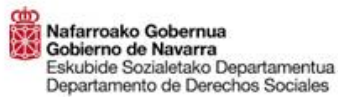# FORLAN

Basic skills learning strategies
for employment pathways

Executive Summary:

Learning Strategies

This project is led by the Navarre Employment Service in a public-private partnership:

servicio navarro
de empleo -
nafar lansare

Comisión
Europea

Gobierno de Navarra
Departamento de Educación
Nafarroako Gobernua
Hezkuntza Departamentua

Nafarroako Gobernua
Gobierno de Navarra
Eskubide Sozialetako Departamentua
Departamento de Derechos Sociales

OBSERVATORIO DE LA
REALIDAD SOCIAL
ERREALITATE SOZIALAREN
BEHATOKIA

anel
Empresa de Economía Social de Navarra
Nafarroako Gizarte Ekonomian Enpresak

FUNDACIÓN
LABORAL
DE LA CONSTRUCCIÓN

SERVICIO PÚBLICO
DE EMPLEO ESTATAL

SEPE

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1. Context

It is estimated that there about 70 million people in Europe who have difficulties in understanding texts, writing, doing simple calculations and using a computer. In Spain, the rate of people who do not have a good command of basic skills in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments is even higher, which poses a barrier for their employability and professional development.

The European Initiative "Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults" aims to help adults with a low level of qualifications to acquire basic communicative, mathematical and digital skills and/or obtain a qualification equivalent to secondary education.

The Forlan project falls within that initiative, and has in its core the development of new learning strategies and the updating of basic skills assessment systems.

2. A broad view of learning strategies

The Forlan project considers learning strategies from a wider perspective. It deals with much more than a given methodology or didactic approach. Special attention is given to (among other aspects): motivation, monitoring and accompaniment, support structures, development of transversal skills and good classroom climate.

Some persons in the Forlan target groups may have a negative view of education and training. This could be due to negative past experiences or a low self-concept of themselves in terms of their learning abilities. The latter improves after finishing the training.

2.1 Skills-based approach

The skills-based approach structures the training: content has to be connected to its practical application in work settings as well as in interpersonal, personal and social settings. In this way, the acquired knowledge becomes entwined with skills and attitudes. Everyday work and personal situations and problems, as realistic as possible, should be the starting point.

Multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary skills-based approach

The above should be achieved with the use of an interdisciplinary approach: an integration of the three areas (mathematical, communicative and digital) will be necessary even when content is specific to one of them. The approach also needs to look beyond and become metadisciplinary (development of emotional intelligence, autonomy, cooperation, tolerance, metacognition, etc. including the so called transversal or soft skills).

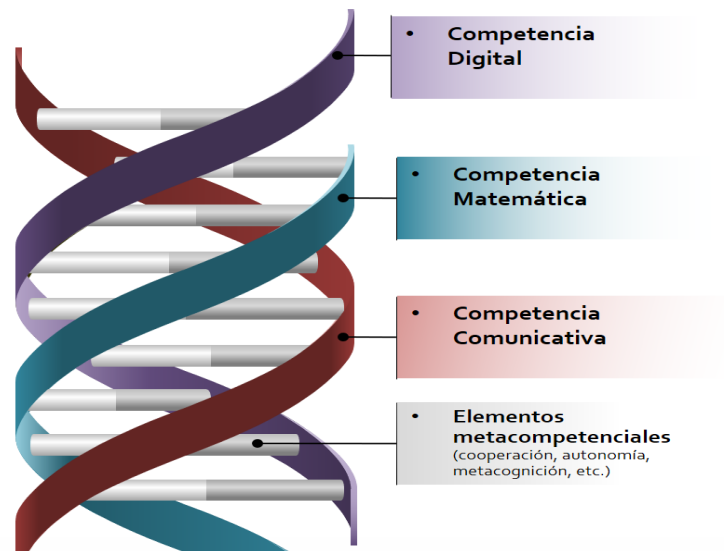The methodology used needs to have a wide approach.

Figure 1. Representation of the interdisciplinary and metadisciplinary approach.
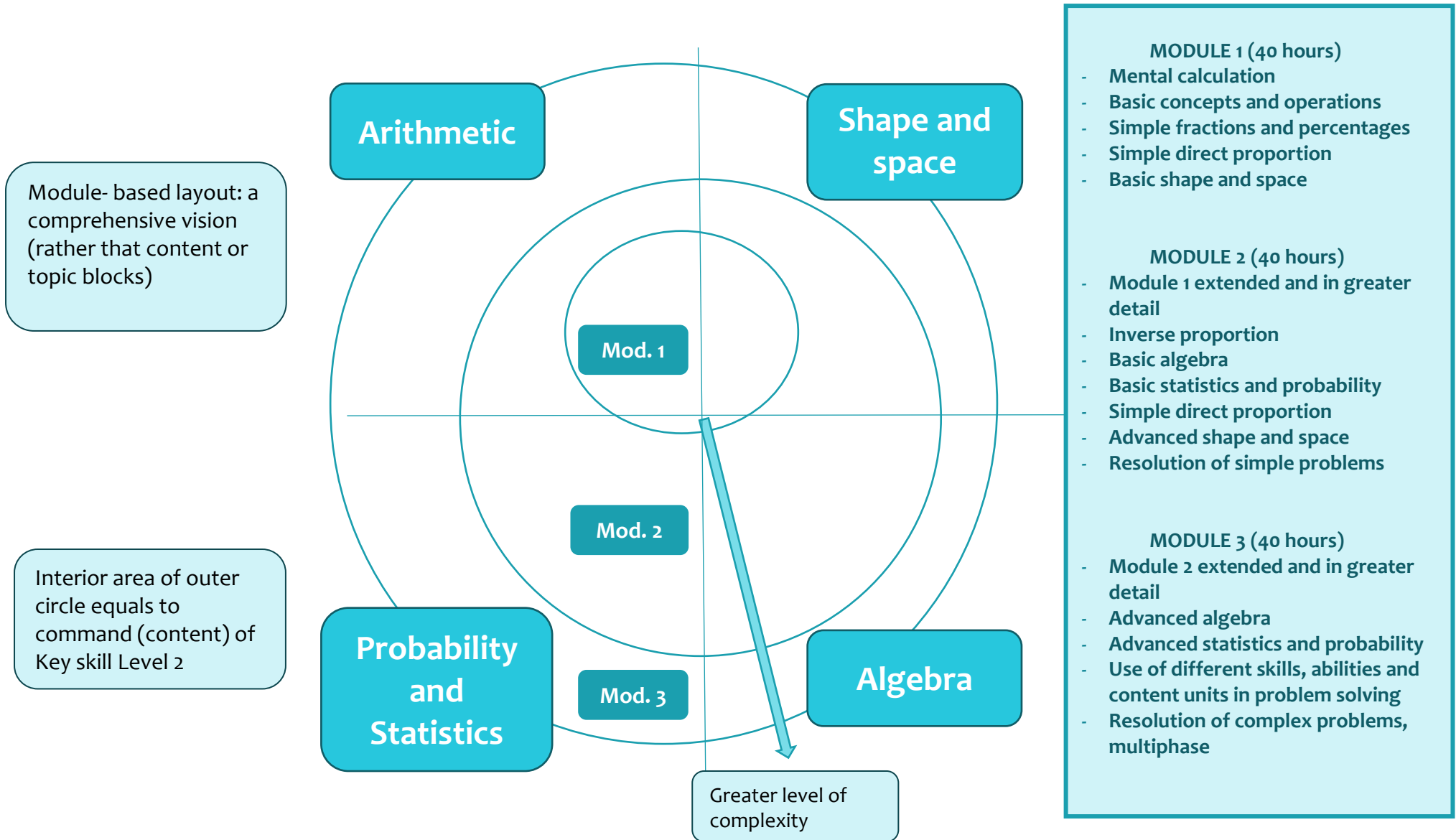
2.2   Module-based layout

A module-based layout is presented where every skill (mathematical, communicative in Spanish and digital) is allocated 40 hours.CN2 trainings are defined in the SEPE catalogue with the following references:

- Skill. Mathematical N2 (120 hours):   FCOV23
- Skill. Communicative in Spanish N2 (120 hours):   FCOV22
- Skill. Digital:
    - Basic (60 hours):   IFCT45
    - Advanced (60 hours):   IFCT46

At the ISA (Initial Skills Assessment) phase, the varied modules can be identified and recognised depending on the participant's previous knowledge. In this way, it is possible that some participants do not have to do training in full as some modules can be put aside (their number of class hours being reduced) by giving recognition to their previous knowledge.

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Module- based layout: a comprehensive vision (rather that content or topic blocks)

Arithmetic

Shape and space

Mod. 1

Mod. 2

Interior area of outer circle equals to command (content) of Key skill Level 2

Probability and Statistics

Mod. 3

Algebra

Greater level of complexity

MODULE 1 (40 hours)
- **Mental calculation**
- **Basic concepts and operations**
- **Simple fractions and percentages**
- **Simple direct proportion**
- **Basic shape and space**

MODULE 2 (40 hours)
- **Module 1 extended and in greater detail**
- **Inverse proportion**
- **Basic algebra**
- **Basic statistics and probability**
- **Simple direct proportion**
- **Advanced shape and space**
- **Resolution of simple problems**

MODULE 3 (40 hours)
- **Module 2 extended and in greater detail**
- **Advanced algebra**
- **Advanced statistics and probability**
- **Use of different skills, abilities and content units in problem solving**
- **Resolution of complex problems, multiphase**

2.3   Motivation and obstacles

Adults without a good command of basic skills in literacy and numeracy may have varied motivations for improving their skills. These may also change over time along with their priorities and circumstances in life. External and internal motivations often come together and they are multiple and complex.

Improving their concept of self-efficacy

The teaching team and the course methodology and design have an impact on the participants' motivation: the way content is presented, material and strategies used, suggested activities and the way they relate to the participants, the classroom climate, etc.

Given the low participation and high drop-out rates among the most vulnerable groups, it is considered essential to strengthen their motivation by working on their sense of self-efficacy with the creation of experiences promoting their self-confidence in their learning abilities.

Motivation and andragogy

Motivation is the key aspect which articulates cognitive, emotional and behavioural elements. It is necessary to consider motivation in teaching-learning processes but also in the promotional and registration stages of a project. This is more the case for adults with a low level of skills as they do not usually take part in training initiatives and when they do, their drop-out rates are high. As J.A Marina put it:

«Whoever holds the key to motivation, will, in turn, hold the key to human behaviour ».

2.4   The role of the teacher

The teaching professional working with adults is not simply an instructor. They have to play several roles: facilitator, information transmitter, agent for awareness, change and relations, manager, evaluator, tutor, coach, mentor, etc. Their role becomes more demanding and complex.

Ideally, an adult educator has to be willing to use new methodologies, avoid dogmatism and promote discussion and students' participation. They must be aware of the dynamics being developed in the group. They need to communicate effectively, contribute to a good classroom climate and lead the group towards their goals. They need to be aware of their own limits and realise the potential of personal interventions.

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The ideal teacher according to Malcolm Knowles

The following summarises the *ideal* teacher' behaviour according to the EPA:

Learning conditions or situations	Learning principles ("adequate" behaviour in teachers)
Students feel a need to learn	Provides students with new opportunities for personal fulfilment.
	Helps every student to clarify expectations so that they can improve their performance
	Helps students to see the gap between their aspirational goals and their current level of performance.
	Helps students identify day-to-problems they might experience because of their lack of skills
The learning environment is physically comfortable and characterised by mutual trust and respect, freedom of expression, mutual friendliness and acceptance of differences.	Comfortable physical conditions that facilitate interaction.
	Accepts every student as a valuable person and respects their feelings and ideas
	Tries to build personal relationships of mutual trust and kindness among students with the promotion of cooperative activities and avoiding judgement
	Shares his/her feelings and provides his/her resources in a companionship and common curiosity spirit.
Students perceive the objectives of a learning experience as their own.	Involves students in a reciprocal process where learning objectives are set. That process takes into account not only the student's needs but also the teacher's needs and those of the institution and society.
Students accept shared responsibility for the planning and running of the learning experience and consequently feel committed to it.	Shares his/her thoughts on the available choices with regard to the design of the learning experience and the selection of material and methods. S/he involves students in these choices and they make a joint decision.
Students participate actively in the learning process	Helps students to organise themselves (group projects, teaching/learning teams, autonomous revision, etc.) so that they share joint responsibility for the research process.
The learning process relates to the students' experience and uses it.	Helps students to exploit their own experience as a learning resource through the use of techniques such as role playing, case studies, etc.
	Adapts presentations of resources to the level of experience of every student.
Students feel they are making progress towards their goals	Helps students to apply new learning to their experience and, therefore, to make it more meaningful and connected.
	It involves students in the development and application of jointly accepted criteria for the assessment of learning goals.

Learning conditions or situations	Learning principles ("adequate" behaviour in teachers)
	Helps students develop and use methods for self-assessment.

Table 2 Andragogic principles according to Knowles, table slightly modified by Sánchez Domenec.[1].

3. Strategies for recruitment, commitment and accompaniment

Along the training, varied strategies are used to recruit participants and provide them with accompaniment before and after the course. Additionally, they also receive indirect extra support by means of the flexible training support fund which is used to lift or alleviate the existing barriers (in terms of the students' circumstances or disposition). It is thus intended to make the training more accessible and increase retention rate.

3.1   Initial skills Assessment (ISA)

It is essential to design initial assessment systems that do not become yet another barrier to access a training pathway. With that in view, the Initial Skills Assessment (ISA) is conceived as a process with different objectives:

- Recruiting and engaging users and motivating them to take training.
- Placing and connecting the training with the labour environment and companies' s needs
- Identifying barriers (with an emphasis on dispositional and institutional barriers)
- Presenting all the available supportive features (accompaniment, monitoring, flexible fund, virtual classroom, etc).
- Giving participants an opportunity to try out the active methodologies so that they can see that they are able to learn successfully.
- Participation (prior to the training course) in a workshop to work on motivational aspects, train skills, overcome barriers and set the ground for community learning.
- Assessing the initial skills levels, without showing deficiencies or stigmatisation, and checking whether it is sufficient to validate certain modules.

Phase 1 ISA: Recruitment

In the first phase of the ISA, persons meeting a number of requirements and being likely to benefit from the training are selected (for example, those under 30 are referred to *Garantía Juvenil* -Youth Guarantee).

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[1] SÁNCHEZ DOMENECH, I. (2015). *La andragogía de Malcom Knowles: Teoría y tecnología de la educación de adultos.* Universidad Cardenal Herrera-CEU. P. 184. Available at https://repositorioinstitucional.ceu.es/handle/10637/7599

Phase 2 ISA: Commitment

 A pre-training workshop is held to detect possible barriers (real or perceived) with respect to the training. Some tools are provided in order to tackle them and, in some cases, overcome them in the course of the workshop. This is often the case with certain perceived and dispositional barriers. The workshop is also useful for some situational barriers as participants have the opportunity to learn about certain public services they did not know of.

- o There is also some initial work on more personal aspects (motivation, self-esteem, etc.) which is extended along the course of the training in transversal skills.
- o This allows some participants to gain some momentum which is key in their decision to star the training.

With respect to participation, literature distinguishes between work-oriented and non-work oriented reasons, although for many authors they overlap. In addition, motivation can derive from interest in the learning activity and the personal value associated with it, or from external pressure that compels the person to participate - to obtain rewards or avoid sanctions. **The workshop also addresses the work-related dimension of motivation in order to increase participation in the training course**.

Phase 3 ISA: Assessment

The purpose of this last phase, the assessment phase, is to evaluate the initial level of skills, to determine whether the minimum requirements in mathematical, communicative and digital skills are met. The narrative that is given to participants is essential and influences the test design.

It is intended that they see the process not as an exam, but as an opportunity for them to evaluate what they already know and thus define the training pathway that best suits their needs.

3.2   Personalised monitoring, tuition and guidance

Participants are individually monitored by the teaching staff. They are also supported by the technical team at SNE-NL and the Department of Social Rights.

Personalised Support

The training offered support classes in summer and online tuition sessions in the virtual classroom every Friday. It also offered some participants personalised pathways (as required by their circumstances) so that they could continue the training.

Monitoring participants

A number of communication channels between teachers and other staff (TGM, counsellors and social services) are established and used for exchanging information about students, incidents, attendance, etc.

The training itself takes a considerable effort and participants may have other difficulties - personal or derived from their environment. Teachers are to pay close attention to students with the view of supporting them.

Online support, Moodle environment

With the use of Moodle an online space with classrooms for every skill was created. Those classrooms contain videos, activities, links of interest, etc. Much of the content was created within the Forlan project and is available in SCORM format. The teaching team uploads some other content (exercises, tasks, summaries) sometimes for all participants and sometimes only for their specific groups.

Additionally, forums and instant messaging allow students to submit queries and ask questions so that the EDEA team can provide the answers.

One of the goals is making the training more flexible and for students to have resources to go over the content covered in the classroom and get some practice or catch up if they were not able to attend the session. As they use the virtual environment, they develop their digital skills.

Online tutoring

Videocalls are held in the Moodle environment. They are recorded and can be accessed for a week with the use of a plug-in (Big Blue Button). This is a support session devoted to clarification of queries and concepts and revision of content.

Communication with WhatsApp

The use of WhatsApp provides instant communication and problem resolution becomes easier. The distance between the «institution» and the person is thus shortened.

3.3 Flexible training support Fund

"Flexible Training Support Fund" refers to a variety of additional supporting measures that can contribute to lifting obstacles in individual pathways. Therefore, they should be assessed and designed on an individual basis.

 In the framework of the Forlan project, the main purpose of the flexible fund is to solve unforeseen events and circumstances affecting participants and that may be present at the beginning or occur during the course of the training.

The aim is to improve the accessibility of the training for people in more vulnerable situations and not to put the training course outcomes at risk.
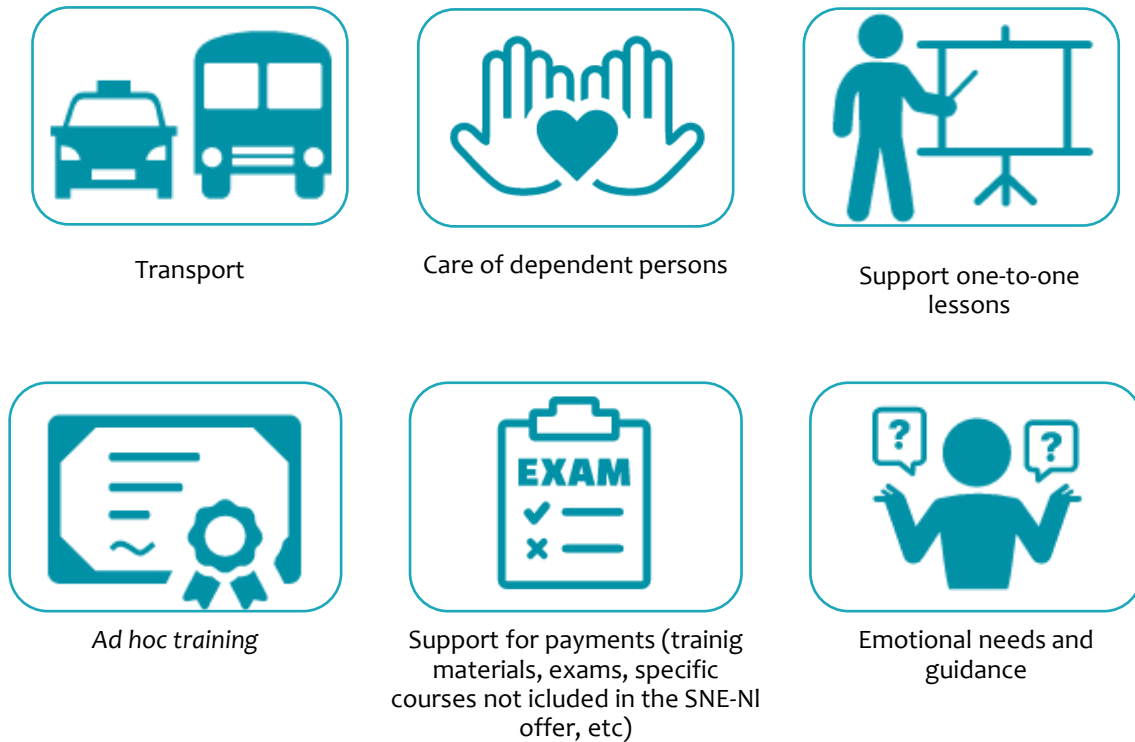
Transport	Care of dependent persons	Support one-to-one lessons
Ad hoc training	Support for payments (trainig materials, exams, specific courses not icluded in the SNE-Nl offer, etc)	Emotional needs and guidance

Figure 2. Individual needs that could be met by the Flexible Support Fund.

The funding of this type of actions and/or activities is subject to a technical and professional appraisal.

4. Training in transversal skills

It is obvious that social and emotional skills are very important not only in our private lives but also in the workplace. They are also called soft skills, noncognitive skills or transversal skills. Besides the training in mathematical, communicative and digital skills, participants are also given training in transversal skills (or soft skills) supplementary to those in CN2.

It is a 40-hour training covering the following matters:

Self-knowledge	Ability to learn and adapt	Initiative and proactivity	individual organization of work tasks

Achievement drive	Communication	Customer care (external and internal)	Team work

Figure 3. Matters covered by transversal skills.

The teacher responsible for transversal skills supports both the teaching staff and the students. S/he mediates and handles the needs that might arise during the training. S/he also aids in detecting and assessing any obstacles and building tools to overcome them, etc. Besides, this teacher helps students to make commitments -individually and as a group- towards their academic, professional and personal development.

The students are listened to and given support and guidance. Among other aspects, work is done on defining personal and professional objectives and helping students to define progress strategies and achieve them.

4.1   Community and classroom climate

The use of the physical space -arrangement of desks, lighting- and the teacher's behaviour (openness and horizontality) etc., are factors that need to be considered in order to have a true community and the best possible climate in the classroom. The teacher is just another person in the group and not an authority figure. His/her behaviour has a great impact in the classroom climate. The ideal characteristics to be promoted are:

- Mutual respect
- Proximity, support, horizontality
- Freedom to express yourself, to be yourself and be free from any pressure.
- They know each other by their first names and everyone is seen as a person.
- The focus is on learning (not on teaching processes)

- Experience and differences are another resource
- Active listening, for everyone
- Mutual trust and responsibility

- Participation in decision-making processes that are related to their learning

Some advice on how to create a good climate in the classroom

In order to have a good atmosphere in the classroom the following should be considered:

- The role played by the teacher
- Socio-affective interactions among participants and teachers
- Physical space (natural light, acoustics, ventilation, low level of noise, space organization)
- Relation and communication (rules, cordiality and respect, neutrality, control on prejudice, appraisal of achievements)
- Enjoyment and relaxation (a sense of humour, play, brain breaks)
- Group management, use of group dynamics and building a learning community

4.2. Mindfulness, meditation and relaxation exercises

Numerous mindfulness-based interventions in education have shown benefits for both teachers and students in cognitive, emotional and social dimensions.

On the other hand, the concept of cognitive load and the time required for creative thinking make it necessary to include brain breaks, through breathing, visualisation, relaxation exercises, etc.

5. Strategies for engaging students

5.1. The power of a question

Generally speaking, **any good question can be an efficient tool in teaching-learning processes**. A well-formulated question can help assess their knowledge, foster understanding, stimulate critical thinking, lead to new knowledge and perceptions, discussion, etc.

Some objectives when asking questions:

- Search for specific information
  - Questions to determine facts, feelings or emotions, to find out more about a process followed in the classroom, etc.
- Help and guide students towards their own solutions.
  - Coaching- like questions intended to activate the students' resources, skills and capabilities and encourage the exploration of opportunities and solutions.
- Development of critical thinking
  - Questions that, upon reflection and questioning, help us construct knowledge.

5.2. Dialogic learning and participatory techniques

Dialogical learning is a way of implementing teacher-student horizontality, of bringing in the rich world of the adult and his or her experiences as a learning resource.

Dialogic learning[2]

The communicative approach belongs to the socio-historical context of the information society. In that society, processing information has become more important than storing it. More than the subjective and individual experience, it is the dialogue and constant interaction with a huge multiplicity of actors and resources that matters.

- Dialogue is egalitarian when all contributions and interventions are considered on the basis of their validity and not on the basis of imposition or power relations.
- Learning begins with interactions between peers.
- Learning also takes place outside the classroom, in the street, at home, in the cultural group, in the local library, at the coffee-bar.
- Possible interactions multiply learning opportunities.
- The connection between different learning environments should be promoted.
- As Freire put it, "Dialogue does not take place in a specific methodological format, but in an attitude of dialogue, which fosters epistemological curiosity and the recreation of culture".

Based on the pedagogy of P. Freire, who rejected the deficit model, in which students are treated as empty containers to be filled with the teacher's expertise, some participatory techniques are used, such as those found in the L&W[3]. Such participatory techniques are ideal for exploring issues and generating sub-themes that are relevant to students, bringing their knowledge into the classroom, generating debate, prompting reflection and analysing the paradigm that each person holds.

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[2] CREA (Community of Research on Excellence for All). (2018). *Aprendizaje dialógico en la sociedad de la información.* STEP4SEAS.
[3] LEARNING & WORK INSTITUTE. (2017). *Citizen's curriculum Activity Pack for Participatory Learning.* learningandwork.org.uk. Available at https://learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/_Citizens-Curriculum-Activity-Pack-for-Particpatory-Learning.pdf

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Discussions and debates

Organised debates and discussions are more fruitful. They can be combined with the flipped classroom. Also, the participants can be given in advance some specific questions on the matter to be debated/discussed.

Debates can be hold in small groups to be later shared with the whole of the class or be open to everyone in the class. It is important to set some ground rules for the running of the debate/discussion.

5.3. Using art, narrative and life stories

It is recommended using art, narrative and storytelling and working on creativity. The aim is to present **stimuli activating the emotional side**, to work with the highly symbolic nature of art and activate processes other than the cognitive ones.

For example, meaningful texts or inspiring images with *google* searches for:

- Pawel Kuczynski (social criticism and politics)
- Vladimir Kush (Russian surrealist artist)
- Rob Gonsalves (magic realism)
- Fiddle Oak (surrealist photo manipulations)

> *"To be a person is to have a story. More than that, it is to be a story"*
> **Kenyon and Randall**

Stories and learning

With a story we can experience the truthfulness and credibility of something, remember it and be entertained. Making sense of a story takes an active effort to make meaning; we use what we already know to fill in the gaps in the story we are told.

> Stories are instruments of transformation as well as information. Being the familiar territory of human experience, they allow us to face new knowledge, widen our horizons, expand our possibilities, relate to characters that change and evolve, etc.

Autobiographies

Narratives and identity go hand in hand. The building of ourselves we do not always use the same stories. Our life stories can change, even contradict one another. Context is also a factor. As context and circumstances change, we re-write, re-tell and re-build ourselves.

Regarding identity as a narrative construction can help to form a concept of the change. Writing about your own life can help development and transformation.

5.4. Role-playing and dramatisation

Here students play the role of someone involved in a particular situation or problem - the more realistic the better. Students give examples of ideas and skills or practice them as they play roles in situations where these are typically applied. Enacting personal or professional situations might be of great interest.

Role-playing makes it possible for them to take on a different identity and realise how other people think, feel and behave.

6. Didactic strategies

The learning strategies are varied and adapted to the classroom context. They are selected by the teaching staff at their discretion and according to the course of the training. In any case, active methodologies are to be promoted where teachers act as guides and facilitators. The "teachers-have-all-the-answers" approach should be avoided.

Life experiences, baggage and previous knowledge are resources that can be used in the classroom. The students' drive and autonomy should be encouraged with the use of scaffolding and tasks of graded difficulty, etc. Teachers need to be but a temporary support. Students cannot continue to depend on them for ever.

Activities have to be useful, relevant and meaningful with regard to their daily lives /personally and professionally)

Diverse methodologies are used:

- Use of active methodologies, implemented at different levels of complexity.
- Use of Bloom's taxonomy for the definition of learning objectives.
- Collaborative and cooperative learning
- Problem-based learning and case method
- Project-based learning
- Gamification and play-based learning
- Flipped classroom
- Strategies for learning to learn
  - Cognitive strategies
  - Metacognitive strategies
  - Use assessment as a learning tool:
    - Assessment by teacher during and in between face-to-face sessions.
    - Self-assessment
    - Co-assessment

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7. Conclusion

The elements transversal to the learning Strategies are the following:

- **Skills approach**, far beyond the transmission of content.
- Interdisciplinary and metadisciplinary perspectives (integrating mathematical, communicative and digital skills and other aspects such as metacognition, learning to learn, emotional intelligence, etc.).
- **Individualisation and personalisation**, use of scaffolding to cater for diversity and respect different learning paces and starting levels.
- The teacher as **facilitator and guide**, in a horizontal relationship
- **Development of transversal skills.** With a parallel training on key skills
- **Active methodologies** that are focused on learning processes rather than on teaching processes
- Learners take in new learning when they are directly involved in the process.
- Encouragement and development of students' **autonomy and participation** along the learning process -they can make decisions that affect the design of the training.
- Let their voice be heard, an in as much as possible, be followed.
- Teachers have **flexibility** in the choice of activities, learning situations and methodologies.
- They should always be attentive to the particular classroom context and reflect continuously on their teaching practice.
- Using **students' experience** as a didactic resource.
- Relaxed classroom climate, where students and teachers can share ideas, feeling and experience.
- The importance of the **classroom community and group dynamics.**
- The importance of communication and soft skills
- The teacher takes into account the **students' motivation** as well as the barriers they may encounter.
- Identifies urgent and immediate needs that students may have with regard to their training objectives.
- Use of contexts and learning situations as close as possible to their **real life**, both personal and professional.
- Linking training to the **labour environment** and their **daily lives.**
- **Transformative and self-conceptual learning.**
- Including work and development related to socio-emotional aspects, especially in work contexts.
- Use of art, the humanities and the **aesthetic experience** as a resource in the classroom.

The focus should always be maintained on learning processes rather than on teaching processes. The core of the training are the students. Consideration must be given to what sparks and enables learning form the students' perspective. In the design and implementation of activities questions such as what is hindering learning, why the activity is relevant and positive, what facilitates learning need to be considered.

Learning triggers are connected to barriers, motivation and learning facilitators (such as the use of online resources if face-to-face attendance is not possible).

It is a complex and always changing relationship.