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“Start with Self”

Inclusive Training Proficiency

*A competence model for business trainers and
educators who care*

Part 1

**Understanding yourself and
reflective practice**

Understanding yourself and reflective practice

Inclusive training begins with self-awareness. Before we can create equitable learning spaces, we must first understand how our own beliefs, biases, and experiences shape the way we teach and interact. **Understanding Yourself and Reflective Practice** invites trainers to “start with self” — to examine their motivations, emotional triggers, and assumptions.

This competence helps you develop authentic presence, emotional balance, and the reflective mindset needed to respond consciously rather than react impulsively. It’s the foundation of all other inclusive practices, because true inclusion starts with knowing yourself.

From this e-book, you will learn:

1. What is Understanding Yourself and Reflective Practice competence?
2. What might hold you back?
3. How to identify excluding behaviours?
4. How to do it differently?
5. What are the good practices that will help you develop this competency?
6. How to begin

Grow your inclusive competencies!

Check out other competencies from our model!

INCLUDE Project Team





1 Understanding yourself and reflective practice

1. What is Understanding Yourself and Reflective Practice?



1.1 Definition

Understanding Yourself and Reflective Practice is the continuous, compassionate practice of looking inward to understand your personal identity and its intersection with the world around you. For a trainer, this means examining not only your skills and teaching style, but also your deeply held beliefs, biases, and privileges.

It's an active process of observing your emotional and cognitive responses during a session, especially in moments of friction or discomfort. By doing this, you can identify how your personal lens may be affecting the learning environment. This self-assessment is the foundation for a reflective practice focused on equity and inclusion, where you intentionally work to create a safe and just space for every learner.

1.2 If you're interested in expanding your knowledge about research and sources:

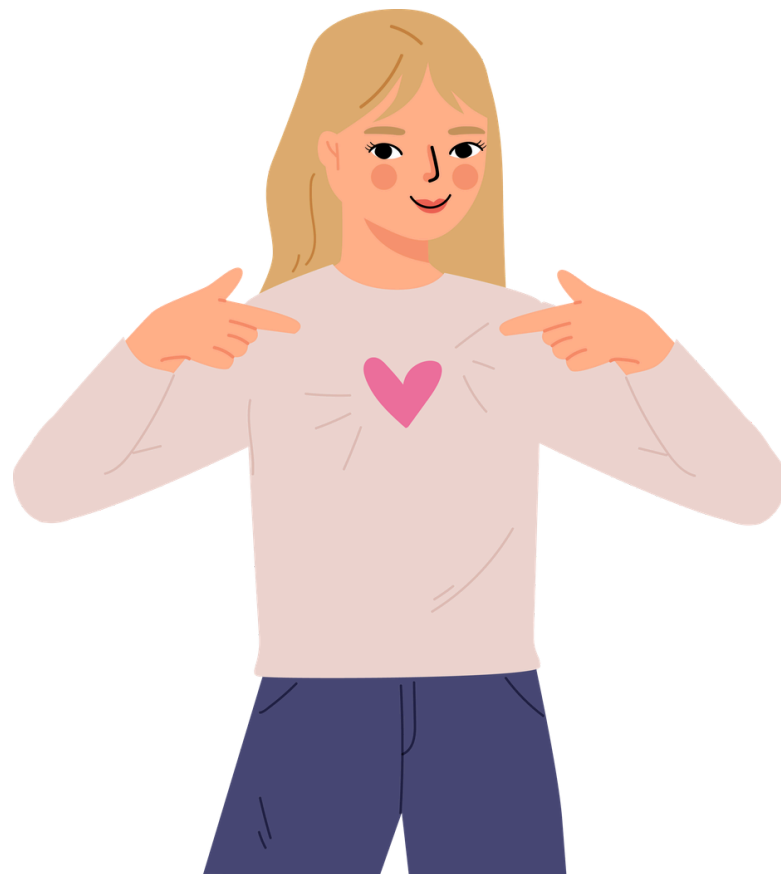
- The Reflective Practitioner was popularized by Donald Schön. His core idea is that professionals, including trainers, can improve by consciously reflecting on their actions. He outlines two key types of reflection: reflection-in-action (thinking on your feet) and reflection-on-action (analyzing an event after it's over). For a trainer, this means processing your own reactions during a session as well as reviewing them afterward to identify and correct for biases (The Reflective Practitioner, 1983)
- Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes how various social identities (such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) intersect and overlap, creating unique experiences of discrimination and privilege. For a trainer, understanding intersectionality means recognizing that participants' experiences are not monolithic (Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics, 1989)



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1.3 By working on this competency, you will:

- Become a more wanted and authentic trainer: when you understand your own values and communication style, you can show up in the training room as your genuine self. This authenticity builds trust and credibility with your learners. People don't just want to learn skills; they want to learn from a real person who has done the work themselves.
- Navigate challenging situations with greater composure: soft skills training can be unpredictable. When a difficult question arises, a participant pushes back, or an unexpected emotional response occurs, self-awareness is your anchor. By understanding your own triggers and biases, you can react with thoughtful intention rather than impulsive emotion, maintaining control and professionalism in the moment, preventing burnout. By engaging in regular self-reflection, you can identify sources of stress and frustration before they lead to burnout. Understanding your own emotional state and Boundaries helps you manage your energy effectively, ensuring you can show up for your learners session after session, year after year, with passion and resilience.





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2. What might hold you back?

2.1 Common thinking traps:

Beliefs	Possible consequences
I can handle any feedback. I don't need a formal reflection process	Without a structured process (like journaling or peer consultation), your learning becomes superficial and reactive. You might only focus on positive feedback or dismiss negative feedback, preventing you from identifying your behavioral patterns and truly understanding your impact
My personal feelings and opinions have no place in a professional training session	This can make you appear inauthentic or disconnected. While professionalism is key, suppressing all personal beliefs and emotions prevents you from recognizing how your biases might be influencing group dynamics or a learner's ability to participate fully.
I'm too busy to reflect. I have to prepare for the next session.	The relentless cycle of prepare-train-repeat without time for reflection is a direct path to burnout. It prevents you from recharging, consolidating your learning, and making necessary course corrections.

If you identify similar beliefs in yourself, don't worry!

Below we'll discuss what to do to update them in the spirit of inclusivity.



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3. Identify excluding behaviours

Before you can change something, you need to notice it first.

Here are some behaviors that might exclude people.

Do any of these ring a bell?

You might have seen them in yourself, participants, or fellow trainers.

In the second column, we explain exactly why these behaviors are excluding, so you can get a fuller picture.



Behaviour	Why does it exclude?
Making assumptions based on past experiences, such as "this type of participant is always resistant" or "this exercise always works."	This rigidity makes you a less effective trainer because you stop seeing participants as unique individuals. When you operate from a place of assumption, you can't respond authentically to what the group truly needs
Reacting defensively to challenge or feedback	It prioritizes the trainer's comfort over the learner's psychological safety. When a trainer becomes defensive, they shut down dialogue, effectively communicating that challenging the status quo is not welcome.
Over-relying on your personal narrative as a universal truth	When you present your personal experience as the only valid perspective on a topic (e.g., "In my life, I've found that...") it can invalidate the experiences of those with different backgrounds.



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4. How to do it differently?

The best way to learn? Get concrete and hands-on! Now that you know what excluding behaviors look like in reflective practice, let's flip the script. In the third column below, you'll find inclusive approaches for these exact same situations.

Behaviour	Why does it exclude?	Inclusive alternative
Falling into the trap of routine and rigid thinking. You start making assumptions based on past experiences, such as "this type of participant is always resistant" or "this exercise always works."	This rigidity makes you a less effective trainer because you stop seeing participants as unique individuals. When you operate from a place of assumption, you can't respond authentically to what the group truly needs	Approach each session with a beginner's mind. Consciously let go of preconceived notions and be present with the group's current energy and needs. Before you start, ask yourself, "What if I approached this group as if it were the first time I've ever led this training?"
Reacting defensively to challenge or feedback	It prioritizes the trainer's comfort over the learner's psychological safety. When a trainer becomes defensive, they shut down dialogue, effectively communicating that challenging the status quo is not welcome	Start by acknowledging what the person has said. You can say, "Thank you for bringing that to my attention," or "I appreciate you sharing that." This validates their contribution and shows you're listening, even if their feedback feels difficult to hear.
Over-relying on your personal narrative as a universal truth	When you present your personal experience as the only valid perspective on a topic (e.g., "In my life, I've found that...") it can invalidate the experiences of those with different backgrounds.	Frame your personal stories as one example among many. After sharing, intentionally create space for other narratives. Use phrases like, "This is my experience, and it's just one piece of the puzzle. Who has a different experience they'd be willing to share?"



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5. Good practices

- **Establish a reflective ritual.** Before every training session, take 5-10 minutes to sit with your thoughts. Ask yourself: "What are my goals for this group? What assumptions might I be bringing with me? Are there any topics that make me feel uncomfortable, and why?" This practice helps you check your own biases at the door
- **Acknowledge your privileges.** Consider what unearned advantages you might have in this specific group dynamic (e.g., your gender, where you are from, educational background, or position as trainer). Acknowledge that these privileges will influence how you are perceived and how you interact with others. This awareness helps you be more intentional about not dominating the space.
- **Practice active self-observation.** Pay attention to your own internal reactions. When a participant says something that makes you defensive or uncomfortable, pause for a moment. Instead of reacting, ask yourself: "What emotional or cognitive response is happening right now? Is my discomfort related to my own beliefs or biases?" This internal check prevents you from projecting your feelings onto the group
- **Document your reflections.** Keep a journal or a digital file where you record your self-reflections. Note what went well and what was challenging. Over time, you can review these notes to identify patterns in your behavior and track your progress in building self-awareness and an inclusive practice.





1 Understanding yourself and reflective practice

6. First step

Great, you've got the theory down and probably have a good sense of what we mean by Understanding yourself and reflective practice.

Now we encourage you to tune into the emotions, thoughts, and reactions you had while working through this competency.

You can take your first step right now.

No need to call anyone, set up meetings, or make any arrangements. Just stick around for a few more minutes and tackle one of the questions below.

Or go ahead and try all of them:

- How did it feel working on this competency?
- What behaviors can you start using immediately?
- Did anything bug you?
- What parts did you want to skip?
- What does your reaction tell you about yourself?



“Start with self”

**Inclusive Training Proficiency
- a competence model for business
trainers and educators who care.**

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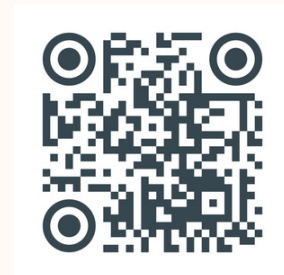
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