



WORKSHOP MANUAL

Breaking down disability: Removing barriers

by Leonor Albuquerque Amaral

Alfred
Herrhausen
Gesellschaft

Schwarzkopf 
Stiftung
JUNGES EUROPA 

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→ *Note from the author:* you are encouraged to read the glossary before starting to read the rest of the manual, as it will help you better understand the vocabulary used throughout.

1. Introduction

This workshop is aimed at de-stigmatising ideas connected to disability and empower young people to advocate for Disability Justice. At the end of the workshop, pupils should be more comfortable and knowledgeable regarding the concept of disability. The idea is that, through exercises which expand and explore their current ideas and pre-conceptions about disability, those participating in the workshop can challenge themselves and experience collective growth, to create understanding beyond pity. The students will then be introduced to the idea of disability as socially constructed, meaning it is lived and built through interactions with other people and one's culture, and not purely medical experience.

The workshop is aimed at all pupils, including non-disabled, pre-disabled, and disabled students between the ages of 14 and 18. It will encourage non-disabled students to advocate for their disabled counterparts in school, and throughout their lives, including in their future employment, relationships, and communities. Further, it will allow students who will go on to develop a disability to hopefully find resources and feel more at peace in their bodies. Lastly, this workshop will allow the burden of education on disability to be partially removed from disabled students.

The workshop has been developed by a disabled person in cooperation with other members of the community. This manual will include further resources that can be used in preparation for this workshop. As you go on to deliver this workshop, remember not to put the disabled students at the centre of this, or in any way pressure them to serve as an educational resource for their classmates. Further, clarify your positionality¹ in the topic (if you are comfortable) and stress the diversity present within the disabled community – even if you are disabled, you cannot speak for all disabled people.



The workshop is two hours (120min) long, with a 10-minute break in between. The most important part of the workshop is to create an environment where pupils are comfortable sharing their thoughts, while not voicing ableist comments that will hurt the disabled people in the room. It starts with a few minutes where hopefully this will be communicated and understood, alongside the aims and expectations for students. Setting this tone is incredibly important as this workshop aims to be accessible for all disabled people. A clear explanation of rules, expectations, and norms is important for the comfort of many neurodivergent people.

There is an audio recording of this manual available on the website. Please note that extra resources, links and the table of contents can only be found in the written version.



DURATION

110 minutes without a break



TARGET GROUP

aimed at all pupils, including non-disabled, pre-disabled, and disabled students between the ages of 14 and 18



FORMAT

digital or on site



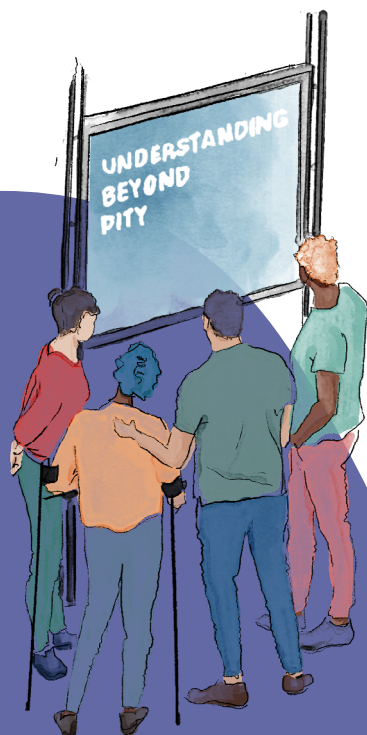
MATERIALS

DIGITAL

zoom or other software for online meetings;
Miro or other software for a digital whiteboard.

ON SITE

markers, flipcharts, and a projector for the PowerPoint presentation.



2. Schedule

| DURATION | MODULE | METHODS / TOOLS | DESCRIPTION |
|--------------|--|---|---|
| 10 min | MODULE 1.1 Welcome and expectations | PowerPoint, open circle | Quick round of introductions, followed by the explanation of the workshop and what pupils can expect. |
| 10 min | MODULE 1.2 Animal match | Ice breaker, pieces of paper with different animal species on them. | Each student is given a piece of paper with an animal name on it, they are then supposed to imitate the animal's sound and shape to find the other student(s) with the same animal. |
| 35 min | MODULE 2 Duck ramps | Group work; flipcharts and markers | Pupils are challenged to design a product that would be useful to the animal from the former activity but useless to humans (example below and in PowerPoint). |
| BREAK | | | |
| | MODULE 3 Accessibility for all | Group work | Pupils are presented with disabled people with different disabilities and are then challenged to rethink a product, space, or event they are familiar with to make it accessible for this person. |
| 10 min | MODULE 3.1 Meet our stars | Input | In groups, pupils are shown a video or given a card with a disabled person talking about their day to day lives and access needs. |
| 15 min | MODULE 3.2 Re-design your life | Group work | Pupils are asked to rethink and redesign any aspect from their daily routine to make it more accessible to the disabled person they have just been introduced to. |
| 20 min | MODULE 3.3 Presenting ideas | Open round | Each group explains their thoughts and the results of their work. Trainers can moderate a small discussion or Q&A regarding the design. |
| 10 min | MODULE 4 Wrap Up | Open round | Pupils are asked what they have learnt during the workshop and are given recommendations of shows, books, etc. related to disability. Expected learning outcomes are made explicit by the trainer. Pupils are then given a feedback form to fill out. |

3. Implementation

3.1 Before the workshop – Educational preparation

One's positionality and awareness of disability is central to the delivery of this workshop. As a trainer, one is not expected to be an expert on disability, but rather willing to learn and to actively de-constructing ableism and questioning their practices and attitudes towards disability. A summary of terms you should be familiar with can be found at the end of this manual. You should read them, ensure you understand them, and ideally include them in your vocabulary when delivering the workshop.

The main goal of this workshop is to introduce the concept of disability as a **social experience, rather than a purely medical one**. This idea is based on the two main models used to explain disability within an academic context: the medical and the social model.

The medical model sees disability as something to be fixed, and the disabled person is seen as an object of study and observation. This model sees the disabled person's impairment as what causes barriers to full participation in society.

The social model sees disability as a dynamic experience, whereby society's inability to accommodate for one's disability is seen as the central issue instead of the disabled person's body. This way, the model centres the need for a shift in society to accommodate for disabled people, rather than changing disabled bodies. It can be illustrated with the following example: a person who can access glasses is not disabled by their "different" sight abilities, but a blind person would be, since our societies are mostly not built to accommodate for blind people.

Similarly, in most Western societies, deaf people are disabled, as their participation in mainstream society is limited, but in many Native American societies, deaf people were not disabled, as the entire population was fluent in sign language. [This TikTok](#) also explains the social model quite well.

HELPFUL METAPHOR EXPLAINING THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

(credits to @txwatson on TikTok)

If tomorrow you woke up and everyone but you could fly, you would not be disabled. It would be a shame that you wouldn't be able to experience this cool thing, but you could still go about life like before. However, if your school decided to build a cool new building with open shafts that you could only fly into, then you would be disabled, because that would be when your environment would fail to accommodate you.

The social model is the rationale behind the different parts and activities of this workshop. Additional materials to further familiarise oneself with disability can be found below.

Books about disability:

- Capitalism & Disability by Marta Russel [Book]
- Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha [Book]
- Claiming Disability: Knowledge & Identity by Simi Linton [Book]
- Crippled by Frances Ryan [Book]

Shows, Videos & documentaries:

- [Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution](#) (Documentary, available on Netflix & Youtube)
- [Special](#) (Netflix Show)
- [Social Model of Disability](#) (YouTube video)
- Our fight for disability rights and why we're not done yet (Ted Talk by Judith Heumann)

Recommended (English speaking) creators:

- Imani Barbarin ([@Crutches_and_Spice](#) on Instagram and [TikTok](#))
- Eliza ([@Disabled_Eliza](#) on Instagram and [TikTok](#))
- Jess ([@thechroniciconic](#) on Instagram)
- Melissa Blake ([@MelissaBlake81](#) on Instagram)
- Cathy Reay ([@CathyReayWrites](#) on Instagram)

3.2 Implementation

Before the workshop – analogue implementation:

- Have a few flipcharts and markers with you (if this is not possible and the pupils have access to a computer, they can use the computer instead of the flipchart)
- Bring paper tape
- Assess whether you will have access to a projector
- Inform yourself of the number of students you will be working with
- Prepare the small pieces of paper for Module 1.2
- Make sure you have all workshop materials at hand.

Before the workshop – online implementation:

- Have a [Zoom](#) room (with breakout rooms)
- Prepare software for participants to co-create on (they can do this on zoom and be asked to take a screenshot, or they can also use a [Miro](#) board)
- Indicate your pronouns and name within Zoom
- Prepare for all group work to be done in breakout rooms.



MODULE 1.1

Welcome and expectations — 10 min

Have students help you rearrange the room for there to be a half circle of chairs, give out tape and markers so they can write their names and pronouns (if they feel comfortable doing so). Welcome the students to the room, and once you start, introduce yourself, Understanding Europe, and this workshop. Do a quick round of names so you get to know the students a bit, too.

Explain that students are allowed to ask any questions, but that this is not a space to discuss whether disabled people are “worthy” of participating in society. Mention that if this gets overwhelming for anyone at any point, they are free to step out of the room for some air, no questions asked. Then introduce the schedule for the workshop and open the floor for questions.

→ **Online implementation:** open the Zoom room, let the students in and make small talk until most students have joined. Encourage them to change their names to include pronouns. Share your screen with the PowerPoint while you are explaining things.

MODULE 1.2

Animal match — 10 min

You can find an explanation of the game here . Distribute the pieces of paper you prepared with the different animal names and instruct students to find the other student(s) with the same animal only by doing animal sounds and gesturing, no words allowed.

→ **Online implementation:** you can either find a creative way of adapting this to online (e.g. have participants type the animal names or sounds in the chat), or you can just scrap this activity and split them into breakout rooms directly (module 2). You can let them pick their own animal in the case of the former.

MODULE 2

Duck ramps — 35 min

Once the students find their peers, you can introduce the following task. Show the picture of a duck ramp and talk about how most things around us are designed to make human lives easier, but how there are a few designs aimed at animals, which are useless to humans. Then, challenge the students to design their own product for the animal they were assigned.

Give them 15 minutes for creating the product and have them present it to the rest of the group after they are finished. Each group decides how they can present their findings (one person, several people, etc.). Instead of flip-charts, the pupils can also use PowerPoint or other digital tools at hand to make their design.

→ **Online implementation:** show the students the slides by sharing your screen. After the task is explained, put them into breakout rooms with a timer and make sure they are allowed to share their screen for the presentation.



MODULE 3

Accessibility for all

This is the main activity of this workshop. Decide whether pupils keep the same groups or make new ones.

→ **Online implementation:** create breakout rooms with a timer. Enter each room and send the assigned person to each group individually.



MODULE 3.1

Meet our stars — 10 min

Each group gets assigned one disabled person. They are either given the card corresponding to this person or are told who they are assigned to and watch all videos with the rest of the class. The content in both these resources is the same, with the same disabled people talking about their day to day lives and access needs.

MODULE 3.2

Re-design your life — 15 min

Afterwards, they are challenged to think of a space, an event, or object that is a part of their lives but not accessible to the respective person. Provide plenty of examples: their school, the public transport network in their area, their favourite park, a club they are a part of, etc. The pupils are then challenged to re-think the identified space and suggest changes to make it more accessible to the disabled person they were assigned and introduced to. They have 15 minutes to complete this task and decide how they will present it to the larger group.

MODULE 3.3

Presenting ideas — 20 min

All groups present their ideas, first they introduce the person who they are aiming to include and then they introduce the space they are looking to improve. Moderate a small Q&A and space for discussion and feedback among the students.

MODULE 4

Wrap up — 10 min

This is a space for pupils to reflect on what they learnt during the workshop and how they can take it further. Start off by asking for something they have come to realise or learnt during the workshop. Ask follow-up questions such as “did anyone else think of something similar?”. Proceed with asking how this applies to their day-to-day reality, plined through the centuries.

It is okay if the conversation flows in a different direction. Just ask follow-up questions that feel natural and when it feels natural to do so. Below you can find some question examples and you can also use the PowerPoint slides for further guidance.

Finish up by giving them some recommendations of media content connected to disability that they can connect with (listed in the PowerPoint). Make sure they fill out the feedback form and then you can let them go. Please stay after the module to support any students or answer questions.

Some discussion questions:

- Have these activities changed the way you see the space you chose?
- Can you think of simple ways you can support the disabled community in your present and future lives?
- What have you learnt in this workshop that you wish more people knew about?
- Do you see disability differently now? In what way?
- Think of careers you would like to follow. How could you be a good ally to the disabled community in that profession?

→ **Online implementation:** for the open discussion, don't have the PowerPoint open so that people's faces (including yours) are more visible to participants.



AUTHOR

Leonor Albuquerque Amaral

Leonor (she/her) is a young disabled woman, an educator, and a disabled rights advocate. She is originally from Portugal and moved to The Netherlands at the age of 18 to pursue higher education. She is a humanities student and focuses on Disability Studies in her academic and non-academic work. She is active in her student community, forming groups and spaces for her disabled and chronically ill peers. She has been involved with the Understanding Europe project for five years, adopting different roles over time. She is also an active member of the European Youth Parliament, where she is chair of the Safe Core Team, the body tasked with all matters connected to participant safety, welfare, and wellbeing in the network.

4. Glossary

ABLEISM – The structural marginalisation of disabled people, through the centring of nondisabled needs and experiences in mainstream society.

DESTIGMATISATION – The removal of stigma; making dialogue around a certain topic more accessible, as to change social perception around it (generally to make it less negative).

DISABILITY JUSTICE – The radical transformation not only of laws, but also of other practices, such as cultural norms and economic policy, towards a future of true equality for all disabled people.

DISABLED PEOPLE (IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE) OVER PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE) – The term “disabled people” highlights disability as an identity marker, and a collective experience, rather than an isolated individual one, to which “persons” strongly alludes. The term “disabled people” also presents disability as something that is external to disabled people, meaning they are disabled by their surrounding environment, rather than something intrinsic to each individual.

IMPAIRMENT – A physical difference or medical condition, such as a limb difference or diabetes.

NONDISABLED – The portion of the population that is not currently disabled.

PRE-DISABLED – Individuals who will become disabled later in life, but who are not yet disabled. Almost covers the entire population, since, as humans age, most become disabled.

POSITIONALITY – The relationship one has to a certain topic, recognising that humans are not capable of complete impartiality. How a person’s background connects (or fails to connect) to a certain topic, how the topic has affected them throughout their lives, and what impact it currently has on them.

Source: All terms have been defined by the author.

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V. i. S. d. P.

Thimo Nieselt

Editors

Martha Manuela Bienert
Friedrich Landenberger
Sean Mackenney

Author

Leonor Albuquerque Amaral

Layout

Friederike Schlenz
Vardges Shahmenendyan

Illustration

Vardges Shahmenendyan

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