training courses in the future, common motives indicated by the trainees included the following: to get to know more about jobs and enterprises; to extend the course's length; to acquire varied information that may improve our performance in different work settings; the opportunity to learn many other things about entrepreneurship; the motivation to learn more on this topic; the pleasure and joy of attending the training sessions; to learn new things; the theme is interesting; to improve job skills and entrepreneurial skills; the course was interesting, important and useful.

Finally, it is noteworthy that participants generally used highly positive words and expressions to describe the training sessions they had attended, such as: “spectacular”; “gratifying”; “informative”; “enterprising”; “great”; “beneficial”; “magnificent”; “good”; “interesting”; “funny”; “nice”; “supportive”; “not at all bad”; and “okay”.

Descriptive results (per module) on the trainees’ perceptions on the course are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Trainees' perceptions on the course's importance, adequacy and impact

Item	Response Categories	Module 1 (n = 31)		Module 2 (n = 21)		Module 3 (n = 11)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
2.1. How much did the participants enjoy the training sessions?	Not at all	1	3.2	7	33.3	1	9.1
	Just a little	2	6.5	6	28.6	2	18.2
	Somewhat	9	29.0	8	38.1	8	72.7
	Quite a lot	8	25.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Very much	11	35.5	0	0.0	0	0.0
	<b>Missing</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
2.2. How did the participants assess the length of the training delivered?	Too long	1	3.2	14	66.7	0	0.0
	Adequate	21	67.8	7	33.3	5	45.5
	Too brief	9	29.0	0	0.0	6	54.5
	<b>Missing</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
2.3. How much did the trainees enjoy the practical training exercises?	A lot	29	93.6	17	81.0	10	90.9
	Somewhat	2	6.4	4	19.0	1	9.1
	A little	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	<b>Missing</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
2.4. How did the trainees assess the amount of practical exercises included in the training course?	Too much	1	3.2	2	9.5	1	9.1
	Enough	27	87.1	18	85.7	9	81.8
	Not enough	3	9.7	1	4.8	1	9.1
	<b>Missing</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
2.5. What kind of subjective changes did the trainees perceive after attending the course?	More informed	29	93.6	20	95.0	10	90.9
	More scared	9	29.0	9	42.9	9	81.8
	More reassured	29	93.6	19	90.5	10	90.9
	More confused	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	More confident	29	93.6	19	90.5	10	90.9
	More creative	29	93.6	19	90.5	10	90.9
	More responsible	29	93.6	20	95.0	10	90.9
	More hopeful	28	90.3	20	95.0	10	90.9
2.6. Would the participants like to participate in other similar training initiatives, if they had that opportunity?	Yes	28	90.3	21	100	11	100
	No	3	9.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
	<b>Missing</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-

### 3. Trainees' likes and dislikes regarding the training course

When asked to state what they enjoyed the most and the least in the training course provided, negative remarks were mostly related to module 1, and included feelings of

confusion/exhaustion aroused by certain sessions/activities, the inadequate length of the course and the desire to alter specific training activities.

As regards trainees' likes and preferences, the utilization of interactive material and technologies was systematically reported across all the three modules.

The trainees' likes, dislikes and preferences about the training course modules are detailed in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Trainees' likes, dislikes and preferences about the training course

	Likes & Preferences	Dislikes
<b>Module 1- Enterprise and Enterprising Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- learning opportunity;</li> <li>- acquired knowledge;</li> <li>- group exercises;</li> <li>- positive interaction with peers;</li> <li>- clarity and good planning;</li> <li>- use of interactive technologies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- confusion aroused by certain activities;</li> <li>- exhaustion of some training sessions;</li> <li>- insufficient length of the course;</li> <li>- insufficient homework;</li> <li>- willingness to meet more entrepreneurs.</li> </ul>
<b>Module 2- Personal Qualities and Abilities for Business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- exercises and writing;</li> <li>- interactive material;</li> <li>- visiting entrepreneurs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reading;</li> <li>- watching videos.</li> </ul>
<b>Module 3- Opportunities and Risks in Running a Business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- interactive material (videos).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- none.</li> </ul>

#### 4. Additional comments and/or suggestions provided by trainees

There were few additional comments and/or suggestions reported by trainees. In general, those comments highlighted the participants' positive appraisals on the overall course and its usefulness. Specific comments and suggestions included: the acknowledgement of the course's quality and impact; the incorporation of more videos and audio material within the training activities; and the willingness to proceed with training on the topic.



## Section II – Assessment of the Training Course by Stakeholders

### 1. Participants

The training course in general and its modules were assessed by a number of different stakeholders in each country, which included trainers, parents/family caregivers, employers and VET specialists, among others. The final dimension of the sample for course validation by stakeholders is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Constitution of the sample of stakeholders

<i>Stakeholders</i>	<b>n</b>
Trainers	6
Parents/Caregivers	3
Employers	2
VET coordinator/specialist	6
Others	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>

### 2. General impression over the training course

The stakeholders' general impression over the "Be Inspired" training course was highly positive and generally attested the course's relevance and usefulness for both ALD and people delivering training to them or caregiving for them. The majority of participants assessed the training course as "very good" (67.9%). Although most participants considered the training contents very important (64.3%), and just about most of them perceived the course format as very adequate for the target population (53.6%), a considerable proportion of participants (53.6%) found that some (and not all) contents were difficult for ALD. In general, most stakeholders found the introductory section of the course very helpful (67.9%) and classified the utility of the course materials for trainers as "very useful" (71.5%). The majority of participants in this group (85.7%) perceived the initiative of making the training course available online for free download as "very important", and the large majority of them (82.2%) expressed no intention to introduce additional changes to the training course. Descriptive statistics for the stakeholders' general impression over the course are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Stakeholders' general impression over the course

Item	Response Categories	<i>n</i>	%
5.1. In general, how did the stakeholders rate the training course?	Very good	<b>19</b>	<b>67.9</b>
	Good	9	32.1
	Not good	0	0.0
	Missing	-	-
5.2. How did they assess the understandability of course contents?	The contents are easy	12	42.9
	Some contents are difficult	<b>15</b>	<b>53.6</b>
	The contents are difficult	1	3.5
	Missing	-	-
5.3. How did they perceive the adequacy of the course format?	Very adequate	<b>15</b>	<b>53.6</b>
	Fairly adequate	13	46.4
	Inadequate	0	0.0
	Missing	-	-
5.4. How relevant did they find the training contents for people with intellectual disabilities?	All very important	<b>18</b>	<b>64.3</b>
	Some important	10	35.7
	Not important at all	0	0.0
	Missing	-	-
5.5. How did they classify the utility of the course materials for trainers?	Very useful	<b>20</b>	<b>71.5</b>
	Fairly useful	7	25.0
	Not useful	0	0.0
	Missing	1	3.5
5.6. How helpful did they find the introductory section of the course?	Very helpful	<b>19</b>	<b>67.9</b>
	Fairly helpful	8	28.6
	Not helpful	0	0.0
	Missing	1	3.5
5.7. How did the stakeholders perceive the initiative of making the training course available for online free download?	Very important	<b>24</b>	<b>85.7</b>
	Fairly important	4	14.3
	Not important	0	0.0
	Missing	-	-
5.8. Would they like to introduce any changes to the training course?	Yes	4	14.3
	No	<b>23</b>	<b>82.2</b>
	Missing	1	3.5

## 2. Specific assessment of modules and training course in general

The majority of stakeholders ( $\geq 67\%$ ) expressed a very favorable assessment over the training course modules. These results are detailed in Table 6. For all course modules, **most stakeholders agreed** that:

- ...the contents were presented and explained clearly;
- ...the amount of practical exercises was adequate;
- ...the course format was adequate for ALD;
- ...the explanations, examples and activities were meaningful for the target population;
- ...the training course emphasized the acquisition of relevant adaptive coping skills;
- ...the handbooks were valuable tools for organizing training delivery;
- ...the contents and materials were well articulated;
- ...the course integrated regular evaluations on learning outcomes;
- ...the course was flexible and amenable to adjustments;
- ...the course was attractive for people who wanted to work on entrepreneurship issues in ALD.

**Table 6.** Stakeholders' specific assessment of modules and training course in general

Items	Modules and Response Categories	Response Categories	Module 1 Enterprise and Enterprising Skills (n = 23)		Module 2 Personal Qualities and Abilities for Business (n = 11)		Module 3 Opportunities and Risks in Running a Business (n = 6)	
			n	%	n	%	n	%
			6.1. The contents are presented and explained clearly.	Yes	23	100	11	100
	No	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
	Missing	-	-	-	-	-	-	
6.2. The amount of practical exercises is adequate.	Yes	23	100	10	90.9	6	100	
	No	0	0.0	1	9.1	0	0.0	
	Missing	-	-	-	-	-	-	
6.3. The format is adequate for people with intellectual disabilities.	Yes	23	100	11	100	6	100	
	No	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
	Missing	-	-	-	-	-	-	
6.4. The explanations, examples and activities are meaningful for the target population.	Yes	21	91.3	9	81.8	4	67.0	
	No	2	8.7	2	18.2	2	33.0	
	Missing	-	-	-	-	-	-	
6.5. The training course emphasizes coping skills that are relevant for the daily lives of people with intellectual disabilities.	Yes	21	91.3	9	81.8	4	67.0	
	No	2	8.7	2	18.2	2	33.0	
	Missing	-	-	-	-	-	-	
6.6. The handbooks are valuable tools for organizing training sessions.	Yes	20	87.0	10	90.9	6	100	
	No	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
	Missing	3	13.0	1	9.1	-	-	
6.7. The contents and materials are well articulated and integrated.	Yes	22	95.7	10	90.9	6	100	
	No	0	0.0	1	9.1	0	0.0	
	Missing	1	4.3	-	-	-	-	
6.8. The training course integrates regular evaluations on the trainee's learning outcomes throughout the course.	Yes	20	87.0	10	90.9	6	100	
	No	1	4.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	
	Missing	2	8.7	1	9.1	-	-	
6.9. The course is flexible and amenable to adjustments.	Yes	23	100	11	100	6	100	
	No	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
	Missing	-	-	-	-	-	-	
6.10. The training course is attractive for people who want to work on bullying issues in adults with intellectual disabilities or difficulties.	Yes	23	100	11	100	6	100	
	No	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	
	Missing	-	-	-	-	-	-	

### **3. Additional comments and/or suggestions provided by stakeholders**

Additional comments provided by stakeholders may be summarized as follows: highlighting of the quality, adequacy and pertinence of the training course; acknowledgement of the quality of training materials and the course's practical component; the recommendation for additional support when delivering training to more individuals with more severe LD.

## Section III – Synthesis and Discussion

### 1. Main results

The most consistent and remarkable result from this pilot validation study was that the training program “Be Inspired” was generally considered **adequate, valuable and well designed, both in terms of contents and format, by ALD and a variety of stakeholders**, including trainers, employers, family caregivers and VET specialists. Regarding the group of trainees, the present study gathered preliminary evidence for the course’s potential impact on the well-being of ALD. The trainees systematically pointed out the interactive pedagogical methodologies as preferred learning strategies during the course implementation. Concordantly, the assessment of the specific modules and the course in general by stakeholders was highly positive, thus consolidating the idea that this training course is adequate for ALD, useful for trainers, and flexible for different adjustments and applications. In fact, some specific sections or contents may have to be adjusted to the learning needs and characteristics of individuals with more severe LD.

### 2. Implications

The “BE Inspired” training program seems to be a valuable tool for promoting enterprising skills in ALD, and its application should be facilitated in a variety of settings, including VET programs for people with LD. The “BE Inspired” course is not a self-administered training tool, and therefore, its implementations should be performed and supervised by a trainer (who may be a teacher, a health professional, or other intervention agent), who is expected to be knowledgeable about the learning characteristics of ALD and entrepreneurship issues in general, as well as to monitor, facilitate and assist the trainees’ learning process and outcomes. Taken altogether, it seems reasonable to accept that, on the one hand, the training course is amenable to further slight improvements in order to best fit the learning characteristics of some ALD; however, on the other hand, it is crucial to acknowledge that some of the most useful training strategies for people with ID are those involving individualized and/or systematic guidance, assistance or support. In this sense, one may well suggest that a trainer’s know-how about the target population and the needs for adjusting the course contents, format and methods accordingly, will ultimately maximize the effectiveness of the training program, by increasing its positive impact on the lives of the people for whom it was designed.

### **3. Limitations**

Despite the contributions brought by this pilot validation study, four main limitations are to be acknowledged: first, the small size of our study samples do not allow us to straightforwardly rely on the observed results, and thus additional caution should be taken while interpreting them; second, although not crucial in the context of the current study, there were some discrepancies in the sampling frames adopted between the participating countries; third, the aggregation of results across countries/modules might have obscured some thought-provoking differences in the observed results; and fourth, no clinical, functional or socio-demographic data were systematically and reliably collected to characterize our study samples (even if the collection of such data was not vital for a pilot validation study like the present one).

### **4. Future directions**

Following the results from the present study, we conclude this international report by delineating three strategic venues for future research and practice with the “BE Inspired” training program: first, the program’s flexibility should be encouraged, by highlighting the course’s modular system, where specific modules may be taught in the context of other programs for the promotion of entrepreneurship, employability or related outcomes; second, the applicability of the “BE Inspired” training program in settings other than VET, such as mainstream schools, induction programs in enterprises or other adult education initiatives, should be ascertained; and finally, a reliable, longitudinal assessment of the impact of the training course in a series of adaptation outcomes of ALD (e.g., quality of life, social inclusion, employability) should be conducted within a prospective research design.