

# EDVSOC

Cultural education for adults  
in need of **sociotherapeutic**  
support



## **EDUSOC**

### **Cultural education for adults in need of sociotherapeutic support**

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# Introduction



This book constitutes the intellectual output of the project “Cultural education for adults in need of sociotherapeutic support” (EDUSOC) which was implemented in 2019–2022, as part of the “Erasmus+” programme, by the following institutions and organisations representing five different countries: ZAMEK Culture Centre (Poznań | Poland), Stichting Anatta Foundation (Aalten | Netherlands), City Mine(d) (London | UK), Creative YouthLand (Egio | Greece), and Asociación Cultural Euroacción (Murcia | Spain).

With this project, we aimed to develop a basis for a cross-sectoral cultural education methodology to be used with individuals and groups in need of sociotherapeutic support. The cross-sectoral methodology incorporates elements of cultural education (including art therapy, and anti-discrimination, democratic, equality, and social education), psychotherapeutic support, and social care. We wanted to create innovative and modern categories to describe vulnerable groups, as well as people in crisis and dependency situations.

Because of the above, we have chosen teaching methods that require complex educational, psychotherapeutic, and social competencies. Furthermore, the choice of methods was closely linked to the need to train the educators, trainers, and facilitators from the above-mentioned organisations, to ensure that they could start testing said methods with different target groups in the future.

The definitions and categories proposed in the book are open to further reflection and analysis. The distinctions between educational and psychotherapeutic competencies in educational processes can serve as guideposts for development of cross-sectoral teams and application of different education methods in working with vulnerable groups.

## **CONTENT OF THE BOOK**

In the first part of the book, we introduce the organisations and institutions involved in the project and the cultural education methods we have worked with over the last three years. We describe the feminist WenDo method, Nordoff Robbins music therapy, choreotherapy (dance and movement therapy based on the authentic movement principles), Gestalt therapy and Gestalt Theatre Therapy, positive psychology, possible uses of nature in social work, as well as Expressive Arts, and Experience Design.

The second part, consisting of three chapters, defines the characteristics of adults in need of sociotherapeutic support. It presents ways of improving adults' competencies and highlights educators' minimum and sufficient competencies in the context of provision of psychological and sociotherapeutic support.

In chapter one, we analyse the category of sociotherapeutic support and identify groups that require such support and function as target groups in educational contexts. To this end, we employ such concepts as: vulnerable groups, intersectionality (a term for intersecting forms of exclusion of particular groups and individuals), and dependency to describe different forms of limited independence.

In chapter two, we expand upon the description of the above-mentioned groups and individuals by adding information about psychological qualities. We indicate that they may be undergoing crises, experiencing trauma, or find themselves deprived of their sense of dignity or agency. Building educational relationships with groups in need of sociotherapeutic support requires a particular kind of critical awareness and moving away from thinking in terms of dependency of individuals and groups towards the concept of interdependence. We analyse the possibility of building cultural education within the framework of the ethics of care. We introduce perspectives of post-colonial studies, policies of positioning, critical disability studies, and a redefined understanding of empowerment.

In chapter three, we reflect on the psychotherapeutic, educational, and social work competencies necessary to build cross-sectoral support networks. We place great emphasis on the careful distinction between different forms of education and therapy across various education methods. The chapter also

dives deeper into the topic of building learning environments for individuals and groups in need of sociotherapeutic support. We analyse and describe the characteristics of a safer space and a braver space.

In the third part of the book, we present case studies from the testing process, that is, from putting selected cultural education methods to use in practice. The activities described in the case studies were implemented by the organisations and institutions involved in the project in Poland, the Netherlands, Greece, and Spain. In this part, some educators provide information on how they prepared for the educational activities, the target groups they worked with, their educational assumptions, objectives, and methods, as well as the difficulties they encountered, and the activities' outcomes.

The final part of the book begins with a short chapter on cultural education research. On the one hand, it describes the diagnostic and evaluation studies carried out during the project. On the other hand, it contains some practical tips on conducting educational research in cultural education projects organised for individuals and groups in need of sociotherapeutic support.

This book would not have come to fruition without the work of many people involved in the project. It is the product of the collective effort put into its writing, editing, discussing, and revisions.

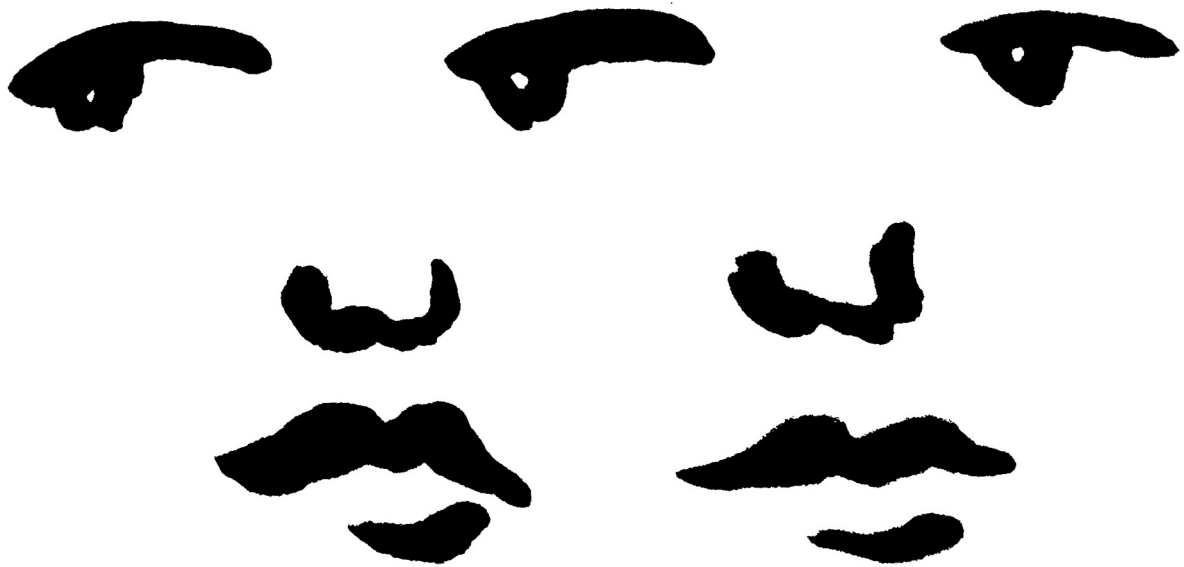


## **PART 1**

# **ORGANISATIONS AND METHODS**

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## **Organisations involved in the project**



## **ZAMEK CULTURE CENTRE**

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ZAMEK Culture Centre (CK ZAMEK) is a public, municipal cultural institution operating in Poznań, Poland. It offers an interdisciplinary programme consisting of activities and initiatives related to music, performance art, literature, exhibitions, film and community outreach. As a public institution, CK ZAMEK assigns great value to cooperation with its immediate neighbours, fostering the development of social ties among people, and discussing issues which are of greatest importance to the local community.

As the institution is based in the former Imperial Castle, a building which stood witness to the European history of the 20th century, its programme includes also reflections on both the past and the history's impact on the present. The former imperial residence houses not only CK ZAMEK, but also such cultural institutions as the Animation Theatre, the Children's Art Centre and the Museum of Poznan Uprising of June 1956, as well as a bookshop, café, restaurants and clubs.

CK ZAMEK employs over 100 full-time employees, and the institution works with a huge number of educators, artists, activists and volunteers every year. In addition, CK ZAMEK has teams consisting of employees of different departments, e.g. ZAMEK Accessibility Team, which ensures that CK ZAMEK is accessible for people with different disabilities, or the "Zamek for Climate" Environmental Team.

### **ACTIVITIES**

ZAMEK Culture Centre is an open place welcoming any visitors who want to take part in the organised events, take a look at the interiors of the castle or just relax. Every year, CK ZAMEK is visited by almost half a million people and hosts around 2,500 events that showcase and drive development of many interesting cultural phenomena. CK ZAMEK is a place where visual arts, theatre, film, music, literature and cultural education initiatives meet, intermingle and complement each other. It hosts regular activities for teachers and school groups, film meetings for schools, tours of the castle, creative workshops accompanying the exhibitions of contemporary art and old masters shown at the institution, museum lessons, literature workshops, etc.

CK ZAMEK has many years of experience in carrying out cultural and artistic education activities; it is the largest entity providing broadly understood cultural education in the Wielkopolskie Voivodeship. CK ZAMEK has always conducted these activities in cooperation with entities from the education and cultural sectors, never forgetting to take into account the needs of local communities.

One of the key areas of CK ZAMEK's activity is provision of non-formal education programmes for adults focused on inclusion and diversity, such as:

- » **“Teatr powszechny”** (running 2016–2021) – performance art programme co-created by people with disabilities at risk of social exclusion. In 2022, the experience of the “Teatr powszechny” was used to establish the new performance art programme: “Presence” (implemented thanks to the funds from the EEA and Norwegian Grants).
- » **“Zamek Otwarty. Kultura dla seniorów zależnych”** (since 2018) – a programme aimed at older people who require assistance with activities of daily living. It provides older residents of the Wielkopolska region with opportunity to participate in a variety of workshops (devoted to e.g. storytelling, handicraft, modern art, theatre), lectures, temporary exhibitions and film screenings.
- » **“RE:WERS – herstoryczne mapowanie miasta”** (implemented in 2018–2019) – the project consisted of a three-part herstory workshop, walks inspired by the stories of women conspirators and the final product – the map of women conspirators. The project aimed to restore the memory of women involved in the underground activities between 1939 and 1945.
- » **“Dwulatka. Szkoła praktyk animacyjnych”** (since 2019) – a two-year course designed for people who want to strengthen their skills in daily work with local communities.
- » **“Współdziałanie w kulturze”** (since 2017) – a programme aimed at building teams consisting of people representing the education and culture sectors. Together, they implement local cultural education projects based on the needs of the target community.



- » **“Sztuka w ciemno”** (since 2019) – workshop initiatives accompanying exhibitions showcased at CK ZAMEK whose aim is to encourage using the sense of hearing, touch and smell to experience art.
- » **“Obrazy wrażliwe”** (since 2019) – a social programme highlighting cinema that addresses local and global challenges we face in our everyday reality. All screenings offered under the programme include audio descriptions and closed captioning. Analogously, any and all in-person meetings, such as lectures, debates and discussions, are translated into Polish Sign Language.

CK ZAMEK also implements the Poznań Cultural Education Programme (PCEP) whose objectives include supporting the process of building cross-sectoral cooperation networks and relations in the field of cultural education. To this end, the programme secured the cooperation of not only the Department of Culture, but also the Department of Landscaping and Environmental Protection, Department of Education and Department of Health and Social Issues. PCEP is part of a larger document – Poznań Programme for Culture 2019–2023, “Culture of Relations – Relations in Culture”, which was adopted by the Poznań City Council on 5 February 2019.

The above-described activities have contributed to increasing the importance of the role of cultural education in the region and integrating the education and culture sectors.

## **TARGET GROUPS**

The activities carried out at CK ZAMEK are directed to many different groups and individuals, including: children, teenagers, adults, older people, people of all abilities and social or economic backgrounds, people living in the larger cities of Wielkopolska (including Poznań) but also from the region’s villages and small towns, members of cultural minorities and people at risk of exclusion.

## SELECTED PROJECTS

- » **“Mała rzecz w wielkiej sprawie”** – the project was dedicated to the people treated in the Women’s Addiction Treatment Ward who are temporarily excluded from social life and have limited access to culture. The aim was to respond to the current needs of the patients who need contact and integration with the outside world and the students for whom participating in the project was an opportunity to gain experience in organising cultural activities for people who are socially excluded.
- » **“Teatr społeczny – strategie przetrwania”** – the project was dedicated to adults with different disabilities and included educational-theoretical meetings inspired by disability studies, body work and learning new techniques associated with such work (taken from contemporary dance, improvisation, contact improvisation, body-mind centring, new choreography). It was designed to build a strong, integrated group capable of self-determination and creation of its own space of representation within cultural institutions.
- » **“Autoportret kadrowany”** – it was an art-therapeutic project (the participants used photography to independently work on their personal development) and, at the same time, a pro-social initiative (aiming to strengthen the communities which were historically excluded because of prejudices and stereotypes associated with people with intellectual disabilities and young people raised in children’s homes).
- » **“Radiowy Uniwersytet Edukacyjno-Kulturowy. Pod brukiem leży plaża”** – the creation of this project was motivated by the growing resentment and fear of people with experience of migration, poverty and homelessness, combined with the lack of knowledge of the situation of such people. The two primary objectives of the project were to take part in education and the public debate on the subjects of the presence of phobias and new forms of racism in social life, art, literature and science.

## **EUROACCIÓN**

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Euroacción is a non-governmental organisation that supports youth and adult learning, as well as professional and personal development of people with fewer opportunities. The organisation's vision is based on supporting individuals and simultaneously addressing broader social changes. Its mission is to inspire and stimulate human potential. Currently, the organisation's personnel consist of six people of different nationalities, graduates of different fields of study, who cooperate with many experts with varied specialisations. The organisation operates in the Spanish region of Murcia where it implements both local and European projects.

Euroacción was inspired by the idea of applying the humanistic socio-educational practices taken from the non-formal education framework to working on personal and professional development. The organisation was founded in 2002 and became active in local projects, as well as management of European projects, in the same year. It works with groups at risk of social exclusion, such as migrants, people who have been incarcerated and Roma people, and, at the same time, remains active in educational activities related to personal and professional development. In European projects, Euroacción specialises in such fields as human rights education (HRE), training of youth coaches and group facilitation.

Since 2015, Euroacción has also been involved in volunteering projects, initially under the European Voluntary Service, and currently under the European Solidarity Corps, in which the organisation performs management activities in all areas of the programme.

Annually, Euroacción, as a partner or applicant, coordinates approximately 8-9 European projects, mainly in the field of youth education. They touch upon issues related to gender, social inclusion of groups at risk of exclusion and emotional intelligence of people with fewer opportunities.

## **AREAS OF ACTIVITY**

- » social inclusion;
- » development of new learning methods;
- » international and local volunteering programmes;
- » emotional intelligence.

At the local level, Euroacción works mainly in schools, with pupils, parents and teachers. One of the main services offered by the organisation is ICARO – a project concerning emotional intelligence, aimed at children and youths aged 3–18. At the European level, Euroacción is involved in strategic partnerships for innovation in the field of youth and education, mainly in the scope of issues related to gender and emotional intelligence.

## **TARGET GROUPS**

The Euroacción team has many years of experience working with migrants of different origins (especially from North Africa), people of different genders and ages, children, youths and adults, as well as teachers and youth workers. The initiatives developed by the organisation are inspired by humanistic approaches and the principles of emotional intelligence.

By adopting a non-formal and experiential learning approach, Euroacción always tries to make sure that its project groups constitute safe spaces. Euroacción is governed by trust-based rules which affect interaction between the groups' members and promote healthy and effective communication systems.



## **WORKING WITH PEOPLE IN NEED OF SOCIO THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT – SELECTED PROJECTS**

- » **NOSCETE IPSUM** – the aim of the project was the social inclusion of young people in prison by developing their capacity for self-help, improving their mental state through emotional support, stimulating and developing their learning capacities, and implementing an educational programme facilitating their future employment.
- » **ROCK THE REJAS** – the project was focused on the artistic and cultural expression. It resulted in creation of authentic recordings of people with prison experience expressing their feelings. The aim of the project was to develop the creativity and the spirit of initiative in a group of young people by inviting them to make musical recordings.
- » **CUERPO Y EXPRESIÓN (PARA UNA VIDA MEJOR EN PRISIÓN)** – the aim of the project was to establish a stable and permanent dance and body expression group for ten young women aged 21–26. It strived to create space for creativity, body expression and dancing, promote healthy habits, such as sport and body work, promote development of social skills (teamwork, communication, listening, camaraderie, etc.), foster personal development of the participants and create a stable dance group which would function as a prison dance school managed by the inmates and open to all young women who would be interested in joining the dancing group.
- » **KINÉ** – the project focused on social integration and psychosocial care for youth who received prison sentences (and were classified as second grade inmates) in the Murcia region. The project used non-formal education methods, as well as audio-visual communication and expression. The aim of the project activities was to promote working on development of psychological and emotional well-being, as well as social skills, of the youth in prison.

- » **WISE BODIES** – the aim of the project was to offer sociotherapeutic support to youth workers through body expression, movement and self-awareness techniques. The body work used different approaches, such as contact improvisation, conscious movement and other disciplines derived from contemporary dance and Gestalt therapy.
- » **Y-OFFENDERS** – the project was aimed at developing the competences of social educators in the field of emotional support and assistance in establishing relationships with young people who are or have been in prison, or people at risk of committing offences. The project activities also included supervision addressing problems which may affect the work of youth coaches.

## **STICHTING ANATTA FOUNDATION**

The Anatta Foundation was founded in 2015, in Aalten, a city located in the Eastern part of the Netherlands. It was established as an organisation of young professionals devoted to the well-being of people and the planet. Carried out within the framework of positive psychology, the Foundation's activities focus on strengthening the sense of happiness, well-being and connection with nature.

**The core of the Foundation's activities is based on the following three pillars:**

- » promoting happiness, mental health and well-being;
- » strengthening people's connection with nature;
- » promoting the flourishing of nature.

Since its inception, the Foundation has been active in the field of youth work, focusing on non-formal education and personal development. Over the years, the Anatta Foundation has taken part in a number of activities funded under the "Erasmus+" programme, such as organisation and participation in trainings, long-term strategic partnerships and youth exchanges.

In 2016, the Anatta Foundation has organised the first international youth exchange under the "Erasmus+" programme intended for people who stutter,

in an arboretum in Northern Italy. Later, the Foundation expanded the scope of its activities to include more intensive educational programmes. Since 2017, the Foundation has been involved in several strategic partnerships aimed at improving the quality of education in the youth, school and adult education sectors, acting both as a coordinator and partner organisation. Over the years, the Anatta Foundation has been active mainly within the Netherlands and Italy, but it cooperates with partners from all over Europe.

The organisation's mission is based on the belief that nature and humans are inextricably linked with each other. The aim of the Foundation's activities is to build a reality in which people and nature can co-exist in harmony. The so-defined mission statement translates into projects that are inspired by nature.

The Anatta Foundation sees nature as a special and inspiring process in which human beings participate as an integral part. Once we re-learn to perceive nature as a part of ourselves, it will be easier to realise how important it is to take care of nature, and, thus also, of ourselves. Nature is seen as an inspiration for the renewal of human communities on the basis of the values of reciprocity, resilience, diversity and interdependence. Nature also gives us inspiration to find solutions for the problems of the 21st century.

## **TARGET GROUPS**

By applying such principles as resilience, diversity and cooperation, the Anatta Foundation helps increase societies' flexibility and knowledge production. It proposes innovative learning and cohabitation structures which give rise to a renewed sense of connection between people and between people and nature. The Anatta Foundation supports the flourishing of communities and nature.

It is active in the field of youth work, education and public health. As part of its work with younger people, it organises exchanges, focusing on particularly vulnerable youth groups. The Foundation organised youth exchanges for people who stutter, people with intellectual disabilities, people who have experienced cancer and teenage children of parents with substance use disorders, etc. In the context of its work with youth, the Foundation carried out, for example, the "Pride of Place" project. It included an educational programme which allowed young people to discover what makes their place of living unique and

consider to what extent this place helps define their identities. The current project, “Learn & Play”, aims to create an educational toolkit for developing emotional and social competences through play.

The Foundation is primarily engaged in projects concerning mental health and humans’ relation to nature. Within the framework of European programmes, they often take the form of strategic partnership. The Anatta Foundation is involved in strategic partnerships in the field of emotional intelligence, Positive Mental Health and Nature Intelligence. What is more, the Anatta Foundation organises trainings for companies and government organisations which are tailor-made to meet their individual needs, conducts research and provides advice on policy issues.

## **METHODS**

In implementing its projects, the Anatta Foundation puts emphasis on fostering a better connection between people and nature, creating prime conditions for the improvement of people’s psychophysical well-being, respecting nature and working on the basis of a sustainable mindset. The Foundation’s projects are implemented primarily in the natural environment and inspired by the methods of positive psychology.

## **WORKING WITH PEOPLE IN NEED OF SOCIO THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT**

The Anatta Foundation works with many people who need sociotherapeutic support. These include people who stutter, people with disabilities, people who live with chronic illnesses or come from under-resourced rural backgrounds. They often have low self-esteem or do not feel integrated into the society. The Foundation works to improve the (mental) well-being of the people it works with by means of establishing contacts and finding peers and introducing methods based on positive psychology and contact with nature.

The Foundation carried out various projects for the benefit of people who stutter, both within the framework of international youth exchanges and strategic partnerships. One of such projects was titled “Stuttering is Beautiful”. As part of its implementation, the Anatta Foundation developed a handbook for



youth workers organising activities for young people who stutter. The Foundation also carried out special projects for people with intellectual disabilities and for young cancer survivors.

## **CITY MINE(D)**

City Mine(d) is an organisation based in London [City Mine(d) London] and Brussels [City Mine(d) Brussels]. City Mine(d) emerged from direct action initiatives undertaken by a group of activists over two decades ago. Over time, the organisation's initial reactive approach was replaced with a responsive one, with the aim of ensuring a long-term social transformation. City Mine(d)'s independent educators and creative practitioners work with project participants on building strategies for lasting change that go beyond mitigating the impact which oppressive practices and systems have on the participants' daily lives.

The London branch of the organisation consists of semi-autonomous groups of educators-practitioners in which decisions are made collectively and often involve project participants or host organisations in the decision-making process. This approach makes it possible to develop educational processes which are adequate to local needs. One of these London groups employs three creative practitioners and educators who co-lead imaginative educational processes at London based charities and community spaces, such as a charity supporting migrants and refugees and an inner-city garden and community centre.

The creative practitioners' approach to sociotherapeutic education includes three characteristic elements: meeting people where they are, listening to the needs and desires of the participants, and externalising their problems. Oppression often works in such a way that individuals begin to perceive themselves or others as problematic. Thus, it is crucial to understand that a well-meaning educational process must situate and examine the problem participants face within a broader social and political context. Specific manifestations of participants' behaviour are often the result of external processes, e.g. various forms of discrimination, the environment in which people function, or the burden of traumatic past experiences.

When City Mine(d) London works with people experiencing loneliness, the team not only creates spaces for socialising, but also organises them in such a way as to ensure that participants can connect with other stakeholders and strengthen their resilience. In turn, when working with groups or migrants and refugees experiencing uncertainty over access to safe and/or social housing, City Mine(d) London organised art workshops during which the participants practised expressing their needs and taking the floor to be able to publicly communicate their concerns. Increasingly, City Mine(d) bases its motivations and tactics on the challenges faced by local communities.

In City Mine(d) London, it is assumed that systemic forms of oppression take advantage of all unique layers that make up people's identities, e.g. their skin colour, gender, cultural background and sexual or religious orientation.

## **"GUERRILLA-STYLE" PRACTICE**

City Mine(d) London does not hold its own physical space but works through partnership with other organisations, community groups or social gatekeepers<sup>1</sup>. This "guerilla-style" practice allows for City Mine(d)'s educational projects to expand their reach beyond familiar networks. It also makes it possible to provide sociotherapeutic education for people who would not consider it relevant for themselves at the first sight and people who feel powerless in the face of overwhelming problems and do not believe they can make a difference.

City Mine(d) London operates in a culturally, economically and ethnically diverse environment where multiple identities rub against each other, therefore, the organisation often works with marginalised and silenced groups and individuals, such as migrants, refugees and people with low or no income. The main methodologies used by the London branch are: narrative mediation, experience design, co-creation and contemporary art. Workshop spaces created by the creative practitioners of City Mine(d) allow the participants to negotiate their personal opinions. Here, the educators assume the role of mediators.

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<sup>1</sup> Social gatekeepers, i.e. people who are crucial in gaining access to different environments, social spaces, groups and communities.

In this sense, the sociotherapeutic education provides the participants with an opportunity to communicate their needs to those who represent different social or ideological positions. Educators sometimes assist in the communication process, as was the case during one of the workshops where the participants expressed conflicting views on the housing rights.

CityMine(d) London believes that knowledge is built through interaction with others, and is, therefore, the product of social and cultural influences occurring in the participants' communities. Different communities generate different cultural norms. When faced with a conflict, we instinctively construct a narrative that justifies the sets of values and beliefs to which we are used. CityMine(d) London believes that art has the potential to initiate processes through which the participants become aware of and accept stories and narratives that are alternative or contrary to those they themselves create and articulate.

In the context of the London activities, the sociotherapeutic educational processes consist of supporting the participants to build new relationships through creative co-creation. Instead of investing in building a consensus, which, according to City Mine(d), leads to marginalisation, the educators involve participants in the creation of shared visual and audio narratives rooted in the diversity of their voices, in order to counter the narratives of hatred and prejudice which harm our communities.



## CREATIVE YOUTHLAND

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The Creative YouthLand organisation was established in 2014, in Greece, in the coastal town of Egio, with the aim of inspiring future generations and in response to the country's economic crisis and its impact on young people.

The mission of Creative YouthLand, implemented at local, European and international level, is to bring about social change by combining non-formal education methods with an artistic approach, derived from theatre, circus, dance, painting, sculpture, music, poetry and visual arts, etc. The organisation aims also to provide young adults and underrepresented communities with spaces for learning and exploring creativity and build up the capacity in the scope of educators, youth workers, facilitators and artists.

Creative YouthLand works mainly with teenagers, young adults and members of underrepresented communities. The main challenges they face include the lack of the sense of socio-cultural belonging, freedom of expression and personal development in a context of various constraints associated with the economic system and social structures.

The vision that motivates Creative YouthLand's work is one in which societies are fairer, communities are united, and young people have the conditions for free and creative development. The Creative YouthLand's coaches believe in the **transformation** that occurs when people realise that they can live healthy and happy lives thanks to their uniqueness within the community. They focus on the **understanding** of human diversity, acceptance of cultural contexts out of which they arise, and respect for their needs. They believe in **resilience** as an art of accepting weaknesses and encouraging people to make mistakes and keep trying. They trust in the power of **art** to enrich the life of young people in all of its aspects. They believe in **learning** as a life-long process that should be accessible to everyone. The coaches regard the verbal and non-verbal expression of feelings and thoughts as essential for communication, understanding and acceptance. They respect nature as the ultimate source of life. They value "meraki" (μεράκι), an untranslatable Greek word that indicates doing something with soul, creativity and love, as essential for fostering people's engagement.

## **APPROACHES AND METHODS**

The synthesis of non-formal education methods and artistic approaches forms the backbone of Creative YouthLand's operations. Creative YouthLand's coaches value non-formal education for its interactive and participatory qualities involving group learning and personal development. They believe that the experiences, expression and creativity associated with art constitute a revolutionary approach to learning.

**The key priorities of Creative YouthLand in working with young adults are as follows:**

- » supporting joint, engaging, educating and inspiring activities within the framework of European projects;
- » cultivating respect: speaking in a respectful manner, engaging in attentive and active listening, creating safe spaces that allow for expression of needs, encouraging discussion and asking for consent;
- » giving the floor to target groups: discovering what topics they consider relevant, recognising their contributions;
- » making time and space for playing: encouraging people to have fun and use unexpected elements and materials from their surroundings;
- » valuing diversity of target groups: involving people of different ages, with different experiences, from different cultural backgrounds, with different interests and modes of participation;
- » building flexibility and confidence in the educational process: inviting people to help in the group, practising patience and trust;
- » working to ensure that people involved in the educational process become good allies: working on themselves to try to create safe spaces for the target groups, challenging assumptions, choosing words carefully, doing their best.

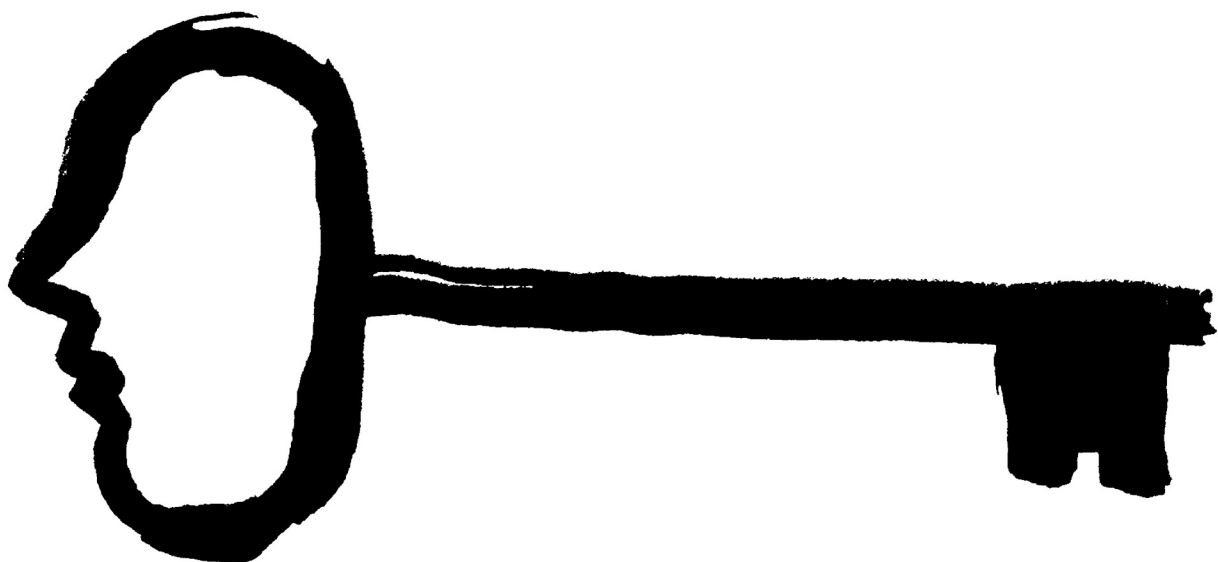
Creative YouthLand uses a variety of methods and approaches in its activities, the most important of which are: drama, role-playing, improvisation and simulation, physical theatre, clown masks and techniques, forum theatre, image theatre, games, viewpoints, storytelling, tango dancing, movement, authentic movement, embodiment, peer-learning activities, open discussions, reflections, and feedback.

## PROJECTS

Creative YouthLand coordinates “Erasmus+” projects and establishes international collaborations within this context. The most important of its implemented projects include:

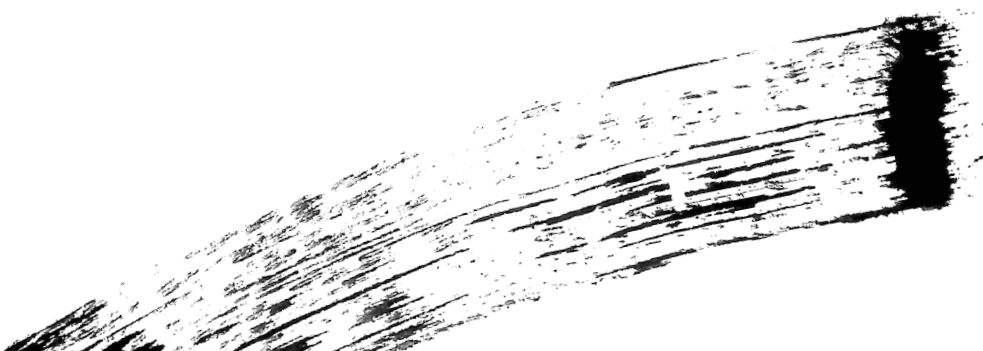
- » **mobility of youth:** Creative YouthLand participates in and organises youth exchanges, training courses, job shadowing, European Solidarity Corps;
- » **cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices:** Creative YouthLand cooperates with partner organisations from other participating countries and runs projects to build capacity in the fields of youth and adult education and schools;
- » **support for policy reform:** Creative YouthLand participates in strategic activities supporting policy reform across the EU;
- » **running workshops, courses, shows, and events on a local and national level** to promote personal, social, cultural and environmental awareness.





# Methods and approaches used in the project

- **WENDO**
- **MUSIC THERAPY**
- **DANCE AND MOVEMENT CHOREOTHERAPY BASED  
ON THE PRINCIPLES OF AUTHENTIC MOVEMENT**
- **GESTALT THERAPY & GESTALT THEATRE THERAPY**
- **POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**
- **NATURE IN SOCIAL WORK**
- **EXPRESSIVE ARTS**
- **EXPERIENCE DESIGN**



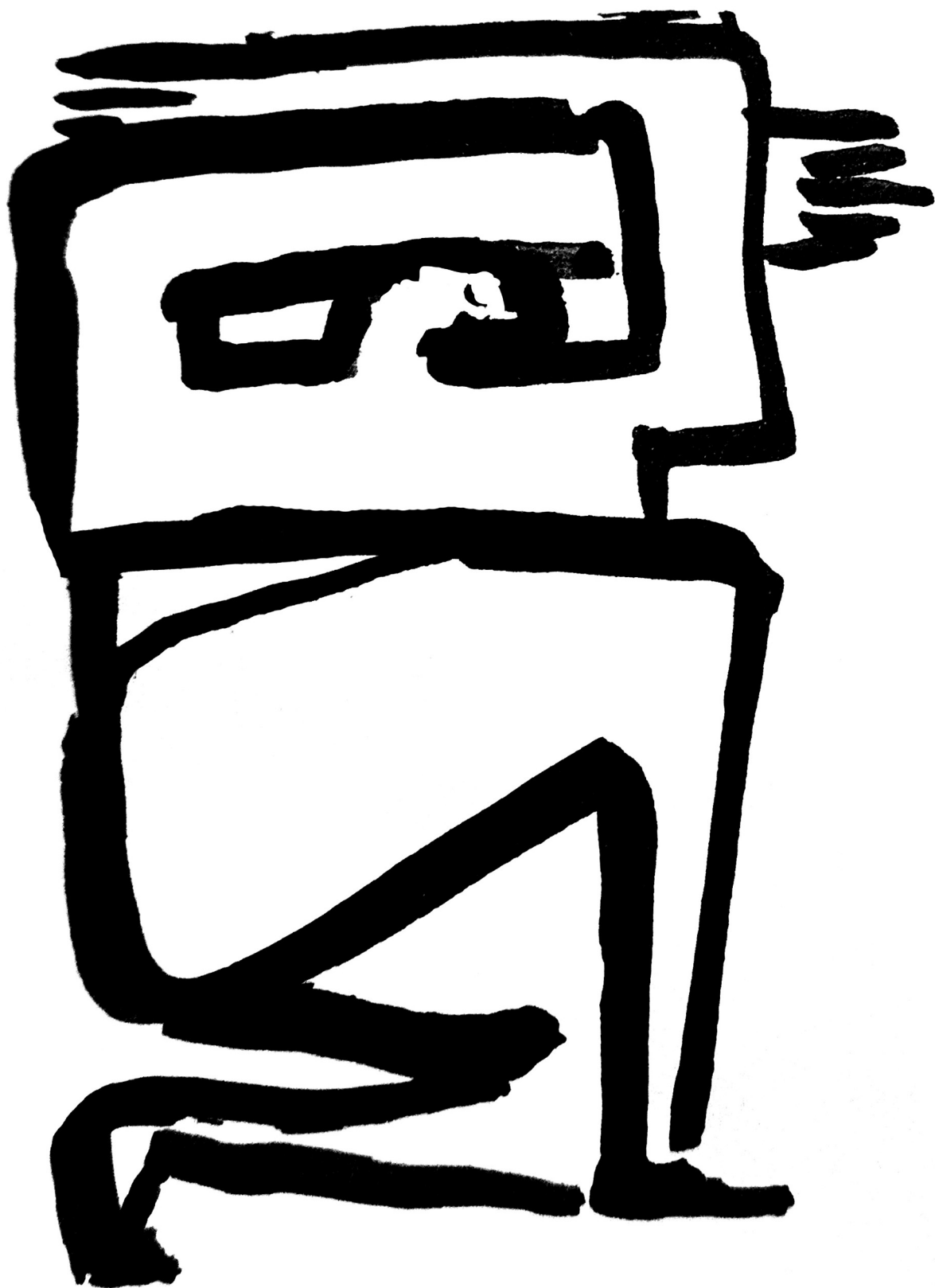


The methods of cultural education of adults presented in this chapter may prove particularly useful for the education of adults in need of sociotherapeutic support. These methods help to empower individuals in various, sometimes very subtle, ways: from increasing their agency and capacity for self-determination and setting boundaries to supporting the development of their creativity and ability to regulate their nervous systems when overloaded with stress stimuli.

Many of the described methods employ various forms of artistic engagement and art-based activities: their main aim is to develop creativity. When used as a tool, art allows people to develop and explore their potential by testing themselves in different situations: group activities (e.g. involving Expressive Arts), free improvisation (e.g. as part of the music therapy) or role-playing (e.g. in the Gestalt Theatre Therapy/GTT method). Each time, participants collect bits and pieces of experiences that enhance their knowledge of themselves. They can also test themselves and broaden their potential in various learning situations. Sometimes this involves stepping out of their comfort zone, pushing their own boundaries, and confronting things they find difficult and maybe have not yet processed (as, for example, in WenDo or GTT). Because of this, the methods described below can sometimes bring therapeutic effects, even though they do not constitute forms of therapy (apart from Nordoff-Robbins music therapy and GTT which can be employed both in their educational and therapeutic functions).

# WenDo

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## **METHOD: WHAT AND HOW?**

WenDo is a feminist method of preventing gender-based violence (against women) through empowerment of women, girls and other female-presenting people. Above all, it is a method of self-defence and assertiveness training. Unlike self-defence courses, it does not focus solely on punches, kicks, releases or other means of physical defence. WenDo prefers using tools that develop communication skills and foster assertiveness, as well as working on voice, body and breath control. Basic training takes 12 hours and it is designed to build self-confidence and sense of agency in women, allow them to experience their mental and physical strength and power, and help them regain their voice and sense of physicality. It also contributes to the stimulation of informed decision-making.

WenDo is not a form of martial art. During the classes, participants learn foremost how to prevent escalation of violence, and in case of danger, how to effectively defend themselves, also physically. WenDo does not constitute therapy. During the course, participants learn the principles of assertiveness and protecting their own boundaries. Trainers and participants work with and talk about experiences of violence, but they do not participate in therapy. If participants require psychological support, trainers inform them where they can receive such assistance.

Two-day WenDo workshops can be part of sociotherapeutic programmes and cultural education projects aimed at women and female-presenting people of all ages – from children, through teenagers, to adult women. During the WenDo workshops, participants learn how to respond to violence and other forms of boundary crossing. They boost their self-confidence, self-esteem and sense of agency. As WenDo is also a technique of mental self-defence, it provides knowledge on effective methods of communication and expressing one's needs, emotions and opinions. This, in turn, helps resolve conflicts, overcome stereotypes and fears, as well as feelings of guilt and shame.

## **TARGET GROUP: WHO IS IT FOR?**

WenDo is a method developed by women for women, girls and other female-presenting people. Workshops are held for different age groups; the youngest participants are 7 years old and there is no upper age limit. Age differentiation results from the need to adapt the workshop programme to the development

needs in the case of children and teenagers and the needs stemming from the physical fitness level in the case of adults (e.g. people with physical disabilities).

Children and teenagers are usually divided into 4 age groups:

- » 7–9 years old;
- » 10–12 years old;
- » 13–15 years old;
- » 16–18 years old.

There are also workshops for women and female-presenting people aged 60 and over. In this context, the age guidelines are designed to create conditions in which the needs of older women can be fully heard and properly addressed.

The WenDo workshops can also be held for groups which include transgender participants and groups dedicated to transgender people.

People with experience of violence and traumatic events should not take part in the workshop before their therapeutic process is completed or without first consulting their therapist.

## **THE GOALS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES: WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?**

- » self-defence (mental and physical);
- » ability to set and protect one's boundaries;
- » self-confidence and self-esteem boost;
- » fostering the sense of autonomy and agency;
- » self-determination;
- » ability to resolve conflicts (violence prevention);
- » overcoming stereotypes and fears;

- » overcoming feelings of guilt and shame;
- » sense of community with other women/girls/female-presenting people (bond building).

**PARTICIPATION IN WENDO WORKSHOPS SHAPES AND STRENGTHENS SKILLS RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING AREAS:**

- » effective, coherent, assertive communication;
- » recognising and diagnosing cases of boundary crossing;
- » decision-making;
- » responding to cases of boundary crossing, gender-based discrimination and violence;
- » physical self-defence in cases of attack/assault;
- » acting under stress.

**FURTHERMORE, WENDO ENHANCES THE FOLLOWING:**

- » self-confidence, self-esteem, sense of security, sense of agency, sense of self-determination;
- » ability to regain control of the situation;
- » knowledge of assertiveness and communication;
- » knowledge of possible solutions to difficult or dangerous situations.

**POSSIBLE TIME AND PLACE**

The WenDo workshops usually last 12 full hours (16 hours at most), with breaks, within the span of two days. For young people aged 7–12, the workshops usually last 3 days in total, with 4-hour-long blocks each day. The classes constitute an inseparable whole, so it is not possible to join the group on the second day or only for a few hours of the first one.

## **WORKSHOP METHODS AND TECHNIQUES: BY WHAT MEANS?**

The workshops are conducted using active methods; the classes make use of simulation exercises, plenary and small group discussions, breath and voice work, as well as elements of drama. In terms of physical self-defence, participants practice punches, kicks, releases, blocks, and so on.

## **TOOLS: WHAT DO WE NEED?**

We need flipchart pads, markers, painter's tapes, punch mitts, and pine wood boards. Tools are provided by the trainers.

## **EVALUATION: HOW TO CHECK IF THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED?**

The last element of the workshop, i.e. the final round, can be treated as its evaluation. It is worth using it as an opportunity to encourage participants, with the right questions, to share their impressions of the workshop and the scope of knowledge they gained. Participants may also be asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire made up of open and closed questions, adjusted to the age group, which can be later subject to an analysis conducted on the basis of the gathered information. For children up to 10 years of age, the questionnaire can be replaced with a drawing.

## **PREFERRED COMPETENCES**

The WenDo workshops should be conducted by a qualified person who has completed a certified WenDo course in any country. So far, there were two such courses organised in Poland: 3-year training for WenDo trainers carried out in 2001–2004 by the eFKa Foundation from Kraków and "WenDo Training Academy" implemented in 2015–2016 by the Autonomia Foundation from Kraków.

## SOURCES: WHERE TO LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION?

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Prepared by:

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# Nordoff Robbins approach to music therapy





## **METHOD: WHAT AND HOW?**

Nordoff Robbins approach to music therapy is based on the therapist and the session participants taking part in collective music-making. The processes that arise out of their team work become therapeutic. Music-making requires a number of skills from the session participants, namely physical, cognitive, social and emotional ones. Playing solo requires taking the initiative, playing as a team – the ability to listen to one another, while playing any instrument stimulates movement and requires the ability to remember and arrange consecutive rhythmic sequences. Music moves participants both literally and figuratively – they require motivation to actively participate in playing, but also coordination, concentration, good memory and creativity, as well as many other skills.

The key assumption behind this approach is the concept of inner musicality, understood as the innate ability of humans to respond to music. Regardless of the agility level, age or musical experience, anyone and everyone has inner musicality. It can be changed by illness or disability, but it cannot be silenced. Inner musicality is present in the sound of our breathing, heartbeat rhythm, pace of movement, muscle contractions and internal biological rhythms. Every person is a collection of unique sounds which may become the beginning of the collectively-created music. Furthermore, we are all embedded in the cultural repertoire of our communities, nationalities, and the entire human species. Americans are not the only ones who know the rhythm of “We Will Rock You”, and many of us, Poles, can sing the refrain of “Hej, Sokoły” from memory, although we never tried to acquire this skill. Music and musicality are resources which are available to everyone and which can be used in development of the therapy process during collective music-making.

The Nordoff-Robbins music therapy is resource-based work, focusing on what is still possible to achieve despite disability, illness or injury. The task of the therapist is to create an environment in which the participants will be able to actively engage in playing, singing or moving to the music. This is why improvisation plays an important role in this approach. Both the therapist and the participants are responsible for ongoing adjustment of the musical activities and therapy process. The first step to establishing a therapeutic relationship is usually mirroring the behaviour of a participant, “tuning in” to their way of being. In music therapy, the objectives and process are not predetermined but “negotiated” and shaped by all participants who treat each other as partners

and members of the same team. The therapist is an expert by virtue of their training, and the participants are experts by virtue of their personal experiences. Together, they form a team whose aim is the development of the musical form and flow, and, thereby, personal development of the people who attend the therapy session.

### **TARGET GROUP: WHO IS IT FOR?**

The Nordoff Robbins music therapy is used to work with diverse groups of people: children, teenagers, adults, and older people, including people with disabilities and different medical conditions, and non-responsive patients. The sessions consist of musical improvisation (also inspired by pieces which were composed earlier) inspired by the participant's psychophysical conditions and their ways of being. Through improvisation, the therapist can, on the one hand, adapt to the abilities of the session participants and, on the other hand, introduce musical material which inspires change and exploration of new opportunities and activities (both on a personal and social level).

### **DIAGNOSIS: “FOR WHAT PURPOSE?”, “WHY THIS SPECIFIC APPROACH?”**

The approach does not aim to cure the participants of their conditions and illnesses, but to support people in their personal and social functioning in the face of their limitations. The session participants and the therapist focus on developing the players' potential, taking into account their range of interests and abilities.

### **THE MAIN GOALS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES: WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?**

The aim of music therapy is to foster development of personal and social creativity, which is understood as the ability to actively engage in shaping one's own situation and social circumstances. Creativity is a flexible and proactive attitude towards the vicissitudes of life.

## **POSSIBLE TIME AND PLACE**

Schools (special schools and ones with integrated classes), nursing homes, hospitals, community centres, public spaces, etc.

## **WORKSHOP METHODS AND TECHNIQUES: BY WHAT MEANS?**

The Nordoff Robbins approach is not a method, because it does not involve a pre-determined action plan for therapy. The theoretical and practical resources that allow for shaping the therapeutic strategy are the therapist's knowledge of music theory and therapy and their musical experience. Nordoff-Robbins music therapy is referred to as an approach, which means that it defines the therapist's attitude to the therapy process and participants. This attitude is characterised by the readiness to be flexible when shaping the course of therapy and music and the ability to see the participants as partners in conducting the session of this improvised therapy.

## **TOOLS: WHAT DO WE NEED?**

It is possible to conduct this form of therapy without any additional materials and accessories, using body sounds ("body percussion") and voice, i.e. focusing on the inner musicality of each participant. It is also possible to use instruments and accessories that emphasise the character of the music, such as fabrics, ribbons, stationery, etc.

## **EVALUATION: HOW TO CHECK IF THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED?**

The evaluation is carried out on the basis of an analysis of audio or video recordings of the session. The following elements are subject to descriptive and quantitative evaluation:

- » duration of active involvement of the participants in the session/music-making;

- » measurement of the synchronicity between players (synchronicity is often an indicator of team members' ability to cooperate);
- » qualitative description of the participants' playing (initiates–follows, loud–quiet, schematic–chaotic, fast–slow). The overall aim of the therapy is to develop the ability to feel comfortable in any of the above-mentioned ways of playing – to creatively combine them and switch between them in a flexible manner. The measurements are made, then, for those moments during which a particular way of playing was recorded.

### **PREFERRED COMPETENCES:**

- » ability to creatively use internal musical properties present in voices and body movements;
- » openness to the unknown;
- » acceptance of limitations, one's own and those of other participants' and, at the same time, the ability to notice potential;
- » ability to find a balance between structure and freedom in conducting the therapy session together with the participants.

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- » Rolvsjord, R. (2006). Whose power of music? A discussion on music and power-relations in music therapy. *British Journal of Music Therapy*, 20(1).
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- » Trevarthen, C. (1999). Musicality and the intrinsic motive pulse: evidence from human psychobiology and infant communication. *Musicae scientiae*, 3(1).
- » Trevarthen, C., Malloch, S. N. (2000). The dance of wellbeing: Defining the musical therapeutic effect. *Nordisk tidsskrift for musikkterapi*, 9(2).
- » Turry, A., Marcus, D. (2005). Teamwork: Therapist and cotherapist in the Nordoff-Robbins approach to music therapy. *Music Therapy Perspectives*, 23(1).

## **EXAMPLES OF TRAINING CENTRES: PLACES WHERE THE GIVEN APPROACH CAN BE LEARNT**

- » [nordoff-robbins.org.uk/](http://nordoff-robbins.org.uk/) United Kingdom
- » [nordoff-robbins.org/](http://nordoff-robbins.org/) Germany
- » [steinhardt.nyu.edu/nordoff/](http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/nordoff/) United States of America
- » [noro.org.au/](http://noro.org.au/) Australia

Prepared by:

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# Choreotherapy – dance and movement therapy based on the principles of Authentic Movement



## **METHOD: WHAT AND HOW?**

Choreotherapy is one of the techniques used in art therapy. It is based on the assumption that contact with art helps to gain insight into problems, reduce negative emotions and develop positive self-esteem. Dance movement therapy is additionally guided by the idea that the body reflects the state of mind, and modifications to movement patterns can lead to changes in the psyche. Body work helps workshop participants to open themselves to their own emotions and needs. Engagement of the physical, cognitive, spiritual and social spheres allows for their integration, which fosters better relations with the environment and greater ease in achieving personal goals.

In choreotherapy, there are two levels of activity that can overlap and complement each other:

- » movement and dance (building knowledge and practical awareness through body work, thematic improvisation, somatic supporting techniques);
- » performance and theatre (drama, voice work, improvisation, creating études).

## **TARGET GROUP: WHO IS IT FOR?**

Choreotherapy is intended for:

- » adults;
- » groups of people with different types of disabilities (physical and intellectual ones);
- » activists and educators working with people with disabilities;
- » parents and guardians of people with disabilities;
- » dance students – especially ones with the “dancer-choreotherapist” specialisation.

## **DIAGNOSIS: “FOR WHAT PURPOSE?”, “WHY THIS SPECIFIC METHOD?”**

Choreotherapy supports/enhances self-awareness in both direct and multi-dimensional manner. It allows us to release and share energy, and recognise, acknowledge and experience things as they are. Choreotherapy offers a chance to work on body awareness, the sense of agency, and learn how to function in accordance with the relevant expectations and needs, both as an individual and a member of a social group. It assigns great importance to providing workshop participants with appropriate support to help them achieve the sense of well-being in each of these areas. Art and therapy methods are used to create activities which rely on directness, closeness, sensitivity and equality.

They are designed to:

- » enhance the sense of agency;
- » increase the visibility of individuals within the functioning of public institutions;
- » foster self-confidence;
- » develop creativity and abstract thinking;
- » establish social relationships;
- » develop communication skills;
- » encourage physical and emotional integration;
- » boost self-esteem;
- » uncover participants' needs and the potential inherent in their bodies;
- » ease tensions;
- » change the language participants use to speak about themselves.



## **THE MAIN GOALS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES: WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?**

- » strengthening the sense of agency;
- » “identifying” natural leaders in a workshop group; people who are active and working to change the wider public’s perception of marginalised groups – in particular of persons with disabilities;
- » supporting workshop participants and their guardians in everyday social life;
- » developing creativity and abstract thinking;
- » shaping social attitudes and the possible real impact on the surroundings.

## **WORKSHOP METHODS AND TECHNIQUES:**

- » movement improvisation;
- » contact improvisation;
- » movement supporting techniques: authentic movement, the Body-Mind Centering somatic practice, pilates, yoga;
- » drama;
- » contemporary dance techniques.

It is also possible to combine different methods, for example, by adding elements of the Gestalt Theatre Therapy. This method works with emotions and considers them crucial for understanding oneself. Alternatively, introduction of elements of the polyvagal theory, the product of many years of Stephen W. Porges’ research and observations, also helps to achieve results in the search for ways of reacting to neurophysiological responses arising from different experiences, including traumas, emotional crises, mental disorders, autism, as well as somatic diseases (Porges, 2020; Dana, 2020; Jaworek, 2020). Stephen W. Porges assumes that mental and physical well-being depends on the sense of security which is the basis for a successful life. If for some reason this sense

of security becomes disturbed, the body activates a number of neuronal responses, which, in turn, lead to a worsened mood.

### **TOOLS: WHAT DO WE NEED?**

- » music + sound system;
- » Intibag sensory objects (optional);
- » art supplies (rolls of paper, pastels, markers, brown paper);
- » dance scarves.

### **EVALUATION: HOW TO CHECK IF THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED?**

- » by organising an open improvised jam session with live improvised music, featuring the participants and people from outside the project group;
- » by combining professional dancers, students of choreotherapy and improvisers with people with different types of disabilities (joint artistic activities, discussions, sharing of experiences);
- » by means of direct contact during the workshop and outside its structure (face-to-face, email, telephone contacts);
- » by holding discussions with parents and guardians of the participants (sharing observations and experiences);
- » by means of feedback given after each workshop meeting designed to gauge the expectations and needs of the group.

## **PREFERRED COMPETENCES:**

- » knowledge and skills related to the theoretical and practical material proposed and communicated to the group;
- » open attitude, understanding and kindness towards participants, their parents and guardians;
- » ability to set proper boundaries, compliance with the jointly agreed group rules;
- » openness to suggestions and changes, as well as to cooperation with specialists in related fields, e.g. psychology;
- » openness and sensitivity regarding the evaluation of the course of the meetings and one's own work with the group;
- » experience in working with groups with special and dynamically changing needs.

## **SOURCES: WHERE TO LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

Sources in Polish:

- » Dana, D. (2020). *Teoria poliwagalna w psychoterapii*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
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- » Porges, S. W. (2020). *Teoria poliwagalna: przewodnik*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.

## **SELECTED TRAINING CENTRES**

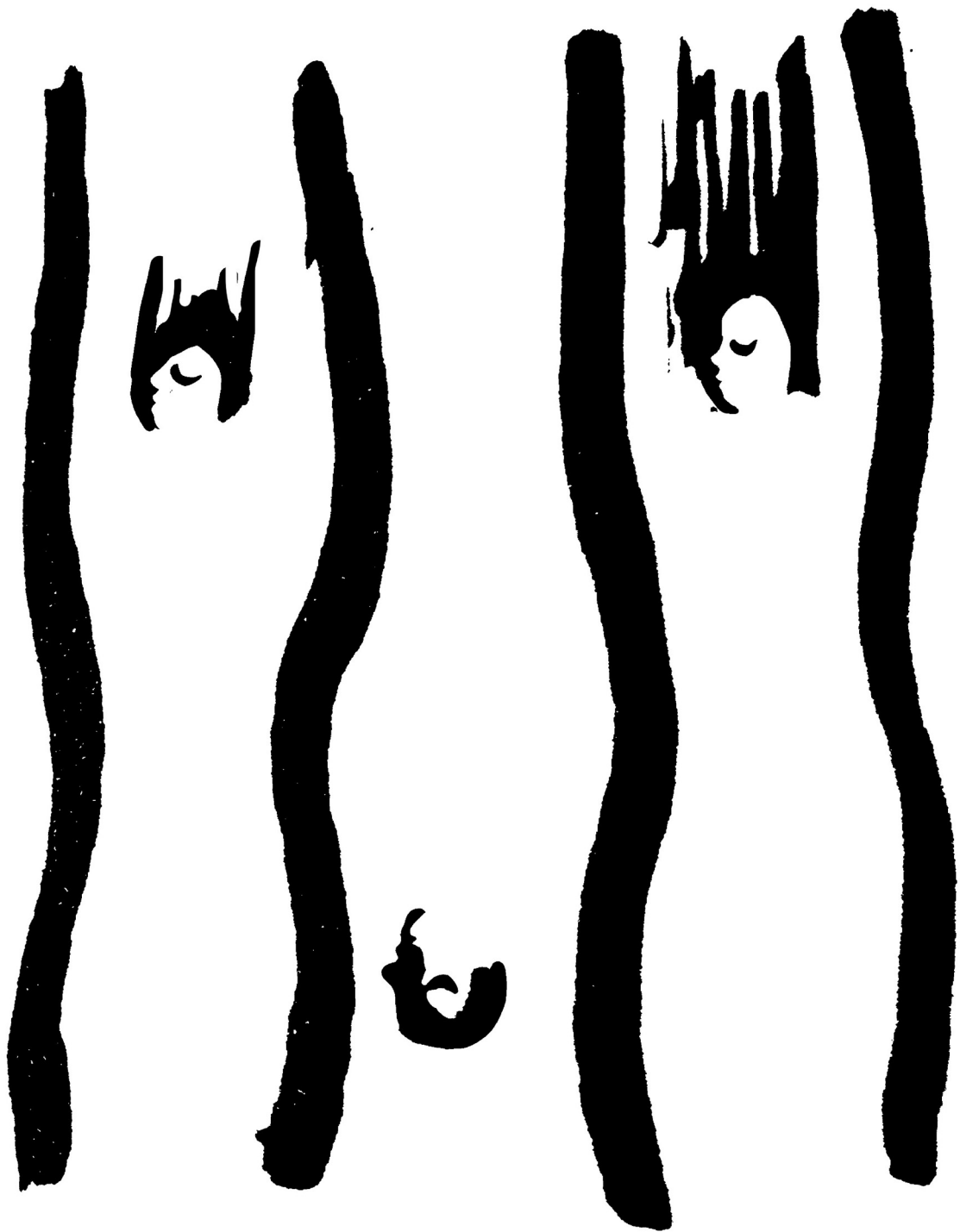
- » Intibag studio in Warsaw (Izabela Chlewińska, Tomasz Bergmann);
- » Polish Choreotherapy Association (Polskie Stowarzyszenie Choreoterapii) based in Poznań;
- » School of Theatre Educators (Szkola Pedagogów Teatru) in Warsaw (workshops led by Justyna Sobczyk and Justyna Wielgus).

## **CONFERENCES, WORKSHOPS, AND MEETINGS ON THE SUBJECT OF CONTEMPORARY DANCE TECHNIQUES, IMPROVISATION, AND SOMATIC SUPPORTING TECHNIQUES**

- » [bodymindcentering.com](http://bodymindcentering.com);
- » Home – Holland Dance Festival ([holland-dance.com](http://holland-dance.com));
- » News & Events | British Council;
- » Summer Intensive — AXIS Dance Company.

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# Gestalt therapy & Gestalt Theatre Therapy



## **METHOD: WHAT AND HOW?**

Gestalt is a word derived from the German language. In the most general sense, it means “whole”, “pattern” or “form”. Together, all these meanings indicate preference for the “whole” over “parts” in terms of categories. In this sense, Gestalt is a holistic process and method. It treats the individual as a whole composed of a mind, body, emotions and spirit – a whole which experiences reality in a unique way.

The main premise of the approach, which combines Gestalt therapy and Gestalt Theatre Therapy, is to activate emotional memories in the workshop participants through improvisational theatre. Improvisation exercises are meant to increase the individual’s awareness of the issues that plague them in life. Activities that can be implemented under this approach consist in improvisations, conducted in groups and pairs (duos) on the basis of fictitious conflict situations in which individual participants are asked to play chosen roles or characters.

## **TARGET GROUP: WHO IS IT FOR?**

Educators and coaches can use this approach to work with many target groups – from children, through teenagers, adults, and older people, to people at risk of marginalisation, such as migrants, people with treated substance use disorders and incarcerated individuals.

## **DIAGNOSIS: “FOR WHAT PURPOSE?”, “WHY THIS SPECIFIC METHOD/ APPROACH?”**

Both Gestalt therapy and Gestalt Theatre Therapy (GTT) are therapeutic disciplines that can be used in working with target groups that require support in the scope of mental health, general well-being and self-awareness of participants. An in-depth diagnosis of the needs of these groups is not required, although people in a mental health crisis or with past traumatic experiences may be particularly sensitive to improvisations conducted in pairs on the basis of fictional conflict situations. It is worth providing them with the support of specialised therapists during the workshop. Both the Gestalt therapy and the GTT are simultaneously very effective and very creative approaches. No specific materials or props are required.

## **THE MAIN GOALS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES: WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?**

- » increase in self-awareness and improved well-being of participants;
- » expansion of opportunities for emotional expression;
- » enhancement of creativity and spontaneity;
- » in a therapeutic approach: healing and closing unresolved matters in the patients' lives;
- » promotion of empathy towards others and oneself;
- » improvement of conflict management skills.

## **POSSIBLE TIME AND PLACE**

Any time and any place. Sessions can be as short as 2 hours or last even a full week or longer.

## **WORKSHOP METHODS AND TECHNIQUES:**

- » introduction to the Gestalt Theatre Therapy;
- » meditation;
- » sensory warm-up and body work;
- » exercises based on the GTT;
- » summary and therapeutic feedback for the participants.

## **TOOLS: WHAT DO WE NEED?**

It may be helpful to provide background music and cushions for the floor.



## **EVALUATION: HOW TO CHECK IF THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED?**

Evaluation consists primarily in asking specific questions related to the above-mentioned goals during the summary section of the workshop.

## **PREFERRED COMPETENCES:**

- » knowledge and experience in the field of Gestalt drama;
- » openness;
- » trust in human potential;
- » creativity and problem-solving skills;
- » good active listening skills;
- » assertiveness;
- » empathy.

## **SOURCES: WHERE TO LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

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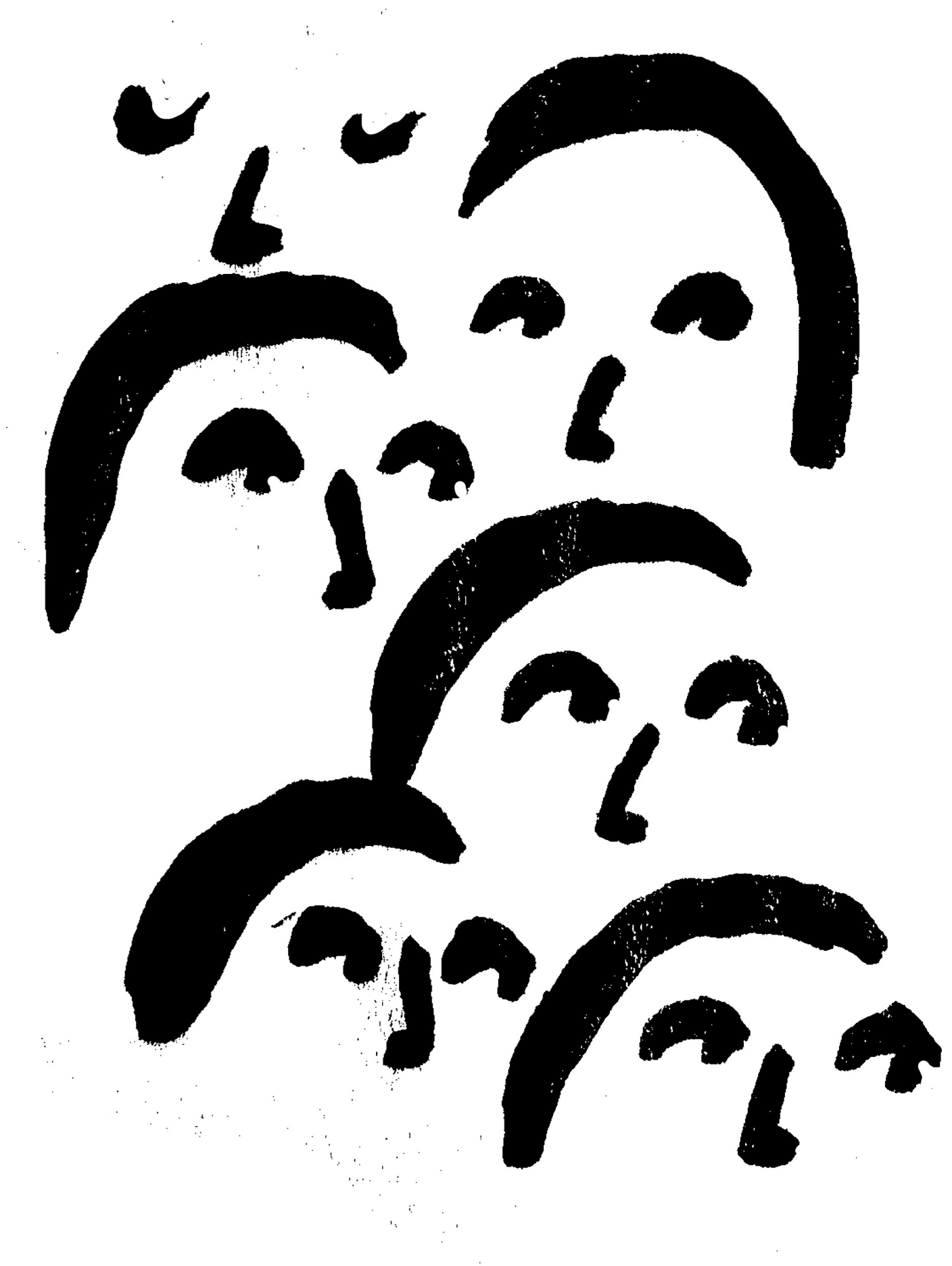
- » [escuelateatroterapiagestalt.es/teatro-terapia-gestalt](http://escuelateatroterapiagestalt.es/teatro-terapia-gestalt)
- » [gestalt-theatre.com](http://gestalt-theatre.com)

Prepared by:

**Diego Marín**



# Positive psychology



## **METHOD: WHAT AND HOW?**

Positive psychology has been a recognised sub-field of psychology since 1998 when Martin Seligman first chose it as the leading theme of his term as the president of the American Psychological Association. Positive psychology points to the limitations of so-called traditional psychology which result from its excessive focus on the problems and shortcomings of the individual. Instead, it focuses on the study of optimal functioning (flourishing) and on the categories of emotional, social and psychological well-being.

A few of its key concepts include:

- » building inner strength and self-esteem;
- » making life more fulfilling;
- » nurturing people's talents and potential.

Selected methods that can be used to implement the positive psychology approach in educational work include:

- » working with values which are significant to participants, and articulating and recognising their positive qualities;
- » providing help to participants to facilitate their recognition of their own potential;
- » keeping the so-called gratitude journal: regularly recording things for which we are grateful in a notebook or journal. The purpose of the gratitude journal is to focus on the good things that otherwise, if we failed to take note of them, would be taken for granted;
- » writing letters to participants' future selves, with responses to such questions as: what difficulties have you overcome? How did you do it? What helped you the most in the process of moving on? What advice would you give to your younger self?
- » performing acts of kindness, which increase participants' own sense of happiness: being kind, helping others;
- » mindfulness: practising sensory awareness, assisted meditation, breath control or careful observation.

The Self-Determination Theory (STD), formulated by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan and based on research into intrinsic motivation, is also part of the positive psychology approach.

The following three psychological needs are considered to be crucial according to the STD:

- » need for autonomy: the sense of agency and control over one's own life;
- » need for relatedness: the sense of connection with others;
- » need for competence: the sense of being good at something.

All three of these needs have to be supported in order to ensure the individual's optimal well-being. Meeting these requirements is conducive to improving personal productivity, perseverance and creativity.

## **TARGET GROUP: WHO IS IT FOR?**

Positive psychology can be used and applied to any target group in need of sociotherapeutic support.

Educational activities using the principles of positive psychology include, for example, an initiative called "paths of happiness" which was implemented in the Netherlands and dedicated to target groups composed of people with health conditions, people experiencing loneliness and people of low socioeconomic status. Thanks to home sessions with counsellors trained in positive psychology and a modest financial budget, the initiative participants were given the opportunity to find their passions. The activity helped those participants redefine their life goals, use their talents, become proud of their achievements and establish contact with other people, overcoming their sense of social isolation.

## **DIAGNOSIS: “FOR WHAT PURPOSE?”, “WHY THIS SPECIFIC METHOD/ APPROACH?”**

Positive psychology makes it possible to focus on strengths, values and qualities, as well as general flourishing of individuals.

## **THE MAIN GOALS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES:**

- » finding the sense of purpose in life;
- » finding the sense of purpose at the time of personal crisis;
- » discovering and developing one’s own potential and resources;
- » escaping social isolation through creative activities.

## **POSSIBLE TIME AND PLACE**

At any time, in any place. Sessions can last from half an hour up to a full week or more. The approach can also take the form of weekly training sessions and regular, periodic counselling sessions.

## **TOOLS: WHAT DO WE NEED?**

No special tools are required.

## **EVALUATION: HOW TO CHECK IF THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED?**

Positive psychology is a scientific discipline, so scientific research uses validated evaluation questionnaires to measure the results of any implemented intervention.

## **PREFERRED COMPETENCES:**

- » basic knowledge of positive psychology and self-determination theory;
- » openness;
- » flexibility;
- » creativity;
- » ability to recognise the potential and value of individuals;
- » ability to listen attentively and actively.

## **SOURCES: WHERE TO LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

Sources in English:

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- » [neweconomics.org/section/publications/wellbeing](http://neweconomics.org/section/publications/wellbeing)
- » [selfdeterminationtheory.org](http://selfdeterminationtheory.org)
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- » Weiss, L. A., Westerhof, G. J. (2020). The Happiness Route: finding alternatives to the problem-based approach in social work for vulnerable groups. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 15(5), 666-669.



## SELECTED TRAINING CENTRES

Information in English:

Various universities offer research-based training in positive psychology, for example, in the Netherlands:

- » [maastrichtuniversity.nl/education/contract/positive-psychology](https://maastrichtuniversity.nl/education/contract/positive-psychology)
- » [utwente.nl/en/education/master/programmes/psychology/specialisations/positive-clinical-psychology-technology/courses-research/](https://utwente.nl/en/education/master/programmes/psychology/specialisations/positive-clinical-psychology-technology/courses-research/)

Online training is also available:

- » [positivepsychology.com/positive-psychology-courses-programs-workshops-trainings/](https://positivepsychology.com/positive-psychology-courses-programs-workshops-trainings/)

Prepared by:

**Laura Weiss**



# Nature in social work



## **METHOD: WHAT AND HOW?**

There are different methods and approaches to working with nature that can be used in the education of people in need of sociotherapeutic support. What they all have in common is the belief that contact with nature has a positive impact on people's well-being.

Methods and approaches based on working with and in nature bring physical and social benefits to a wide range of people. The physical benefits include lowering blood pressure and reduced stress levels. The social benefits are linked to the development of skills related to: communication, responsibility, creativity, cooperation, flexibility and curiosity about the world. In addition, spending time in nature brings relief to the nervous system suffering from the overload associated with social interactions, which is related to the assumption that nature is a space that is free from prejudice and social judgement.

This approach is based on the following concepts:

- » biophilia – the well-being and survival of our ancestors depended on their connection with nature (which they needed to, e.g., find food and water, navigate and predict the time and future weather conditions).
- » Attention Restoration Theory – the natural environment is an attention regulator: individuals demonstrate that they can concentrate better after spending time in nature or even after seeing nature scenes.
- » Stress Reduction Theory – exposure to (non-threatening) natural environments which, in the course of evolution have been beneficial for people's well-being and survival, automatically evokes various psychophysiological responses that reduce stress. Viewing or visiting natural environments after a stressful situation promotes rapid physiological regeneration and relaxation (Ulrich, Simons, Losito, Fiorito, Miles, Zelson, 1991).

"BIOPHILIA, if it exists, and I believe it exists, is the innately emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms. (...) The biophilia hypothesis goes on to hold that the multiple strands of emotional response are woven into symbols composing a large part of culture. It suggests that when human beings remove themselves from the natural environment, the biophilic learning rules are not replaced by modern versions equally well adapted to artifacts. Instead, they persist from generation to generation, atrophied and fitfully manifested in the artificial new environments into which technology has catapulted humanity. For the indefinite future more children and adults will continue, as they do now, to visit zoos than attend all major professional sports combined (at least this is so in the United States and Canada), the wealthy will continue to seek dwellings on prominences above water amidst parkland, and urban dwellers will go on dreaming of snakes for reasons they cannot explain".

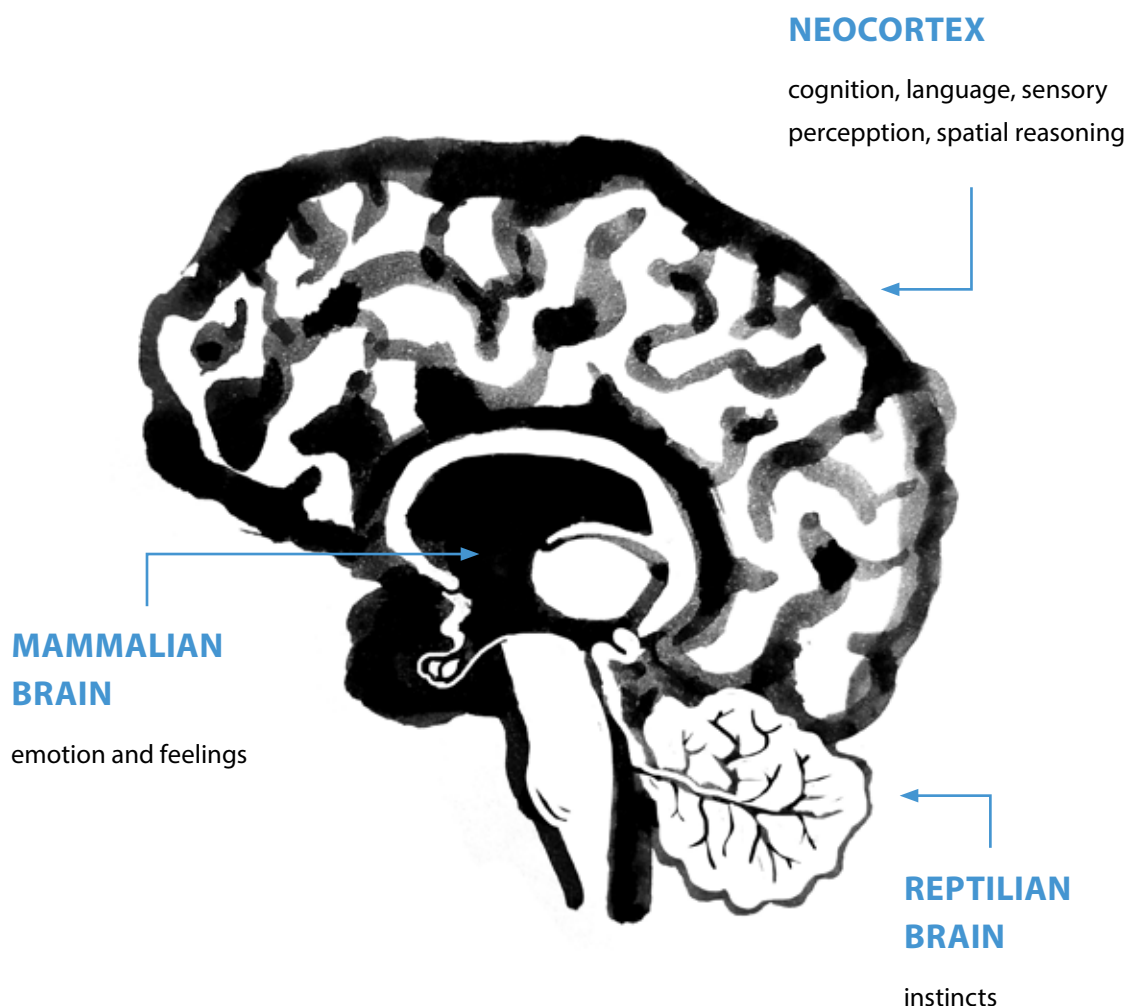
Kellert, Wilson, 1993, p. 31

Justification for using nature activities to help people with sociotherapeutic needs can be found in the Green Mind Theory, especially in its triune brain concept, according to which the brain consists of the archicortex, the limbic system responsible for emotions, and the neocortex (Pretty, Rogerson, Barton, 2017; Ploog, 2003; Smith, 2010; MacLean, 1990; Rosengren, 1986; Harris, 2002; MacLean, 2019).

The archicortex, also referred to as the "reptilian brain", is located in the lower part of the brain stem which reacts quickly, involuntarily and impulsively, regulates the fight or flight responses to various stimuli, and controls the parasympathetic nervous system. Activity of the archicortex ensures survival in mammals, and is important for maintaining vigilance and self-defence reflexes that detect various threats. However, in modern, highly consumerist societies, the reptilian brain remains constantly active because of the impact of a large number of stimuli, which is becoming increasingly problematic. People in the state of high nervous excitement are focused primarily on looking for the possible threats in the environment and are disconnected from the creative part of their brains.

Remaining in the state of hyperactive reptilian brain excitation for a prolonged period of time has also a negative impact on the immune system.

On the other hand, the neocortex is responsible for slowing down human reactions, is a centre for learning and a driver for rest and digestion. The neocortex calms and controls the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for the most important repair works in the body. The neocortex regulates the activity of the nervous system when the person in question is not being constantly exposed to stimuli from the external environment, e.g. when the danger has passed, when the hunger has been satiated. When the neocortex is activated, the attention of the person is open, and there is space for new actions and reactions, for creativity and free social interactions (Salomons, Albers, 2021).



The drawing shows the triune brain concept.  
Drawing designed for the purposes of this publication.

The Green Mind Theory assumes an optimal balance between the reptilian brain and the neocortex. Activities performed with full attention and complete immersion, calm the internal noise. In the Green Mind Theory, this state of mind is known as the flow.

### **TARGET GROUP: WHO IS IT FOR?**

Nature-based methods and approaches can be used with respect to a wide variety of target groups. In theory, these methods can be used with all adult audience groups, especially those groups which were addressed in our project, i.e.: women with sociotherapeutic needs, women with substance use disorders, older people, older dependants, older people with disabilities, young people and persons who work with young people who are interested in mental health issues or have mental health needs, as well as migrants and people from various ethnic backgrounds.

### **THE MAIN GOALS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES:**

- » guiding workshop participants into the state of rest and relaxation;
- » clearing the mind;
- » deepening participants' body awareness and sensory sensuality;
- » improving the well-being of people who are undergoing recovery and convalescence;
- » making individuals and groups more open to deeper social interactions.

### **POSSIBLE TIME AND PLACE**

The choice of place and time is flexible and depends on the amount of time at the organisation's disposal, the needs of the target group and the available options. There are 5-minute-long creative nature activities and month-long nature immersion courses. Some nature activities can also be designed to take place every week.

Activities should take place outdoors, in a varied natural environment, e.g. in a landscape with a view of water, a forest and an open field. They can also be held in a green park located within a city. Activities can also be organised indoors, as research indicates that merely looking at images of nature has significant benefits for the functioning of the nervous system.

## **WORKSHOP METHODS AND TECHNIQUES: BY WHAT MEANS?**

Many workshop methods and techniques used when working with people with sociotherapeutic needs can also be applied to nature-based workshops and employed outdoors. For example, activities involving elements of drama, weaving, visual arts or music can also be conducted in the natural environment. Other activities can also be created specifically to be used in nature, for example, on the basis of such practices as:

- » muting stimuli, for example, during a silent walk;
- » treating nature as a mirror, e.g. a tree can be viewed as a symbol of an individual – what are your roots? What does the thickness of the trunk say about you? How do the leaves relate to the manner in which you communicate?
- » using nature as a place for creativity and fun;
- » treating nature as a place for restoring the awareness of the body and its activity; nature can help people to become more aware of their bodies and senses.

## **TOOLS: WHAT DO WE NEED?**

Workshops organised in nature can be conducted without the use of any additional tools. However, nature itself provides many materials which can be used for activities, such as leaves, needles, rocks or branches. Living objects, such as trees, plants or flowers, can also be useful during such workshops. In addition, workshops and activities organised in nature may also use such tools and materials as notebooks, sketchbooks, pencils, sheets, sound systems (to play the sounds of nature) and cameras (to take pictures of nature).

## **EVALUATION: HOW TO CHECK IF THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED?**

The evaluation of the desired outcomes of activities or workshops is often based on the evaluation provided by their participants. One of the tools used for this type of evaluation are the "scaling questions" which require the participants to indicate the degree to which a given outcome was in their opinion achieved on a specified scale. Such evaluations can also be conducted outdoors.

Another option is to use questionnaires, filled before and after the workshop. There are also more creative methods of evaluation – for example, participants can be asked to find a natural object which could represent their assessment of the workshop's outcomes.

## **PREFERRED COMPETENCES:**

The competences which are useful for becoming an educator and facilitator working in nature can be linked to more general skills needed to practice soci-otherapy:

- » good listening skills, ability to summarise and ask questions;
- » open-mindedness;
- » curiosity about the world and people;
- » ability to be "here and now";
- » communicating without judgement;
- » being goal- and outcome-oriented.

Aside from the above-listed skills, any educator and facilitator that wants to work with nature will benefit from experience in holding nature-based workshops and activities.



## SOURCES: WHERE TO LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION?

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- » *Games for Nature. Environmental Education Through the Eyes of Young People*, (2010). „Project of Youth Exchange: Learning from each other – games of environmental education“.
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- » Smith, C. U. (2010). The triune brain in antiquity: Plato, Aristotle, Erasistratus. *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences*, 19(1).
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## **EUROPEAN PROJECTS RELATED TO THE VALUE OF NATURE IN SOCIO THERAPY**

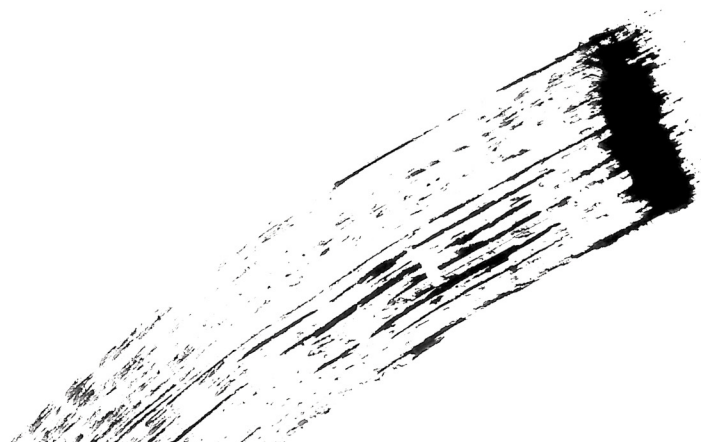
- » The Green4C (GreenForCare) project, co-financed through the "Erasmus+" EU programme: [greenforcare.eu](https://greenforcare.eu)
- » Nature Intelligence: [natureintelligence.eu/about](https://natureintelligence.eu/about)
- » Positive Mental Health: [positivementalhealth.eu](https://positivementalhealth.eu)

## **SELECTED TRAINING CENTRES**

- » In the Netherlands, there are several training centres which offer nature-oriented training, including Atma Instituut ([atma.nl](https://atma.nl)), Kraaybeekerhof ([kraaybeekerhof.nl](https://kraaybeekerhof.nl)) and Het Coach Bureau ([wandelcoach.nl](https://wandelcoach.nl)).

Prepared by:

**Sybrein Bouwsma**



# Expressive Arts



## **METHOD: WHAT AND HOW?**

Expressive Arts are a combination of non-formal education methods and an artistic approach derived from theatre, clowning and tango. The essence of this combined approach is education through experience; learning through action.

## **TARGET GROUP: WHO IS IT FOR?**

This approach can be used in educational work with children, teens, young people and adults, with no requirements concerning prior experience.

## **DIAGNOSIS: “FOR WHAT PURPOSE?”, “WHY THIS SPECIFIC METHOD/ APPROACH?”**

The Expressive Arts method works very well as a complement to formal education, as it shifts the burden of activity from the mental sphere to an embodied action. It stems from the belief that in modern societies many human activities are based on mental engagement required by the late-capitalism trends of investing in the development and competences of individuals. The Expressive Arts method allows people to become more rooted in physical activity, focused on “here and now”, as well as movement and performative activity. This method also makes use of a wide range of non-verbal communication approaches to facilitate cooperation and group interactions.

## **THE MAIN GOALS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES: WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?**

The main goals of the Expressive Arts approach are:

- » to increase creativity and attentiveness;
- » focus on “here and now”;
- » support self-expression;
- » renew participants’ connection with the body;

- » communicate with others through the body;
- » be available to active listeners;
- » be open to integration with others, and release tension through laughter.

## **POSSIBLE TIME AND PLACE**

A closed room intended for physical activity, with sufficient space to allow everyone to move. The size of the room and the duration of the workshop depend on the number of participants. Outdoor classes and online workshops are possible.

## **WORKSHOP METHODS AND TECHNIQUES: BY WHAT MEANS?**

Workshops should begin with meditation or mindfulness exercises during which the group determines the intent of the activities together. The next step is to introduce exercises, e.g. a “getting to know each other” exercise or team-building and trust-based games. The third, key part of the workshop is devoted to delving into the main topic. The workshop ends with a summary session which is achieved through participants telling the group what word, gesture or expression describes their feelings. It is followed by a chosen form of evaluation.

## **TOOLS: WHAT DO WE NEED?**

There are materials that can be useful during workshops. It is a good idea to prepare flip chart paper, markers and A4 sheets. In addition, it is necessary to prepare speakers and electronic equipment (a laptop, a phone, etc.) to play music. It is also advisable to prepare some props and costumes for theatre games. It is recommended for participants to walk barefoot and maintain contact with the floor or ground to feel their feet supporting their whole body.

## **EVALUATION: HOW TO CHECK IF THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED?**

During or after the course, the participants are asked to evaluate the educational process, using any chosen form of evaluation.

## **PREFERRED COMPETENCES:**

- » competences in the field of cultural awareness and expression;
- » personal, social and learning competences;
- » civic competences;
- » entrepreneurial competences.

## **SOURCES: WHERE TO LOOK FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

Sources in English:

- » Applied theatre: [intellectbooks.com/applied-theatre-research](http://intellectbooks.com/applied-theatre-research)
- » Evaluation of the impact of educational activities involving art: [artisfoundation.org.uk/blog/blogposts/2017/09/monitoring-evaluating-impact-arts-schools](http://artisfoundation.org.uk/blog/blogposts/2017/09/monitoring-evaluating-impact-arts-schools)
- » Therapeutic clowning schools in the United States [clownswithoutborders.org/top-clown-schools-u-s](http://clownswithoutborders.org/top-clown-schools-u-s)
- » Woodley, K., Sotelano, M. (2010). *Tango therapy 2, Research and practice*.

## **SELECTED TRAINING CENTRES**

Knowledge of non-formal learning is necessary for learning the Expressive Arts method. Later, non-formal educators can take part in courses in physical theatre, improvisation, clowning and tango. Training courses in the scope of applied theatre, theatre in education and dance/movement in education can also be useful.

Prepared by:

**Georgia Sotiropoulou,**  
**Maria Sotiropoulou**

# Experience Design





## **METHOD: WHAT AND HOW?**

Experience Design is a part of a set of new disciplines, which include also Design Thinking, that exist at the intersection of several areas. Many of them are employed for strictly commercial purposes. We would like to present a specific approach, developed by Susanne Buck and Pigalle Tavakkoli, which focuses on transformation of the audiences of specific cultural institutions and non-government organisations. This approach has potential applications in both activism and education, serving to increase the organisational effectiveness of education-based activities.

Experience Design is an approach which supports the design of campaigns and processes that allow people to:

- » actively learn in order to exert positive influence on their environment and become agents of change;
- » organise activities of associations and groups to allow them to act in solidarity with each other and transform their communities;
- » provide educators and activists with tools that enable self-reflection, making it possible for them to assess the actual impact of their work and share this knowledge with other members of their team or with other stakeholders.

An important element of Experience Design is Flow's Engagement Thresholds Model which became a tool for identifying barriers hindering potential participants' involvement in projects carried out by different institutions and organisations. Similarly, other elements of Experience Design, for example empathy mapping or Emotional Journey, make it possible to predict the quality and success of educational experiences.

In terms of Experience Design and engagement thresholds, the sociotherapeutic educational process is primarily an experience, or a programme of experiences, of people and groups living in the social environment of institutions and organisations. The most memorable experiences affect people on the emotional level. We forget what we read, heard or saw, but we usually remember how something made us feel. Flow Associates, a cultural consultancy, specialises in designing meaningful educational experiences.

## **TARGET GROUP: WHO IS IT FOR?**

Experience Design can be used with different target groups. This approach can be applied to any potential group of participants from the social environment of a given institution or organisation. Understanding the needs and circumstances of such groups is essential for creation of educational campaigns and processes that can have a long-term impact on the participants and change how they think and act.

## **DIAGNOSIS: “FOR WHAT PURPOSE?”, “WHY THIS SPECIFIC METHOD/ APPROACH?”**

When planning activities, it is necessary to:

- » define and understand the needs and motivations of participants, as well as the broader context in which they function. This makes it possible to identify cultural and social barriers to their participation;
- » determine the effect, including the nature, of the long-term change that the institution/organisation wants to achieve;
- » identify or create tools which can help design educational activities. Experience Design is an approach useful in designing educational processes which are transformative in nature, i.e. support participants in changing their behaviour patterns.

## **THE MAIN GOALS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES: WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?**

Experience Design makes it possible for educators to design educational activities that meet the actual needs of their participants. To achieve this goal and test the adopted assumptions, the process usually has to include an element of co-design/consultation with the participants. Experience Design is an approach which is used foremost to design educational activities which make a permanent impact and change the life of people taking part in said activities.

## WORKSHOP METHODS AND TECHNIQUES: BY WHAT MEANS?

Experience Design allows educators to adapt the design process to their needs and budget. There is a variety of available methods and models, but those listed below are the key ones:

- » Flow's Engagement Thresholds Model – there are multiple models which illustrate various levels or means of engagement, but the Flow Associates believes that it is most useful to think about engagement as a series of thresholds which individuals and groups from the environment of a particular institution pass through on their way towards greater impact on the life of that institution. This model is not focused only on monitoring increases in the amount of people participating in activities offered by an organisation/institution on a regular basis. Its most important aspect is the focus on the impact that participation in the life of an institution or organisation has on individual people, their lives, their communities and the organisation itself. As people pass through thresholds, they develop their skills, abilities and competences in order to improve and cope better with their circumstances. While fewer and fewer people pass through each subsequent threshold, those few who are able to pass through all engagement thresholds eventually become leaders who support and influence other people from their local environment<sup>2</sup>;
- » empathy mapping – an empathy profile is a useful psychographic tool which helps to identify the audience of specific organisations or institutions. It allows to look at the audience from many different points of view, taking into account the external factors which affect the life of the audience of cultural institutions, and, thus, conclude how they will engage in educational activities;
- » Emotional Journey – drawing the emotional journey of participants of planned events can help identify the (positive and negative) emotions they could experience during the activity. Negative and positive emotions will affect the success of the planned campaign or activities. Emotional journey is a diagram which outlines the potential future actions, feelings, perceptions, thoughts and behaviours of the audience, including both

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<sup>2</sup> [flowassociates.com/2021/07/flows-engagement-thresholds-model](https://flowassociates.com/2021/07/flows-engagement-thresholds-model)

Accessed on: 3 August 2022.

positive and negative moments. It helps to identify interactions which may need more attention to improve the participants' experiences, as well as interactions which are irrelevant and can be removed from the process.

### **TOOLS: WHAT DO WE NEED?**

Materials which can be useful during such training courses include large sheets of paper in different colours, post-it notes, and markers.

### **EVALUATION: HOW TO CHECK IF THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED?**

When using the Experience Design tool, it is a good idea to focus on qualitative rather than quantitative feedback; for this reason, evaluation can take the form of small focus group sessions and individual meetings/interviews.

### **PREFERRED COMPETENCES:**

The person who conducts the training course should understand the process of designing experiences, in both theory and practice.



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- » Williams, G. (2009). *Telling Tales, fantasy and fear in contemporary design*. V&A Publishing.

## EXAMPLES OF TRAINING CENTRES

Information in English:

- » Experience Design Short Course:  
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## **PART 2**

# **BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND DEFINITIONS**

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**Who are adults in need  
of sociotherapeutic support?**





## IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT:

- » the language we can currently use to talk about adults as subjects of cultural education;
- » adults in need of sociotherapeutic support;
- » vulnerable groups;
- » intersectionality;
- » dependency;
- » dependent older people;
- » moving away from dependency and building communities based on interdependence.

The book is the result of more than three years of collaboration between institutions and organisations from Poland, Spain, the Netherlands, the UK and Greece: the ZAMEK Cultural Centre, Euroacción, Stichting Anatta Foundation, City Mine(d) and Creative YouthLand.

All these organisations have extensive experience of working with adults and groups that are being marginalised, discriminated against or not adequately supported, and therefore may require sociotherapeutic support. They work with people who are incarcerated, have migration experience, are unemployed, live with substance use disorders and experience communication difficulties (e.g., people who stutter, people with autism and symptoms of dementia, and people dealing with or recovering from illnesses), as well as older adults and dependent people living in care homes, people with disabilities, as well as members of multi-ethnic communities, and many other groups.

Individuals that can be classified into the above-mentioned groups are often understood to be **in a difficult, crisis, complex and multifaceted temporary or permanent situations that affects many aspects of their lives at the same time**. As such situations usually impact people's economic, health,

psychological and social circumstances, they can noticeably limit their agency as actors operating in the political, public, legal, social spheres of life.

Imagine people in difficult economic situations (for example, deprived of income, the right to work, access to their accumulated assets and sometimes also their homes) who, at the same time, are in poor health, experience psychological crises (e.g., overt or covert depression, self-doubt, neuroses), feel lonely and lack social support networks. It is a description that could be easily applied to such groups as people with migration experience, many older and incarcerated people and people with substance use disorders.

Sometimes, a temporary crisis can turn into a permanent condition. Sudden and unexpected events, related to, for example, the loss of a loved one, dismissal from a job, a health crisis, natural disasters, sudden catastrophes, and accidents, often put people in difficult, temporary situations. In the absence of adequate support, the crisis-evoked circumstances can result in such permanent conditions as social marginalisation, poverty, and loss of health.

## **DOES EVERYONE NEED SOCIO THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT?**

In our project, we devoted a lot of attention to the issue of defining groups in need of sociotherapeutic support. But who is to identify individuals and groups as ones that have a particularly strong need for support? Isn't defining different groups by their deficits an act of colonisation in which communities and individuals are described and simultaneously determined by means of language and concepts that do not belong to them, are not theirs? How, and to what extent, do individuals and groups in need of support participate in defining their own needs and circumstances? We were also interested in how our questions and dilemmas reverberate in the educational context. How can we build democratic educational relationships that are not based on the underlying inequality between educators and learners? Relationships which would allow for situations to be created communally rather than on the basis of learners' dependency on teachers?

During our discussions, we realised that sociotherapeutic needs are very often invisible at the first glance. Traumas experienced by individuals and groups often remain unexpressed and unconscious. People can also perceive their own dependencies on caregivers, as well as patriarchal, family and other systems, as

problematic, but, at the same time, impossible to change. We discussed the fact that a democratically and sensitively structured educational relationship can also trigger reflexivity, which can contribute to changing learners' situation and allowing them to develop a greater ability to express their needs and find the right language to describe them.

For this reason, we have made the democratic assumption that, potentially, we all need sociotherapeutic support. We believe that adoption of this thesis allows us to look more closely at both learners and those who take on the role of educators through the prism of their unexpressed or unacknowledged needs and deficits and create a space in which they can together search for a language to describe their individual circumstances. We also draw attention to the structural contexts of various **climate, economy, energy, migration and war crises, which are currently exacerbating social inequalities and worsening the living conditions of many individuals and groups. Populations affected by energy and housing poverty, arising out of climate and war-related crises, will only continue to grow and reveal new, unexpected and perhaps as yet unnamed problems. It is, therefore, worthwhile to promote a language describing deficits and needs within the framework of adult education and create a space in which they can be defined collectively by both individuals and groups that need it.**

## **VULNERABLE GROUPS**

Individuals may perceive difficult life situations as problematic and hard to bear. On the one hand, they may feel responsible and even guilty for their own difficult circumstances. On the other hand, said circumstances do not necessarily constitute consequences of individual actions, but reflect social, economic and political relations, which result in **permanent, systemic exclusions** of certain individuals and groups, as well as their **marginalisation**, or **threats** thereof, and overt **discrimination**. From this perspective, individuals have no influence or control over the processes and mechanisms that define and determine their circumstances.

Groups and individuals who are discriminated against or marginalised can be broadly referred to as **vulnerable groups** (Nifosi-Sutton, 2017).

Vulnerable groups are often defined by listing specific sub-populations, i.e., distinguishing groups in need of support on the basis of their shared sociological characteristics (Aday, 1994; De Chesnay, 2008). Accordingly, vulnerable groups and populations include women, ethnic and cultural minorities, people with disabilities and migration experience, children, teenagers, older people, members of LGBT+ communities, survivors of terrorism and human trafficking, people affected by natural disasters, including the climate crisis, and asylum seekers.

Sometimes, vulnerable groups are divided into people affected by **individual** and **social/collective vulnerabilities** (Rawlinson, 2012). The former category includes groups that are almost homogeneous because of some characteristic shared by their members, for example, age (in the case of older people and children) and health (people with disabilities). On the other hand, collective vulnerability refers to groups which tend to be more diverse internally. According to the UNESCO report “On the principle of respect for human vulnerability and personal integrity” collectively vulnerable groups include people who are unemployed, illiterate, involved in ethically dubious research, incarcerated or otherwise deprived of mobility and freedom, people who are subject to “hierarchical relations” (including, for example, students, employees or members of the armed forces), marginalised people (immigrants and migrants, nomads and members of ethnic minorities), survivors of war, people impacted by climate change, natural disasters and the “exploitation of resources in developing countries” (“On the principle of respect for human vulnerability and personal integrity”).

However, it should be taken into account that distinguishing between groups whose vulnerability is individual and collective carries with it **the danger of removing collective responsibility for the inferior living conditions of these communities**, which may, in turn, result in **a lack of legal or social protection of said groups** (Masferrer, García-Sánchez, 2016).

The vulnerability of social groups can be defined on the basis of many varied factors, one of which is gender, which is why women are considered a vulnerable group. They are a particularly vulnerable because of issues related to reproductive health, lower wages, which increase the risk of poverty, the burden of care work, the greater risk of domestic violence, and the fact that the climate crisis has a more serious impact on women’s lives (Rawlinson, 2012; Shi, Stevens, 2021). Cultural and ethnic minorities are treated as particularly vulnerable due to their worse economic or health circumstances and more limited access to

education (Shi, Stevens, 2021). People with disabilities are at risk of being marginalised due to their health conditions, poorer access to education and career development, and high health-care-related needs, but, most importantly, due to social exclusion caused by the way societies are set up and function (Taylor, 2011; Taylor, 2014; Taylor, 2017).

## **INTERSECTIONALITY**

Groups in multifaceted (temporary and permanent) crisis situations are most often at risk of exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation on the basis of more than one factor affecting their life. For example, a Black migrant single mother from an ethnic minority who is economically disadvantaged or belongs to the working poor is underprivileged in multiple ways and to a much greater extent than a white woman who is also a single mother, but belongs to the middle-class and lives in a large Western European city. This overlapping of different factors of exclusion, oppression and discrimination is known as **intersectionality** (Carastathis, 2016; Collins, Bilge, 2020; Crenshaw, 2017; Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, Tomlinson, 2013; Kuran, Morsut, Kruke, Krüger, Segnestam, Orru, Torpan, 2020). Different forms of oppression affecting lives of groups and individuals do not function in isolation from one another. Therefore, whenever we describe or analyse the situation of particular individuals and groups, we should take into account all forms of exclusion that affect them at the same time.

It is also important to **remember about intersectional nature of exclusion and oppression when identifying the characteristics of target groups in the context of adult education**. An intersectional approach to vulnerable groups helps to understand the needs of these groups (which are sometimes very complex) and take into consideration the diverse and complicated factors that determine their circumstances. Rarely do individuals bear personal responsibility for getting caught in a matrix of **intersectional exclusions**, but the fact that they are affected by intersecting forms of oppression makes it much more difficult for them to improve their circumstances. We can, therefore, taking into account intersectionality, formulate the following definition of vulnerable groups:

**vulnerable groups consist of individuals exposed to potential harm (intentional or accidental), risks associated with changing circumstances and possible dependency (Ippolito, Sanchez, 2015), because they exist**

**in complex, multifaceted and intersectional circumstances in which they are impacted by multiple and diverse forms of oppression, exclusion and marginalisation. The educational needs of such groups are complex, resulting in the need to address and improve multiple key competences in the course of their education.**

## **SOCIOTHERAPEUTIC SUPPORT**

The organisations participating in our project kept encountering similar problems in their daily educational work targeting vulnerable groups, chief among them, the issue of trying to respond to all needs of adult learners. Educators and trainers often felt that, for example, civic education activities were of no use if the target group had problems coping with permanent stress, felt that their health and safety were threatened, or if the groups' other basic needs were not met. In their work, the organisations' representatives often thought that education addressing only selected competences did not have the desired effect and failed to improve the situation of the target group members. They concluded that adult education required a more systemic approach.

Sustained oppression and exclusion of vulnerable groups and socio-economic equality cannot coexist at the same time. Social justice, as a form of European policy, presupposes ensuring equality of opportunities and sustainable improvement of the life situation of groups at risk of exclusion. In this context, cultural educators may find themselves in a particularly difficult situation. They may feel that, by using artistic and cultural methods, they are not participating in the process of developing systemic changes and sustainable solutions supporting vulnerable groups.

Because of the above, we felt that it was very important to develop a cultural education methodology based on **cross-sectoral cooperation between cultural educators, social workers and therapists**. Through holistic support, in carrying out cultural adult education activities, educators are able to work on improving many different competences at the same time and provide people with support not only in terms of their skill development, but also in context of their mental health and social circumstances.

## DEPENDENCY

The definition of vulnerable groups we adopted assumes that they are exposed to potential harm, risks associated with changing circumstances and the possibility of finding themselves in a state of **dependency** (Ippolito, Sanchez, 2015).

The **category of dependency is a “multi-discursive” concept**, i.e., one which is present in different areas and domains, including academic thought, social policy, disability studies and therapeutic practice. Dependency can affect people and groups of different ages and social characteristics.

Dependency is “socially constructed” – it is not a concept that is universal to all cultures, places and social groups. The statements included in this text are grounded primarily in the Western discourse and strongly linked to the mode of functioning of this particular reality.

**Dependency is a state of limited independence, which means having to rely on other individuals, groups and institutions. In this sense, dependency is most often associated with physical limitations (experienced as a result of ageing, illness, disability) and psychological problems (fear of social interactions, avoidance of contact with other people, etc.). Both of these groups of issues, by no means representing the entire range of possible causes leading to dependency, can also be linked to difficulties related to self-care (i.e., inability to do one’s shopping, maintain personal hygiene, and prepare and eat meals, and so on, without assistance). It is worth emphasising here that even the so-defined dependency is neither permanent nor implies that every person classified as dependent requires help and support in all aspects of their functioning. Each person’s (in)dependence should be assessed separately.**

## DEPENDENCY AND GENDER

Dependency is a feminised concept, which is caused as much by demographics (women’s life expectancy is higher than men’s) as it is by socio-cultural reasons.

Gender is an aspect of identity that can limit one’s access to life opportunities and development of social and cultural capital. Research indicates that women

are the gender that is more likely to be dependent on others within the household context: “any situation in which a person depends on others to meet their material needs constitutes a power relation” (Coelho, 2010). According to the “Working, Yet Poor” report, “44% of Europeans think that the most important role for a woman is to take care of her home and family, while 43% think that the most important thing for a man is to earn money” (De Michelli, Capesciotti, 2020). Therefore, the risk of becoming dependent is greater for women, especially given the criteria relevant to women’s situation on the labour market:

- » lower employment rates;
- » pay and pension gaps;
- » the high rate of part-time work;
- » unequal access to property;
- » career breaks motivated by maternity leave;
- » unequal distribution of care responsibilities, segregation in education and later on the labour market;
- » working in lower-paid jobs (e.g., in social and health services).

These inequalities result in an imbalance between men and women in terms of career and income opportunities. Women are also at greater risk of losing their income, e.g., because of divorce. Women’s lack of sufficient income implies their inferior social position, reduced capacity to make autonomous decisions in every aspect of their lives, and their inability to exercise their full rights as citizens.

Age is another factor that has a huge impact on women’s situation. As women get older, they become responsible for greater number of care responsibilities – “when married or cohabiting women do not have a wage or other source of personal income in their own right, their male partners have enormous power (potential or realised) over the resources at these women’s disposal” (Lister, 1990).

When designing education aimed at women, it is worth considering an intersectional approach, as any kind of oppression felt by women can intersect with their other identities and further exacerbate their marginalisation:



1. Women all too often earn less than their male household partners, and thus constitute people who, in line with the opportunity cost logic, can sacrifice their income to take up domestic work. If either partner is to give up their career for the sake of providing care for dependants at home (children, older people, people who are ill, and people with disabilities), women are more likely to stay home because their earnings contribute less income to the joint household and can be given up without a significant harm.

2. Income inequality is a source of dependency (Coelho, 2010).

3. Work-life balance policies should contribute to the gender equality by promoting women's participation in the formal labour market, equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men, and closing the gender gap in wages, salaries and pensions.

4. If women do not have a voice or influence in local or national decision-making processes, they do not facilitate the success of political processes and do not participate in the collective actions needed to represent and defend their interests (Fox, Romero, 2017; Sagnier, Morell, 2019).

## **DEPENDENCY AND SOCIAL CLASS**

The development and course of dependency is influenced by one's economic status, social position and capital (both in the economic sense and in terms of cultural, social, symbolic capitals that influence one another), as well as the type of work performed.

## **DEPENDENCY AND AGE**

Another factor which is important for the general issue of dependency is the environment inhabited by dependent older people, which can be either their home (in which case, older people's informal carers are their nearest and dearests, family members, and friends) or an institution (e.g., a nursing home). The socially produced dependency (or its various dimensions and aspects) very often emerges, deepens, and gains legitimacy in relation to these very structures (formal or informal).

The process of marginalisation and making older people dependent on others began in Western culture at the beginning of the 20th century. It involved, among other things, states (in the organisational, institutional sense) gaining more and more influence over the lives of their citizens by precisely defining, normativising and scrutinising them. Naturally, the developing scientific discourses provided support for certain arbitrariness in the ordering of the social structure. Peter Townsend argues that the concept of “pension”, which has proved highly significant in shaping the contemporary understandings of dependency in its economic sense, and the status of the “kept man”/rentier has been developed in the same way in both capitalist and socialist states (Townsend, 2006). Others argue that “dependency” as a concept (and term) was invented and began to be developed socially and economically precisely at the time of the birth of capitalist structures operating within nation states.

It can therefore be said that dependency also has its structural dimension. The concept of dependency has to a large extent begun to shape (programme) our thinking about old age and seniority. Colloquially speaking, the imagined dependency of older people has increasingly started to become a “self-fulfilling prophecy”. It became a stereotype used both by social policy and legislation and certain (formal and non-formal) educational processes.

## **DEPENDENCY AND AGE AND SEXUAL IDENTITY**

The issue of sexuality (including sexual orientation) of older people, especially in Poland, remains a taboo. However, it is worth remembering that functioning as a non-heteronormative person in old age is even more difficult for people who have grown up/became adult in a period marked by even greater than the currently experienced institutional and social homophobia. When such non-heteronormative individuals lose their independence, the absence of loved ones can mean that their circumstances become dramatic. It may be caused by their natural family members passing away or the older people getting rejected due to their sexual non-normativity. Non-heteronormative individuals often bear an additional burden of not having a partner, not only because of demographic issues, but above all because of oppressive conditions that have made it impossible for such relationships to be formed, established and maintained. Loneliness often becomes very acute. Non-normative people (including homosexual and transgender people) should not be forgotten in the context of ageing pro-

cesses, quality of life and institutional support. How can these mechanisms be skilfully developed for the benefit of current and future dependent non-normative older people? It is certainly a huge challenge for our society, and one in which cultural, educational and state institutions must be involved.

## **DEPENDENCY AND DISABILITY**

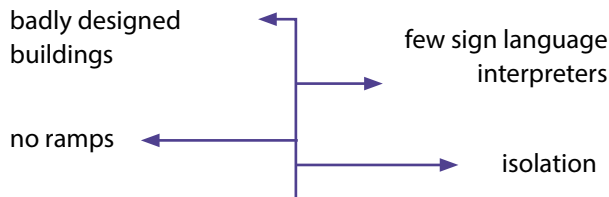
**(Pillemer, 1985; Kotlarska-Michalska, 2000)**

People with disabilities are often perceived as people with illnesses that make their lives difficult and dependent on others. A new approach to the issue was developed in the 1980s, in the form of the social model of disability which emerged out of the Fundamental Principles of Disability. The underlying idea was that “we are not disabled by our impairments but by the disabling barriers we face in society” (Olivier, 2013).

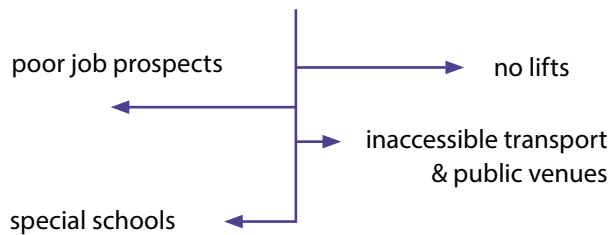
The social model broke away from linking disability to deficits, suggesting instead that the concept of disability itself is a social construct. If society was arranged in such a way as not to create barriers, there would be no need to define disability in terms of deficits or non-normativity. A social reality devoid of barriers for people with disabilities does not force them into dependency. For example, ramps and lifts installed in buildings ensure that wheelchair users are no longer functionally disabled. Similarly, if people with visual impairments are to read the latest best-selling book to be able to talk about it with their friends, the availability of full-text recordings should be considered when books are produced and published (Scope, 2022).

The social model has been challenged in critical disability studies and in the context of feminist studies. Transcending the social model allowed for highlighting the personal perspective instead of focusing only on those aspects of disability which are publicly shaped (Thomas, 2017). The social model’s limitations originated from the fact that it ignores the experience of individual corporeality and failed to take into account the intersectional exclusions encountered by people with different disabilities. Additionally, the social model did not consider the cultural determinants of disability and maintained a strict dichotomy between the public and private spheres (Król, 2022). The second chapter of this book provides more information on the critical model of disability and dependency.

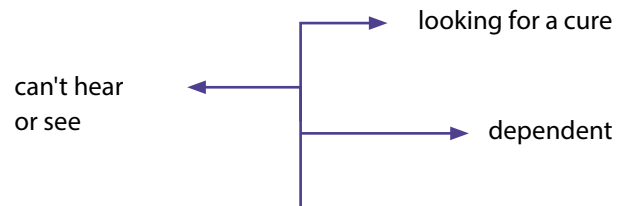
## The Social Model



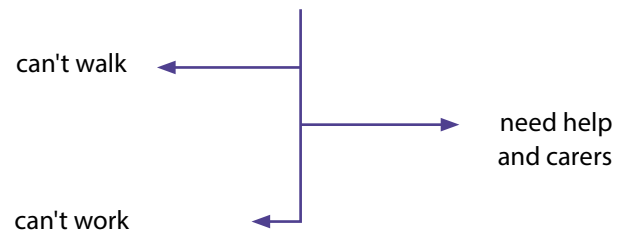
### PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES CAUSED BY BARRIERS



## The Medical Model



### PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES CAUSED BY MEDICAL CONDITIONS



The diagram shows characteristic features of the social and the medical model of disability.

It is based on Mike Oliver's book: "The individual and social models of disability" (1990).

The diagram was designed for the purposes of this publication.

## MIGRANTS' DEPENDENCY ON SOCIAL CARE

Some methods used in educational work with people with migration experience exacerbate their reliance on social support systems and push them into dependency. Polish Migrants Organise for Change, an organisation working with migrants from Central and Eastern Europe in London, identified a problematic trend among NGOs involved in provision of direct support for people with migration experience.

Direct support focuses on helping people navigate the complex immigration or welfare system, but does not invest in educational processes that would increase their resilience in the face of crisis situations. The so-designed activities actually increase people's dependency. City Mine(d) London observed that many creative projects delivered by cultural organisations focus only on helping "here and now", but do not equip the participants with the tools needed to build social support networks for themselves.

On the other hand, the war circumstances and the sudden migration crisis faced by Poland after Russia's attack on Ukraine gave rise to many reflections concerning strategies and building support for migrants. Aid actions focused on the

“here and now” are crisis actions that are part of the “for” strategies employed for the benefit of people facing war, fleeing from danger or life-threatening situations, and experiencing sudden homelessness. Such activities also serve to identify these people’s needs, create the support networks, and develop a broader approach based on acting “with” the communities in need.

There is a great potential for sociotherapeutic education at further stages of the process of “working with” people with migration experience. It can offer learning experiences that allow participants to transform themselves from mere users of services into drivers of change. This is possible by means of:

- » activating the creative potential and imagination of the participants;
- » supporting their activities in building community strategies to address not only individual but also group problems;
- » contextualising these desires and problems as part of a larger system of opportunity or oppression.

## **THE ROAD TO DEPENDENCY**

**(Kotlarska-Michalska, 1999; Taylor, 2017; Jefferys, 1989)**

Dependency (or rather a system of care, as well as neighbourhood and family support) used to be less visible. It did not function as part of a specific, separate category (with its characteristic images, archetypes, vocabulary and notions). Prior to the emergence of institutions for dependent people, especially in small communities, dependency was embedded in the natural rhythm of individual and community life.

Therefore, certain changing social and cultural factors may contribute to dependency in adult life. The cult of youth and the weak position of old age in Western culture influence the activation of certain marginalisation practices, e.g., in relation to older people. The social space in which they could continue to perform their professional and social roles is shrinking. Older people are, in a way, pushed into passivity. They are expected to adopt a more passive attitude (rest in “their old age”). Consequently, many people confine themselves to private, domestic spaces (restricting themselves to family and neighbourhood contacts – if any). The “low-esteem complex”, i.e., the feeling of inferiority in relation to younger

generations, gradually pushes older people into dependency. The simultaneous valorisation of family as an institution leads people to form certain expectations concerning their children and grandchildren in the old age, which, in turn, results in creation of a certain type of dependency on said family members. Paradoxically, older people who live in nursing homes and have high social competences (verbal skills, ability to create social connections, etc.) remain independent and self-reliant for the longest time (regardless of whether they have physical or sensory disabilities).

### **ESCAPE FROM DEPENDENCY OR RENOUNCING OF THE TERM? (Jefferys, 1989)**

It is important to recognise the competences, skills, agency and expertise of people with limited independence in the context of minimising the negative effects of their stigmatisation as dependent individuals. Escaping from the state of dependency – or, in fact, providing assistance in this regard – is, for many institutions and organisations, the biggest sociotherapeutic challenge involving cultural educators. At the same time, this emancipatory approach to dependency reinforces this concept and suggests that there is a division between dependent and independent people and that being independent is the social norm. Meanwhile, it is worth considering a different language for talking about adults in need of sociotherapeutic support – one that does not employ the term “dependency”, but uses the language of interaction and interdependence instead. Such a change allows to abandon the discourse of individualism in favour of the language of community and collaboration. In the next chapter, we will take a closer look at how these concepts function in the field of adult cultural education.





# Competence development of adults in need of sociotherapeutic support





## IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT:

- » the competency diversity of groups of adults in need of sociotherapeutic support;
- » how to think about the core competencies when designing cultural education processes;
- » how to develop cultural education practice with the help of feminist theory, intersectionality theory, aging studies and critical disability studies;
- » why the category of empowerment needs to be rethought;
- » how the concept of dependency can be redefined in terms of the ethics of care.

## MOVING BEYOND THE “US VS THEM” PERSPECTIVE

Vulnerable groups often include people whose circumstances are affected by stress, violence, and addiction, and people experiencing material, social and health-related difficulties. They need both psychological, social and cultural support and initiatives aimed at improving their civic, personal, and social competences, as well as competences related to awareness, cultural expression and learning. The situation of such groups can only be improved in a sustainable manner if the support they receive encompasses the “whole individual”, with their psychological aspects, social and economic position and cultural capital.

Cultural education for vulnerable groups of adults in need of sociotherapeutic support is a particularly challenging work. Often, it entails working with people who have experienced trauma, so educators, including cultural ones, become the so-called **secondary trauma recipients**, that is, they get affected by trauma in a “second-hand” manner. Educators that work with people who are under stress because of dramatic experiences are also influenced by said people’s emotions and became stressed themselves. The dramatic experiences that evoke such reactions can include traumatic events related to war, violence, including sexual violence against women, extreme poverty and precarity, as well as discrimination on the basis of race, religion and gender.

Individuals requiring sociotherapeutic support are often also exposed to **economic and social crises**, which negatively impacts their sense of dignity and makes it difficult for them to trust strangers. **It is, therefore, important to include work on restoring dignity and building trust** as an important part of cultural education aimed at vulnerable groups.

People in need of sociotherapeutic support may be in **a situation of family or institutional dependency**, that is, be entangled in complex relationships with other people or institutions. This applies to older people, people with disabilities who are ill, people with substance use disorders, young adults, women experiencing family violence, including financial abuse; people held in penitentiary institutions, etc. Their sense of autonomy, independence, and agency may be negligible. Educational work with the above-indicated people should also take into account cooperation with other actors participating in the situation of dependency, and should be a practice for developing a sense of control and autonomy.

Individuals belonging to vulnerable groups often find themselves coping with **stress, agitation of the nervous system, freezing behaviour**, low moods, and overt or masked depression. Any educational activities that address issues related to these people's agency, sense of autonomy, well-being, and creativity can also trigger difficult psychological reactions.

The above-mentioned characteristics of people who need sociotherapeutic support form an important context for the nature of the educational relationship established between cultural educators and the recipient groups. In such circumstances, education is not based on the sender-receiver model, in which trainers act as guides and authorities in relation to the learners.

## **A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE “DEPENDENCY – INTERDEPENDENCY” DICHOTOMY (Taylor, 2017)**

Dependency is not a neutral term. This category is often used in a manner associated with negative connotations. It is used to define people who are not independent and require attention, support, and assistance. However, the fact that someone receives care and empathy from others does not necessarily have to be seen as a negative thing. It is the status of people who experience difficulties, live with reduced abilities and function in non-normative ways in society, that constitutes a problem.

As long as the understanding of dependency (and the resulting treatment thereof), is dominated by the assumption that it involves non-sovereignty, subordination, weakness, and lack of self-reliance, the word “dependency” will remain not only a descriptive, but also a stigmatising term (as it currently functions). The semantic totalisation of persons defined as dependent will continue as long as understanding and use of the concept remains unchanged. A more precise, nuanced use of the term in discourse can help us abandon dependency (if we see it as a negative, inconvenient status which is unwanted by the very people to which it refers).

Considering the above, it is worth taking a closer look at the **category of interdependence**, which has tremendous potential not only for therapy, but also for animation and education. Paul K. Longmore, a disability historian, wrote that people with disabilities value not self-sufficiency but self-determination, interdependence rather than independence, personal connection rather than functional separateness, and human community rather than physical autonomy (Longmore, 2001).

The complexity of learners’ situation requires creating partnerships and exchange relationships, as well as building trust and treating each other with mutual respect. In this context, the use of quantitative questionnaires to measure competence or lack thereof, i.e., **defining learners in terms of deficits, is not conducive to development of democratic educational situations.**

**When cultural educators take on the role of more powerful and knowledgeable actors, this very approach colonises, instrumentalises and discredits the recipients of said education.**

## DEFINING THE KEY COMPETENCES

Meanwhile, the implementation of EU adult education projects requires the use of the category of key competences, which should be measured and defined before any educational activities begin. When working with vulnerable groups and adults in need of sociotherapeutic support, it is important to take into account that the individuals in question may have low skills in the scope of the key competences defined by the European Union. They are important in relation to cultural education activities in the scope of:

- » civic competences;
- » competences in cultural awareness and expression;
- » personal, social and learning competences.

On the one hand, referring to these competences increases the possibilities of social inclusion of vulnerable groups and likelihood of achieving a sustainable, systemic change. On the other hand, the creation of learning situations provides an opportunity for in-depth reflection on the very process of defining subjects and groups through competence deficits.

## POLICIES OF POSITIONING AND THE POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

Approaches derived from the findings of feminist and intersectionality theories, as well as critical disability and aging studies, are useful for countering the reinforcement of discrimination policies and instrumentalization of people from vulnerable groups. It is worth using them to the extent that they thematise the exchange of knowledge and establishment of deep relationships between privileged actors and those at risk of marginalisation.

In this context, it may be helpful to refer to **the policies of positioning**, which, in the tradition of Black feminism, has been the practice of thematising, revealing one's own social position in relation to other subjects (especially in educational relations) in the context of class, race, age, gender and other areas of privilege and oppression. However, this definition does not cover the full scope of the positioning policy which requires constantly asking oneself the question first formulated by bell hooks, one of the theorists of Black feminism: "Within complex

and ever shifting realms of power relations do we position ourselves on the side of colonising mentality?" (hooks, 2008). In other words, do we instrumentalise groups of recipients in the educational process, imposing on them "our ways of seeing and theorising, of making culture" (hooks, 2008)? Do we give them space to be creative on their own terms and explore their possibilities and potentials freely and without pressure? Do we create a space in which content and values are imposed or a space marked by democratic exchanges and free creative relationships?

Thinking and acting in terms of positioning policies is also susceptible to the critique of post-colonialism in the scope in which it challenges the dominance of Western academic epistemology, i.e., knowledge systems created at Western universities, which, to a large extent, also permeate European education and equalisation policies (King, 2022; Grech, & Soldatic, 2015). Many project and seminars groups participating in the "Cultural Education for Adults in Need of Socio-therapeutic Support" project were multi-ethnic and multicultural. These groups were diverse in terms of gender, their relation to cisnormativity and other variables. This situation has repeatedly prompted us to thematise the type of language and epistemologies we use in our educational work in relation to groups whose members come from outside our native cultural circle. We have had to consider these aspects in terms of imposition, colonisation and sometimes even appropriation of cultural content.

In respect to cultural education of people who need sociotherapeutic support, the lessons we draw from Black feminisms remind us that people who are oppressed, underprivileged and vulnerable **seek their own languages for expressing their experiences**. In this context, cultural education is part of a broader **policy of articulation**, that is, mechanisms for boosting the visibility of individuals and groups who cannot participate in the official and privileged channels shaping social visibility and agency and ensuring that their voices get heard.

Therefore, in cultural education activities that use art tools (music therapy, drama, dance), the goal is often first and foremost to provide a place for representation of cultural diversity within the public space. For example, music therapy sessions are organised in the open air to bring excluded social groups into the public space as visible groups, as valuable and important members of society. The free open concerts and jam sessions are open to all interested people who want to participate in making music, and observe and create it together with people who are homeless and people with disabilities.

## THE BODY IS ALSO POLITICAL

**Corporeal experience of different people belonging to vulnerable groups occupies an inalienable space in significant processes occurring within cultural education.** This experience becomes particularly noticeable in educational activities that use art therapy tools (e.g., ones related to music, drama or movement therapy).

It is worth remembering that the category of corporeality was one of the factors which drove the disability studies to move beyond the social model of disability. Critical disability studies researchers pointed out that the experiences of the body are just as important as the normative ways in which disability functions in socio-cultural contexts. Bodies and corporeality began to be analysed also in terms of politics and resistance, rather than as purely private experiences. Moreover, there is a full spectrum of bodily experiences in any society: from congenital disabilities, through acquired disabilities, the effects of temporary and terminal illnesses, to the physicality of experiencing an aging and dying body. In these aspects, corporeality is a category with a cultural and discursive dimension.

Many individual abilities, both mental and bodily, are necessary for stimulating the creation and improvisation in music, dance and theatre. They are essential to allow individuals to be creative and express themselves through rhythm, and, at the same time, follow what is happening and find their place in the group – recognise when it is their time to tap out the rhythm or start singing. Thus, for example, music does not only affect individuals emotionally, but also motivates them to make physical movements: this is especially important when working with people with restricted mobility. One of the goals of various forms of music therapy is to help participants not only in development of their subjective creativity and expression, but also ingenuity in engaging in interpersonal interactions.

Musical improvisation also provides opportunities to test, explore, and enhance the creativity located in one's body. People learn to be loud and quiet, fast and slow, rhythmic and disorganised, and use both high and low registers. At the same time, they learn by experiencing gentleness and agitation, taking initiative and following others. Such exercising of one's own broad expressive capabilities involves also unlearning the deeply internalised beliefs about one's identity, such as the ones expressed in statements like "I'm a quiet person", "I'm a flamboyant person" or "I'm an introvert".

In music therapy, the goal of developing creativity is to find oneself at all levels of expression: to be loud when one needs it and quiet when the time is right for that approach. What is more, improvisation in art teaches empathy, as well as listening and following others. It allows people to get to know their own voices, which can be understood as voices of their individual selves. Art therapy allows to create a parallel between human expression and artistic expression.

### **We all function on spectra: redefining empowerment**

For the purposes of cultural education, we adopt the metaphor of “being on a spectrum” and its related assumption that, in the course of our lives, from birth to advanced old age, people can move between states marked by different ability levels. They can be less able and disabled, healthy and ill, experience an acquired disability, enjoy good mental health and go through a depressive period. All these states affect both men and women, cis-normative and non-normative people. This approach makes it possible to reduce the cultural dichotomies – healthy versus sick, able-bodied versus disabled – and appreciate the experience of the body. We can take into account individual persons’ perspectives and how they approach and experience their own corporeality. In this context, the aim of education becomes more focused on building a relational space for the exchange of experiences rather than the process of normativization aiming to achieve the state of socially desirable normality, normativity, health and productivity.

The above-described perspective is also based on Carolyn M. Morell’s redefinition of the concept of empowerment based on her research on the living conditions of older women. Morell wrote: “I had yet to discover that an age-conscious definition of empowerment requires ‘embodiment’”. (Morell, 2003). Treating empowerment as an act of empowering individuals by making up for their deficits negates their real capabilities and limitations of their bodies. An aging body experiencing pain, impaired mobility and dementia states cannot be freed from these limitations. For this reason, Morell proposes to consider the human condition through the prism of existing on different spectra where the period of youth already contains the seeds of old age, but old age and disability still retains access to the experience of youth.

Thus, empowerment should be a practice that incorporates and takes into account both human capabilities and the limitations of the body, which tends to slow down and become harder to control over time. Women striving for empowerment can base their definition of themselves not only on how they are seen

and described by others, but foremost on how they talk and feel about themselves. Elimination of one's weaknesses has a disempowering effect. Therefore, provision of cultural education means creating a space where we can be seen in our entirety, with our strengths and weaknesses alike.

**Redefining empowerment allows also to escape the dynamics of power relations in education, which can be based on the power of the privileged at the expense of the weakness of the powerless.**

## **FROM DEPENDENCY TO THE ETHIC OF CARE**

Becoming a "dependent" person is first and foremost an action occurring in the context of one's identity. Assuming the role of a dependent person, accepting the new circumstances (how the situation is judged by the environment and oneself) is an operation that occurs within the sphere of identity. It requires re-defining one's self-image, which is often a conflicting experience with negative consequences (it should be remembered that the definition of dependence has predominantly negative connotations – Jefferys, 1989). Therefore, educational work with people who are at risk of dependency or already functioning as dependants, should also address identity issues. This context assigns greater significance to memories (and various forms of their preservation, manifestation, materialisation), personal lifestyles, possessions and objects. Accessories, clothing, material traces of activity, embodied events (scars, abilities, tattoos), gestures and habits, body postures – all these elements constitute parts of identity and need to be acknowledged and incorporated into sociotherapeutic practices that ensure individuals' independence in education.

However, **retaining a strong concept of dependency within the educational practice leaves us once again trapped in the shackles of the binary thinking: independence – dependency.** That type of thinking idealises the notion of independence, indicating that there are individuals who function completely independently and thus fit into the desired social norm. Meanwhile, just as we can function in our lives at different points on the spectrum between being able-bodied and disabled, or sick and healthy, we can also, analogously, over the course of our lives, experience various degrees of dependency on multiple entities (human, non-human, institutional). **The myth of complete independence stigmatises the situation of dependency which affects everyone to varying degrees.** Thus, Susan Wendell, a researcher, suggests **replacing the**



**concept of dependency with the category of reciprocity** to facilitate understanding of the complexity of the relationships in which we are entangled (Wendell, 1989). The literature on critical disability studies includes also Carol Gilligan's work on the ethics of care (Gilligan, 1993). This notion allows to replace thinking in terms of dependency with recognition of the reciprocity of assistance provided in social relations and build grassroots, collective support networks consisting of actors who function on different spectra of abilities (Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018).

## **CULTURAL EDUCATION OF PEOPLE WHO NEED SOCIO THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT AND CREATION OF EDUCATIONAL SPACES**

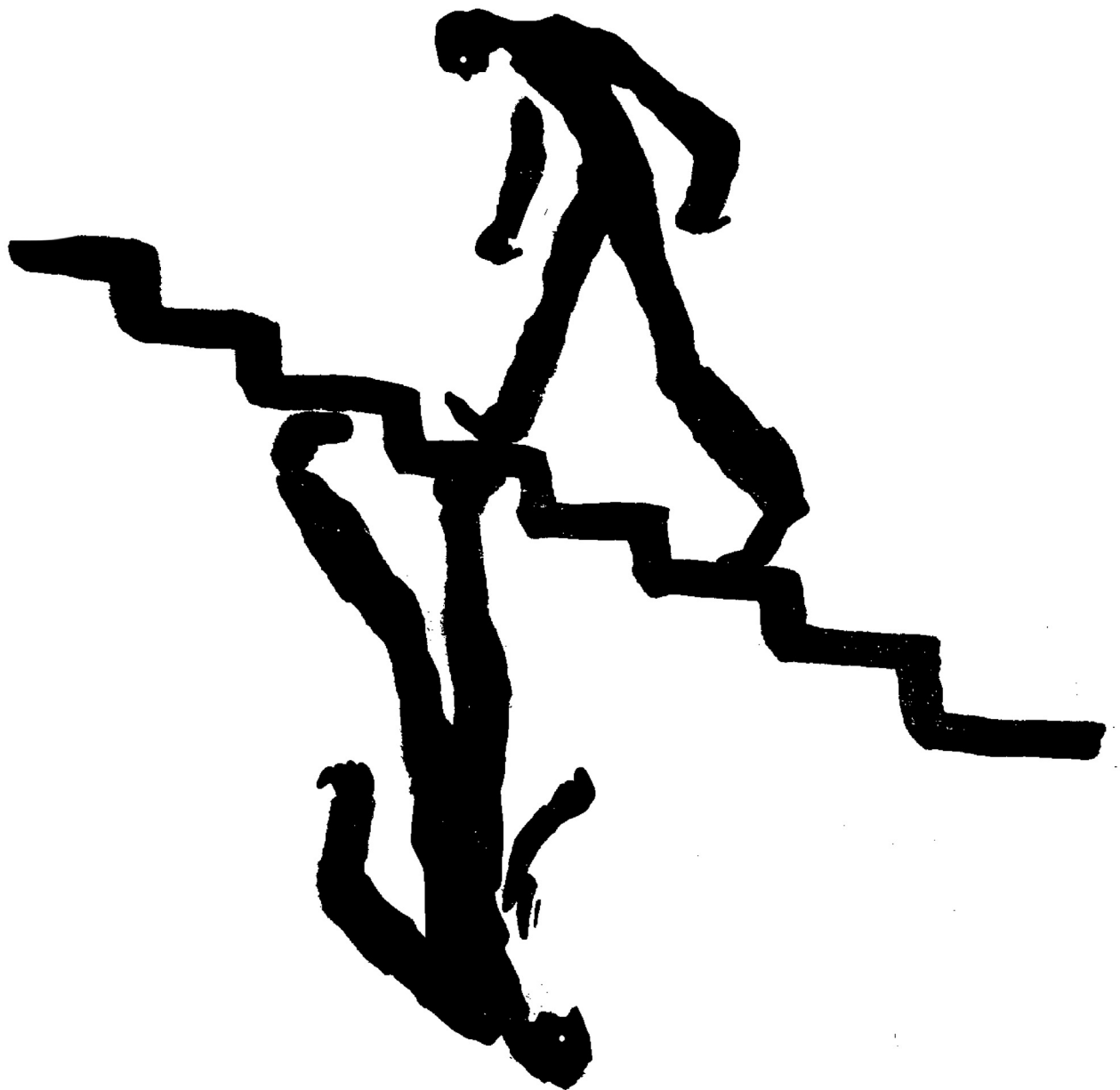
Education that pays attention to the condition of people belonging to vulnerable groups triggers a series of emotional reactions, sometimes very difficult ones, in both learners and trainers. In this context, one of the goals of such educational activities is to create and maintain a space for these reactions, so that people who occupy said space can feel safe within its confines.

Educational activities that make use of art tools sometimes develop competences that are very difficult to define in a precise manner. At times, the aim of a given activity may be, for example, to allow people to practice their skills of taking on roles, participating in improvisations, and be funny. In this context, there also needs to be a safe space for participants to be able to openly discuss what actually happened during the workshop.

Sometimes, the assessment of the competence of people in need of support is done through discussion, a sort of collective process involving participants, which is also a creative activity in itself. It can include processes of becoming aware that individuals tend to internalise certain objective social problems as their personal responsibility. These processes require time and collective action. People taking part in educational activities may not always be aware of their needs and able to express them. Often, they are able to recognise different needs and competences only during the course of educational activities. Each stage of training brings some changes. One of the elements of education is the process of conversation itself – of creating a safe space for on-going creative transformation, both for participants and trainers.

The next chapter will provide information on how to create such spaces in educational situations, and what to call them and why.

# Minimal and sufficient competencies of educators in provision of psychological and sociotherapeutic support



### **IN THIS PART OF THE BOOK, YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT:**

- » the psychotherapy and social work competencies which are worth incorporating into a holistic cultural education methodology for people in need of sociotherapeutic support;
- » the timing and conditions which allow educational methods to have a therapeutic effect;
- » differences between therapeutic and educational goals.

Cultural education is commonly perceived as an interdisciplinary field of educational practices that employs a variety of artistic tools (drama, dance, music, fine arts, literature, storytelling, and others), as well as tools used in anti-discrimination, equality, anti-racist, political, critical, civic, and social education.

However, cultural education is not defined on the basis of the tools used by educators. Their importance is secondary to the objectives that the educators set for themselves, the most important of which are based on the aspects described and discussed in the previous two chapters.

They can be summarised as follows:

- » Cultural education perceives individuals in the context of the intersectional exclusions and systems of oppression and seeks to thematise these circumstances in educational work, describe the related situations and life experiences, and, together with participants, reflect on the possibilities of countering said exclusions. In this sense, cultural education is an emancipatory activity.
- » The “epistemological”<sup>3</sup> basis of activities is important in the context of cultural education, as it can be used to seek answers to questions raised within the framework of post-colonial feminist theories, intersectionality, critical disability studies, and cultural studies on ageing. How

3 In this context, “epistemological” means that cultural educators are aware of the sources of knowledge they use in practice.

should we treat vulnerable groups? How does the category of gender intersect with other personal characteristics and affect people's life circumstances? What does the category of dependency entail?

- » Cultural education draws on critical pedagogy approaches and wants to bring about social change and improve the quality of life of vulnerable groups and groups at risk of marginalisation.
- » Cultural education creates a safe space in which participants can discuss things that matter to them, engage in group processes, and develop their creativity in a free, safe, and confidential manner.

**A holistic approach to participants of cultural education which takes into account their economic, welfare, political, and social situation creates the need for defining the minimum and sufficient set of competencies in the field of psychological and sociotherapeutic support.**

**Question:** Does combining cultural, psychological, and social support within adult education mean that trainers should possess competencies in all these areas? Should they be educators, social workers, and therapists at the same time?

**Answer:** Not necessarily. Of course, there are people in the educational community who have competencies and experience in social work, therapy, and the use of tools of cultural education which include selected forms of art therapy. However, it is crucial to organise the educational process in a way that fosters establishment of cooperation between representatives of different sectors, including social work, culture, and mental health support institutions. **Such networks of cooperation of institutions representing different fields are examples of so-called intersectorality.**

**Question:** Why can intersectorality be more effective than ad hoc support?

**Answer:** In adult education, well-organised intersectorality can respond to intersectional exclusions of vulnerable individuals and groups. Intersectoral support is more effective than more narrowly targeted assistance offered by representatives of a single sector, as vulnerable groups and those at risk of marginalisation receive help from many corners, which addresses not

only their social and psychological needs, but also the needs related to artistic and cultural expression and health.

**Question:** Are intersectoral support networks easy to build?

**Answer:** Building intersectoral support and cooperation networks is by no means an easy task. Establishing intersectoral networks takes time and requires a significant commitment from many stakeholders, all of which should be equally interested in building such holistic support networks. It is also good to try out different solutions, propose new forms of cooperation, and check what works at the various stages of their creation. In our project, we tested intersectoral links between the healthcare sector (a psychiatric hospital) and the culture sector. Our project group itself was composed of representatives of various disciplines, including psychology, social support, music, movement, and dance therapy, as well as anti-discrimination education and other initiatives.

**Question:** Should intersectoral support networks be developed from the perspective of institutions or groups and individuals in need?

**Answer:** It is worth considering looking at intersectorality through the eyes of institutions, organisations, educators, and officials who create it. However, this approach often means that the perspective of groups at risk of marginalisation are not taken into consideration. On the one hand, adopting the point of view of the creators of intersectoral networks allows to identify not only difficulties, but also administrative, legal, institutional, personnel, and other kinds of barriers. On the other hand, looking at intersectoral networks through the lens of individuals and groups that need support makes it possible to, first and foremost, identify their problems, needs, and systemic difficulties. For them, the support networks are essential. Vulnerable groups also do not have to empathise with the difficulties faced by support and education systems, which are often ineffective or inefficient. Researcher Freyja Haraldsdóttir pointed out that “empathising with the powerlessness of bureaucrats, professionals, and support institutions is a one of the ways in which people with disabilities react emotionally to structural ableism,” a way of coping with the internalised oppression of the care and support systems (Haraldsdóttir 2018, after: Król 2022, p. 65). Looking at intersectoral support and education systems from the point of view of the recipients, rather than the providers, makes it possible to better understand and follow the real needs of vulnerable groups instead of focusing on systemic obstacles to construction of support networks.

### ABLEISM:

"is prejudice against disabled people that can lead to countless forms of discrimination, from lack of access to jobs, education, and housing to oppressive stereotypes and systemic inequalities that leave disabled individuals marginalised. Ableism breeds discrimination and oppression, but it also informs how we define which embodiments are normal, which are valuable, and which are 'inherently negative'".

Taylor, 2017

**Question:** What does intersectorality contribute to support institutions?

**Answer:** Intersectoral activities constitute special support for persons who work with adults in healthcare facilities, day care centres, sociotherapy centres, and prisons. It can relieve them of some of their workload, complement their efforts, offer methodological support, create a network of contacts, provide opportunities to exchange experiences, and trigger a reflection on the existing support, assistance, and educational practice.

### THERAPY VS EDUCATION

Many of the methods applied in the field of cultural education may give rise to some doubts: is it still education or already therapy? Such confusion may arise because cultural education methods have numerous therapeutic effects. Participants often admit that these methods provide them with support in their everyday life. Sometimes, certain contents, tasks, and exercises can bring about deep emotional reactions and drive participants to engage in more in-depth reflection and conversations with others. Many exercises based on theatre, drama, storytelling, music, and movement therapy activities address personal lives of participants.

This is inevitable: **on the one hand, therapy, as an activity involving working with a client, contains many art-related elements, which is why its practitioners refer to it as an art form. On the other hand, many cultural education methods have therapeutic effects.** Some schools, methods, and approaches employed in cultural education deliberately make use of therapeutic categories and tools, e.g., different varieties of art therapy.

**The scopes of competencies related to the ability to deliver correct, well-prepared, systematic therapy and adult education differ significantly from one another.**

**Question:** What is the therapeutic process?

**Answer:** Therapy involves considering each person as an individual in order to skilfully and accurately diagnose their situation, the barriers and difficulties they experience, as well as their capital and competencies. Such work requires time and skills originating from a different system than cultural education. Moreover, the therapist takes responsibility for the therapy process. The person starting therapy and the therapist enter into a contract in which they specify the objectives, forms, and expected duration of the therapy.

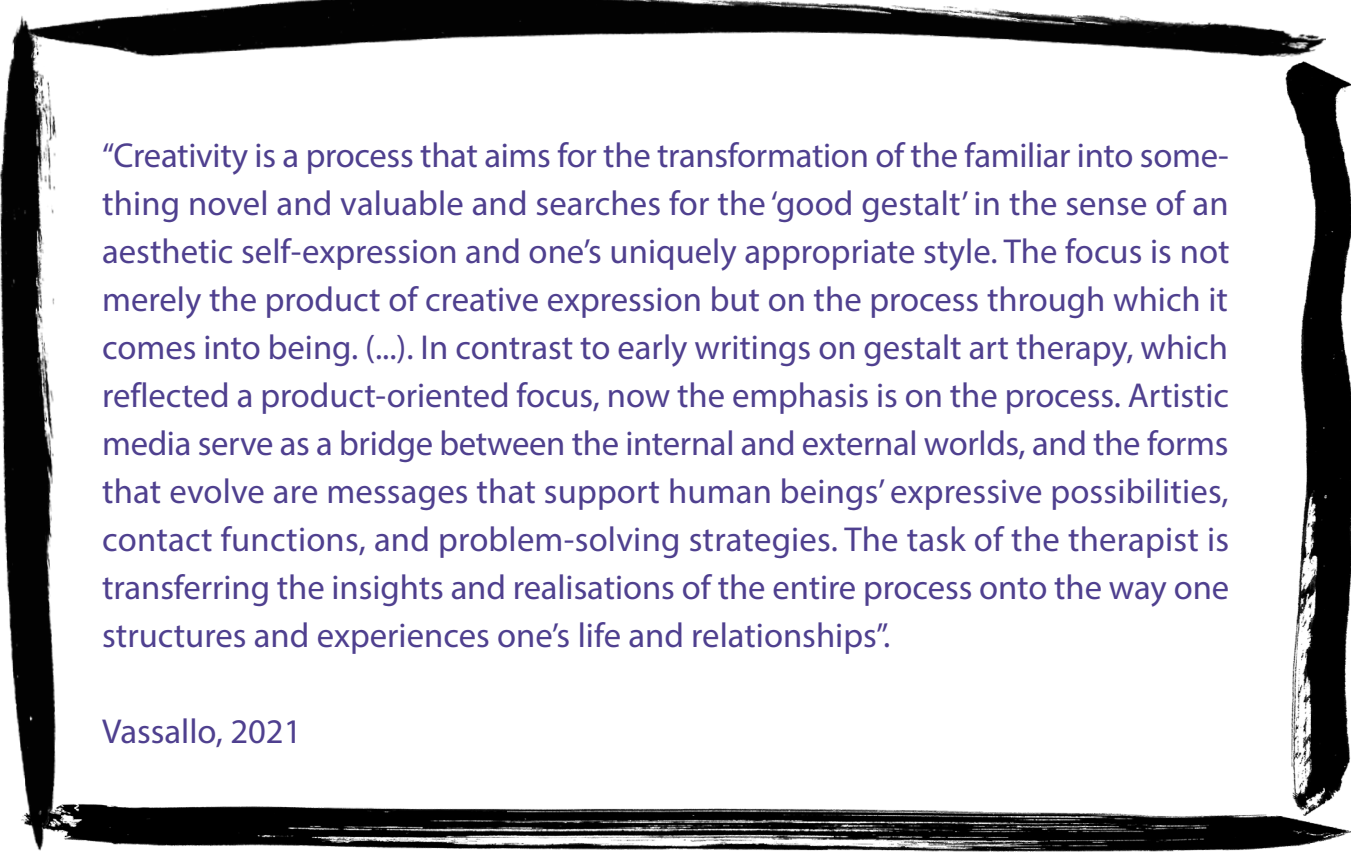
**Question:** What is the educational process?

**Answer:** Education, meanwhile, is an activity that creates situations that allow participants to expand their knowledge, competencies, and skills. The educational process enables participants to practice their group work and cooperation skills, and develop their social skills.

**Question:** Does therapy have anything to do with art?

**Answer:** In many types of therapy, there is a strong belief that psychotherapy is a form of art (Brownell, 2019; Parlett, 2003; Miller, 1973; Rhyne, 1970; Rubin, 1984; Zinker, 1977). This assumption is based on the fact that the therapist has to be responsive to the client's needs, creative, and ready for occasional improvisation. Therapy requires patiently following the rules of the chosen therapeutic method, so in this sense, it is a craft, but the art of creativity is also needed at various stages of the therapeutic process (Roubal, 2019).

The assumption that therapy is to some extent an art also applies to the Gestalt therapy, the tools of which we have used in our project. However, in this case, the belief in the artistic character of therapy has additional significance. The Gestalt method recognises that tasks related to artistic expression and creativity can and should be incorporated into the therapeutic process, as they serve to reveal experiences that are otherwise difficult to articulate (speak of). They may, for example, be part of traumatic past experiences that have been repressed, dramatic memories that have been relegated to the subconscious, and experiences that clients do not remember because they were in a “freeze mode” when they happened, which means that they were shut off from their emotions. These may also be somatic (bodily) experiences that individuals are unable to voice or do not feel ready to confront.



“Creativity is a process that aims for the transformation of the familiar into something novel and valuable and searches for the ‘good gestalt’ in the sense of an aesthetic self-expression and one’s uniquely appropriate style. The focus is not merely the product of creative expression but on the process through which it comes into being. (...). In contrast to early writings on gestalt art therapy, which reflected a product-oriented focus, now the emphasis is on the process. Artistic media serve as a bridge between the internal and external worlds, and the forms that evolve are messages that support human beings’ expressive possibilities, contact functions, and problem-solving strategies. The task of the therapist is transferring the insights and realisations of the entire process onto the way one structures and experiences one’s life and relationships”.

Vassallo, 2021

In Gestalt therapy, the therapeutic process consists largely of the person in therapy regaining the ability to connect with and experience their emotions, as well as learning to talk about their mental states, i.e., mentalize them. Art can be very useful in facilitating such processes. This is one of the reasons why theatre, as



a form of artistic expression, has found such a significant application in the Gestalt therapy movement, which resulted in establishment of Gestalt Theatre.

Andrasik argues that Gestalt Theatre (as transformation of applied drama) complements the theoretical framework of Gestalt therapy through the use of expression in the therapeutic process. The results of such creative work can function on their own as an experiment or be reworked therapeutically at a later stage. For this reason, Gestalt Theatre is also used in education, development of emotional intelligence, and so on (Andrasik, 2020). It is used in educational work with the body: in the context of somatic perception abilities, and body and movement awareness. What is more, Gestalt Theatre has extensive application in the development of emotional skills and intelligence, as well as such social skills as listening, assertiveness, self-confidence, and conflict resolution.



The Gestalt Theatre method is successfully applied in groups of young adults affected by problems with discriminatory behaviours based on gender, ethnic, religious, national, and other characteristics. Problems that arise within a group can be visualised in role-played conflict interactions which allow to performatively expose the mechanisms that govern said interactions and later discuss and debate them in greater depth.

Many of the elements used in Gestalt Theatre are nowadays also applied in various cultural education methods. Workshops and training sessions often begin with “grounding” activities, which anchors participants in the “here and now”, for example, through meditation or by focusing their attention. The influence of the Gestalt method on cultural education is also noticeable in its orientation toward the process rather than the effect, use of creativity in educational activities, and inclusion of improvisation.

**Question:** Does education have anything in common with therapy?

**Answer:** Of course, cultural education activities can, and often do have, a therapeutic effect that addresses the well-being of participants in a broad way, in physical and psychological aspects alike. In the course of cultural education, people in crisis situations, including health-related ones, older people and people with various forms of disability and neurodiversity, take part in activities that improve their sensory, memory, and motor abilities, as well as their mental and physical well-being.

If we think about cultural education in terms of creating interactions, it is worth remembering that cultural education allows participants to share their experiences and talk about their circumstances, impressions, memories, and feelings with others. In other words, educational situations also involve conversations, interactions, and exchanges that have a social dimension and can provide support to participants. They allow them to become members of a group, spend time with other people, make new friends, and overcome loneliness and social isolation, which significantly improves their mental well-being.

Many educational situations have therapeutic effects, although the situations themselves do not constitute therapy. However, the therapeutic power of cultural education is seldom written or spoken about. It strengthens individuals and groups in various aspects of their functioning, as individuals and within the

social contexts of their lives. Theatrical or performative activities with collective impact can serve a therapeutic function for entire communities or groups, and the same is true of musical activities, and those related to fine arts.

Similarly, various forms of anti-discrimination, feminist, critical, and socialisation education often bring improvements in the mental well-being of participants. In the context of our project, we have tested, and described for this book, one of the more unique of such education techniques – the WenDo method. This approach empowers women and equips them with self-defence tools and techniques, allowing participants to grow stronger. Like other forms of critical education, at times, it can even contribute to changing how participants perceive themselves in terms of gender, social, cultural, and other roles, and thus initiate profound individual transformations.

The therapeutic function is also fulfilled by modern forms of education that involve working with and in nature: they generate a sense of relief, sooth and calm down the agitated nervous system. In our project, this function was served by the methods proposed by the organisation called Anatta Foundation: nature in social work and positive-psychology-based approach. Descriptions of these methods can be found in this book, in the section titled „Methods and approaches used in the project“.

Some, but not all, of the above-mentioned educational activities are pre-defined as therapeutic. For example, it is no coincidence that music therapy and art therapy have the word “therapy” in their names.

**Question:** In what sense is music therapy a form of therapy?

**Answer:** In some art therapy methods, such as the Nordoff Robbins music therapy, which was implemented in our project and described in this book, the therapeutic elements do not necessarily have to lead to a specifically defined change in the life of an individual or group, as is the case in various forms of individual therapy.

In Nordoff Robbins music therapy, change is understood as a process that can involve improving the quality of functioning only in certain areas of people’s lives. Like in all forms of educational work conducted with older people, as well as people with disabilities, neurodiversity conditions, dementia and autism,

therapeutic activities cannot be geared towards achievement of a spectacular change in the form of radical improvement or healing. Art therapies seek to avoid reinforcing the clear-cut opposition between illness and health. They often approach participants without judgment, but with regard to the basic characteristics of their conditions and circumstances. In this context, music therapy is more about “fishing for moments”, being in the “here and now” with participants, and accompanying them in the process. Following the participants and staying in touch with them can sometimes function as “little big goals”, especially when working with people with autism or dementia.

Another difficulty lies in determining who is supposed to define change in music therapy; whether it should be the therapist, participant themselves, or their social circle. Nordoff Robbins music therapy accepts that participants have the right to assess their own change, as it may be invisible to others, and difficult to measure or valorise. It may be difficult to define even for the participants themselves, and it may occur after a long time has passed.

Music therapy and other art therapies have also other, equally important objectives. For example, they offer a respite for participants, as well as for persons who perform caregiving roles on an everyday basis, if they are in a situation of dependency.

**Question:** Why is it important to distinguish between education and therapy?

**Answer:** Considering education and therapy in terms of similarities, for example, consisting in achieving similar results in participants, may, in practice, give rise to various problems. Treating educational and therapeutic activities as equivalent or as substantially similar can result in unwittingly entering into the therapeutic convention in educational situations.

**The list below includes several important points to bear in mind when undertaking educational activities that produce therapeutic effects:**

### **1. Maintaining the boundaries related to participants’ personal problems**

It should be remembered that many exercises, tasks, and questions involved in educational activities may cause participants to experience emotional reactions related to past experiences and personal issues. It is worth remembering

that when we conduct workshops, our goals are educational rather than therapeutic. This means that we focus on creating a space in which participants can develop various social, civic, and personal competencies rather than solving their individual problems. We are unable to do the latter during a workshop that lasts just a few hours and involves a group of several people. It is a good idea to indicate this in a contract before the start of the workshop and clearly define the educational objectives and tasks that the group wants to achieve. If anyone expresses the need to talk about personal problems, we can refer to the contract in which the group agreed that we would not do this. We can also mention the issue of other participant's comfort. Other people in the group may feel uncomfortable listening to other people's personal problems.

## **2. Crossing the boundaries related to participants' personal problems**

If an educator who has no psychological competencies begins to discuss participants' personal issues during a workshop, class, or a training session, it may lead to the opening of the proverbial Pandora's box. It is impossible to know the causes of participants' personal problems, traumas, and pains. As we have no relevant competencies, and we haven't promised to provide psychological help, we cannot be sure how participants would react and feel in such situations and whether we would be able to cope with their reactions. In Gestalt therapy, conducting therapy outside of the therapist's office is seen as a form of violence, as it opens wounds and reveals problems for which we are unable to offer closure. Leaving participants with open emotions can be seen as unintentional aggression.

## **3. Exposure**

Many art therapy methods that belong to anti-discrimination education are based on the social exposure of participants. They involve doing things in front of the group, improvising, performing tasks that involve movement, and role-playing scenes. It is especially true in the case of Gestalt Theatre activities, where the usual exercises involve playing different roles and arranging a variety of interactions. These can sometimes take the form of conflicts, confrontations, and role-played power and subordination relations. Such exercises allow to check the attitudes we usually adopt in such circumstances, as well as express (articulate), analyse and understand them (for example, through the analysis of conflict management styles).

There might be some worries that role playing such scenes and the associated social exposure may be too taxing on participants. Is their sense of security not disturbed?

Gestalt Theatre trainers believe that role-playing within a theatrical framework is an experiment that allows for free exploration of a variety of socially problematic content. It is important for the trainer and participants to agree to the employment of this method and discuss what kind of freedom it provides. Theatrical improvisation can bring an immense sense of freedom, which can sometimes mean that certain sacrifices have to be made in terms of social exposure. However, not all participants wish to pay such price. It may happen that not all members of the group want to be involved in this form of activity – in which case, they have the right to refuse.

#### **4. Safer space**

Role-playing scenes and engaging in musical, movement and other forms of improvisation requires participants to trust each other and feel safe within the group. It is extremely important to introduce confidentiality rules in the group contract (personal issues discussed in class should not “leave the room”). Participants should feel that the space established for joint activities is as safe as possible (safer space). It should be a space in which the feelings, rights, and boundaries of vulnerable people and groups are treated with special care.

However, many people believe that it is not possible to create a space that would be completely safe for participants. On the one hand, we cannot predict all reactions of people participating in educational processes. On the other hand, as facilitators, we accept responsibility for the course of events. For this reason, there is a growing tendency to consider the workshop space as a safer space or braver space instead of a safe space.

The discussion on safe space emerged in the second decade of the 21st century in connection with the conflicts on the US college and university campuses. Student activist and organisations fighting for greater progress in combating institutional racism and protecting the rights of minorities at universities clashed with the free speech advocates who believed that academic discussions should address all topics, including ones which some groups see as controversial. The debates became more heated during the elections and subsequent presidency of Donald Trump. They became especially intense in response to the #MeToo movement (which also touches upon the issue of rape at the US universities and gender inequality) and in connection with the Black Lives Matter movement. Those who believed that universities should ensure that educational environment is a safe space for students demanded that several important rules should be commonly followed in discussions, courses and classes, as well as on campuses in general. They rules included the following:

- » Using trigger warnings (TWs), that is, warnings that protect vulnerable people from exposure to content that is challenging, controversial and potentially damaging to their psychological well-being.
- » Preventing microaggressions, that is, slights, which are expressed in behaviour, speech, or gestures, towards representatives of minorities, groups at risk of discrimination, as well as vulnerable and marginalised groups (“The Quiet Discrimination of Microinequities: A Q&A with Adjunct Professor Mary Rowe”, 2016).
- » Disinviting speakers, i.e., refusing university invitations to guests and visitors whose views or actions contradict the values of the inviting university.
- » Renaming prominent campus spaces and symbols, such as those labelled with the names of individuals whose views or actions have been hurtful to minority, marginalised, vulnerable, and discriminated groups (Palfrey, 2017).

## 5. Braver space

For some individuals, exposure to content related to social inequality, exclusions of particular groups, marginalisation, historical and contemporary acts of injustice, suffering, and discrimination, can be difficult to bear, accept and work through. This is true for people belonging to vulnerable groups, but also members of particularly privileged groups. The latter may feel overwhelmed by a sense of responsibility for the wrongs committed by the majority to which they belong, despite the fact that they themselves were not personally involved in committing said wrongs. These individuals may also react with resistance or denial, sometimes expressed as hostility towards minority groups. Brian Arao and Cristi Clemens argue, however, that such reactions are an affirmation of majority group supremacy (Arao, Clemens, 2013; Haraldsdóttir, 2018). For example, the sense of guilt that characterises people belonging to the white majority is referred to as “white fragility”.

However, for advocates of shaping educational environments as brave or braver spaces, confronting such topics and the emotions they trigger is sometimes a necessary condition for development and expansion of knowledge. Learning requires getting out of one's comfort zone. Some authors argue that education in the area of social justice requires bravery, which involves the pain of giving up one's privilege (Boostrom, 1998). It is particularly true in the case of non-formal education environments, where participation is often voluntary and based on a conscious decision.

Because of the above-described reasons, Arao and Clemens defined an alternative category to safe space to describe educationally facilitated environments - a brave space. The name emphasised that the bravery associated with learning is more valued in such space than the illusion of safety (Arao, Clemens, 2013). The authors list the following rules of brave space:

- » **Controversy with civility:** a rule that should replace the principle of “agreeing to disagree with each other”. Controversy with civility was first introduced in the social model of leadership development (Sken-dall, Ostick, Komives & Wagner, 2017). It states that disagreements, conflicts, or lack of consensus constitute unavoidable elements of diverse groups' dynamics rather than something unusual, or an “unfortunate side-effect”. When participants disagree with each other, such disa-



greements should be approached with respect for different views, not with the aim of reinforcing and consolidating them, but with the goal of discussing them in a creative way, understanding the sources of the disagreements, and finding common solutions.

- » **Own your intentions and your impact:** a rule that replaces the safe space's directive "not to take what is said personally". In the educational process concerning social justice, participants often engage in lively and intense discussions. Such engagement is part of the educational process and since people involved are usually not experts on the issues raised, the views they express may be ill-considered, provisional, or hurtful to other individuals and groups. While immaturity of views is natural in a learning situation, and the discussion itself is intended to verify many views and understand the preconceptions that shape them, it can bring real harm to some participants, hurting them and their feelings, and triggering their traumatic memories and emotions. It is therefore important to take care of all participants in the process and recognise that the judgements they express have a real impact on others. While hurtful judgements may stem from ignorance and lack of awareness in those who express them, they have real consequences for persons belonging to vulnerable groups.
- » **Challenge by choice:** a rule in accordance to which participants decide for themselves whether to take part in particular tasks, exercises, and discussions, but have to explain their choices. Passive participation is not allowed when no justification is provided, as it can be a form of microaggression, passive violence, or a way of perpetuating majority group supremacy.
- » **Respect:** we want to be respected and we treat other with respect.
- » **No attacks:** we do not tolerate any violent behaviour in the group or during discussions directed at group members and non-members alike.
- » **Contracting:** the above-described rules are worth incorporating into a group contract drawn up together with participants before the sessions or workshops begin.

- » **Triggering:** despite deliberate and careful attitude of trainers and the well-defined rules of the group contract, certain contents or exercises may act as triggers for some people in the group, i.e., they may trigger memories, emotions or traumas. While we cannot assume such a scenario will come to pass, we should prepare for it, i.e., we should:
  - try our best to analyse the group before the educational activities commence, learning as much as possible about past experiences and current circumstances of participants;
  - try to predict what types of exercises and content might be triggering for the people in the group, and be open and receptive to modifications of the activity scenario;
  - invite psychologists to work with us, support our educational activities, and, if necessary, provide assistance to those who have been triggered if we are going to work with a particularly vulnerable group whose members can be personally affected by the workshop content;
  - invite a second experienced trainer to act as a support person if, for various reasons, working with psychologists proves impossible;
  - include a rule in the contract that states that our activities do not constitute therapy but education, and therefore they are not meant to solve individual problems;
  - if someone is triggered and there is no support from psychologists available, we should try to calm the person down, as far as it is possible, by reducing their level of stress and nervous agitation.
- » **Making recommendations for further assistance:** there are often situations in which socially sensitive content addressed in cultural education activities causes participants to feel triggered. It is a good idea to prepare for such situations and, before the activities begin, create a contact list of people and organisations from which participants can obtain psychological assistance and other types of support. It is worth making sure that the recommended facilities and specialists are affordable, which means, for example, that they can be accessed as part of the state-funded primary healthcare.
- » **Supervision:** trainers responsible for conducting educational processes with vulnerable groups often become secondary trauma recipients themselves. Psychological support and supervision for cultural educators are hardly ever considered, but it is worth bearing in mind that educators:

- make a great educational effort by engaging in constant and creative self-education, improving their skills, and developing new methods and tools in a creative way;
- address socially sensitive topics, drawing on various methodologies and methods of social and anti-discrimination education.

All these elements mean that cultural educators are often overworked and deal with big responsibilities and, sometimes unrecognised, stress, so they need psychological support themselves.

We recommend that a supervision process for trainers should be planned simultaneously with any long-term educational projects conducted with vulnerable groups.



## **PART 3**

# **CASE STUDIES**

**Introduction to the case studies.**

**Educational research in practice**



### **IN THIS PART OF THE PUBLICATION, YOU WILL LEARN ABOUT:**

- » the research carried out in the project “Cultural education of adults in need of sociotherapeutic support”;
- » the testing of the sociotherapeutic support methods described in the book;
- » the design of research in educational activities and the associated challenges.

### **WHAT ARE EVALUATION AND DIAGNOSTIC STUDIES?**

In our project, we implemented<sup>4</sup> two types of research: evaluation and diagnostic. As its name implies, the first type, i.e., the evaluation research, has served to assess and test whether the activities planned and carried out by us and our partners really serve their intended purpose. The evaluation covered all types of activities included in the three-year project: partner meetings, online and offline seminars, training, and dissemination events. We mostly relied on surveys (online and offline) filled by participants of these workshops.

Diagnostic research allowed us to obtain data necessary to write up the intellectual output. It consisted of information about the process of testing various methods of sociotherapeutic support in adult education and its results. Testing methods of working with groups requiring sociotherapeutic support constituted a very important key part of the project. Each of our partners uses a specific method in their everyday work with selected groups of people. Thanks to the training and webinar stage of the project, everyone had the opportunity to learn about the methods employed by others; namely: WenDo, Nordoff Robbins music therapy, Gestalt Theatre Therapy, positive psychology, nature in social work, Experience Design, and Expressive Arts.

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<sup>4</sup> This chapter describes research activities that were carried out by an all-female team, so all gender non-specific mentions of research team's members should be understood as referring to women.

## **HOW DID WE CARRY OUT RESEARCH IN THE PROCESS OF TESTING SELECTED ADULT SUPPORT METHODS?**

Before the testing commenced, all partners participating in the project were required to choose one of two available pathways:

- » Testing their own, familiar method with a new group (pathway 1).
- » Testing a new method, which they learnt during the training and webinars, with a familiar group which they had involved in their earlier activities (pathway 2).

Conducting the seminar online facilitated the decision-making process. During the seminar, the researcher responsible for the coordination of the project spoke about the entire research process related to the testing, including its objectives and progress.

The testing began when the partners selected their respective pathways. What did it look like from the research side of things? At the beginning, we formulated the main objectives, at the same time considering what we wanted to learn by conducting the research.

First and foremost, we were keen to gather information about the way each of the partners implemented the testing process: where, with what group, how many people participated, and what activities were undertaken. We knew that such data would allow us to compare these processes and reflect on the differences between them.

Secondly, we wanted to learn as much as possible about the (sociotherapeutic) needs of participants and assess how comfortable they felt during the tested activities. The project we implemented prioritised provision of support to these groups, and we conducted the research to check how such support could be delivered in an effective manner, in alignment with the needs of the interested parties.

Thirdly, we wished to make sure that the selected testing method was well-suited to the needs of participants, as well as the circumstances of the testing (for example, the planned duration and schedule of the activities). We assumed that by identifying barriers and difficulties (as well as opportunities

and resources), we would learn how to flexibly adjust the tested methods to maximise the effectiveness of the targeted support.

Each partner was provided with a toolkit for conducting and summarising the research during testing. The tools in question included:

### **1. Survey questionnaire for the testing participants**

The survey was divided into two separate documents – to be filled before and after the testing. Therefore, in practice, the participants filled out one questionnaire before the activities commenced, and another after the activities were concluded. This made it possible to examine how things had changed, i.e. in terms of declared levels of knowledge or skills in the given area, reported levels of satisfaction at the start and end of the testing, and assessments of its various aspects.

### **2. “Testing summary” – a template with a set of sixteen questions**

The document was divided into three main parts: preparation for the testing, the testing itself, and observations and conclusions.

The template was designed to help partners write down their own reflections on the testing process: gathering organisational information (concerning the number of participants, testing locations, selected groups and methods, etc.), as well as their conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of the process. Other very significant information gathered through the template was the data related to meta-reflections on using a given methodology of working with people in need of sociotherapeutic support to strengthen groups which were not included in the testing. A lot of the so-obtained information was to contribute to the intellectual output and this publication.

Initially, we assumed that all partners would use both of the above-described tools. Yet, already before the testing began, it turned out that this would not be possible, due to various reasons. In the end, partner organisations conducted the study in a reduced scope, filling out a simplified summary template.

## **WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES INVOLVED IN THE PLANNED STUDY?**

### **1. Knowledge base**

Only some of the institutions and organisations involved in the project have team members or close collaborators that are able to conduct research. Most of them would either need additional training to use the questionnaire, survey, or observation form or would have to outsource the task, paying professional researchers. Unfortunately, it was not possible to apply either of these solutions, due to two other facts concerning the partner organisations involved in the project.

### **2. Financial resources**

All partner institutions operate as NGOs and have no access to permanent funding, which was a major challenge, as this means that all their financial resources are closely linked to specific programmes and tasks that are incorporated into specific projects. They simply have no money to finance additional activities, such as the research involved in the project (and therefore can neither commission them nor finance the work of their own staff in this respect).

### **3. Time**

Consequently, the partner institutions are financed with project funds and only have time for their own activities. Their schedules are filled with activities that have been planned well in advance, and the prospect of conducting research would force them to work unpaid overtime. This was not possible for both formal and ethical reasons.

The research was fully planned by the initiating institution, ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań, which has been conducting research as a mandatory part of its activities for many years. In addition to that, since Zamek is the leading institution in the project, the team was keen to obtain full information from the testing process. On the one hand, to learn as much as possible about the functionality of the tested methods and the needs of participating groups; on the other, to collect information that would serve as inspiration for future activities and projects. As a result, Zamek made use of the prepared tools, supplementing them with its own, which included in-depth interviews with participants of the tests, scenarios for focus group interviews with trainers working with the participants, and detailed observation forms.



## **HOW TO IMPLEMENT RESEARCH IN EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS? – USEFUL TIPS**

### **Make sure that research tools are accessible**

Try to prepare research tools in such a way as to ensure that persons with no prior research experience would be able to use them. Clear instructions, explanation of research objectives, and consultations with the researchers will certainly facilitate proper understanding and implementation of the research.

### **Create two research toolkits: the basic and extended versions**

This will allow to adapt the tools used in the project to the partner's abilities. It is recommended to initially provide all these tools to all partners in order to give them time to decide which toolkit to implement and, above all, allow them to discuss and modify the toolkits together (which will make the partners feel that they are co-authors of the research project, and make them more willing to implement it).

### **The research should be discussed by the whole team**

Make sure that issues related to the research are periodically discussed by the whole project team, along with the partners. It is best to schedule time for talking about the evaluation and diagnostic research during general project-related meetings. Most of the partners tend to be present at such meetings, so it would give them a chance to share their opinions. Additional meetings fully dedicated to research should only be organised at key stages (e.g. before the evaluation of seminars or the testing).

### **Researchers in the initiating team**

It is beneficial for the leading organisation/institution to have experienced researchers on the project team. It takes a lot of work to design and later coordinate research, and it will be difficult for the person coordinating the project to do this work. What is more, researchers who are involved in the team's activities, as well as all stages of the project's implementation, can make suggestions on how to implement the recommendations from the already conducted research.

**Elements of Gestalt therapy in dance,  
movement and theatre activities.**

**Example of two workshop groups**

**(Poznań | Poland)**



## WORKSHOP GROUPS AND WORKING METHODS

The Kolekttacz collective, which consists of Agnieszka Dubilewicz, Paulina Giwer-Kowalewska and Aniela Kokosza, offered sociotherapeutic support through body work with elements of choreotherapy, contemporary dance, performance, and theatre. The framework that tied these elements together was based on a combination of Gestalt therapy and theatre. Methods and techniques derived from this combination were adapted to the educational goals of the project and were subject to testing through regular group work during weekly workshops. These meetings were organised from August to December 2021, on the premises of the ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań, and involved groups of eight to twelve people. They were attended by a researcher conducting the participatory observations and one of the project coordinators. Establishment of a second workshop group, initiated in the first weeks of the project's implementation, became an important part of the endeavour. The second group was consisted of caregivers of people with various disabilities, mostly women. The group was led by Olga Stobiecka-Rozmiarek, an applied drama teacher and facilitator. The research concerning both groups was carried out as action research, in close cooperation with the trainers (through regular consultations) and the assumption that changes and adaptations can be made in the course of the project. Thanks to the observations and interviews with the workshops' participants and people who led and coordinated the activities, it is possible to describe several months of workshop activities in a manner that takes into account different opinions and perspectives<sup>5</sup>.

The workshop participants included people who had collaborated with Kolekttacz on an earlier project ("Social Theatre - Strategies for Survival") which was also implemented by the ZAMEK Culture Centre. It meant that the workshops were attended by both active individuals who knew each other well from past activities and people who were just getting to know each other in the course of subsequent meetings. The group was mixed in terms of gender, and

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5 The researcher, Magdalena Popławska, carried out thirteen participant observations during the workshops held at the ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań, two interviews with female trainers (including one focused interview), four in-depth interviews with female and male participants, as well as consultation meetings with female trainers and interviews with project coordinators and initiators. The text quotes excerpts from internal reports completed for the EDUSOC project and supplementary research materials..

included adults under the age of 40, living in or around Poznań. They were people with all kinds of disabilities, interested in relaxing body work and expanding or changing their range of motion. It is worth noting that some of the participants had previous experience with acting, which meant that they favoured theatrical and performance activities. Disability was a point of reference for the participants when they reflected on breaking down barriers and stereotypes, but the main motivation for working together was based on curiosity, the desire to “experience new situations”, including “new movements”, and to take on life’s challenges. In addition, one participant emphasised the importance of leaving familiar, domestic spaces and spending time doing something different. Some of the participants were also worried that the workshops would prove too demanding and different from their earlier experiences. One person noted that “the beginnings were difficult”, also due to the on-going pandemic. Facilitators played a significant role in overcoming some of these concerns. They were perceived as open-minded, not only teaching, but also directing others towards new solutions. They didn't operate with a predefined script in mind – as one participant said, “they introduced order, but not fully”.

The method tested was tailored to the needs of the specific workshop group. Those working on the project drew their knowledge of Gestalt Theatre Therapy from, among others, a training seminar conducted by Diego Marín, a therapist and educator. The exercises analysed during the seminar were re-enacted and tested in various modified forms in a group consisting of female trainers, project coordinators and researchers. Importantly, elements of Gestalt Theatre Therapy overlapped with techniques already used by the trainers in their daily work with body consciousness, which allowed them to maintain continuity and consistency in their working methods. Within the analysed project, Kolektacz planned to focus, in particular, on the sense of agency, related to making conscious, responsible decisions and affecting the surrounding reality. From a set of different exercises, the trainers chose those that referred to adopting other peoples’ perspectives, playing different social roles, evoking varied emotions, distancing oneself, and, at the same time, responding to changing circumstances and stepping out of one’s comfort zone. Definition of the boundary between education and therapy was particularly important in this process – that is, the use of the Gestalt approach only for the purposes of collective learning and experience, not for analysing and changing individual patterns of thought and action. Moreover, since the exercises presented at the seminar were based on mental and verbal work, it became necessary to “de-verbalize” the selected

techniques, so to speak, and translate them into movement and the corporeal dimension. According to the research, the ZAMEK Culture Centre could have planned even more extensive training devoted to Gestalt Theatre Therapy methods. The workshop facilitators needed a lot of support in employing this method and ensuring a wide circulation of knowledge. One of the Zamek's responses to this need was to organize another training course, this time conducted face to face by Diego Marín, for the trainers, researcher and project coordinator. Within the framework of this event, it was possible to rework the assumptions of the educational approach towards Gestalt Theatre Therapy, as well as to present the final reflections on the activities conducted.

On the other hand, the second workshop group, conducted with the participation of caregivers of people with disabilities, offered "relaxation exercises, good movement exercises, conversation, support, and creative activities"<sup>6</sup>, with the help of music, dance, theatre, and visual art tools. Elements of the Gestalt method were also introduced into the workshop activities. The caregivers' well-being, their self-care, became the focus of these activities. The work was performed in an intimate group of about ten people, with a rhythm determined by weekly meetings (1.5-2h each) whose hours overlapped with those of the workshops conducted with the above-described group. Contrary to initial fears (caused by the difficult recruitment process), the participants of the new group were open to taking part in the activities proposed by the facilitator from the very beginning. Their needs overlapped, encompassing a desire to experience "peace" and "relaxation", and "remove tension". One of the coordinators and authors of the project was among those who decided to take some "time for herself" and also spend it together with the group. In her daily work, she ensures, among other things, that Zamek's events are accessible to people with disabilities. She recognised that she shared common experiences with other workshop participants and quickly began to feel part of the group.

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<sup>6</sup> The text comes from a leaflet addressed to people that could be potentially interested in creating a new workshop group published by the ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań.

## RESULTS OF JOINT ACTIVITIES

Elements of Gestalt Theatre Therapy proved the educational potential of the method in many different aspects. In a group led by Kolektacz, the exercises shed some light on the characters of the participants and their preferences. One person turned out to prefer performing in front of an audience, while another immersed herself more in her own personal world – the world of imagination. The role of group facilitator or leader was performed by the person who helped others and tried to understand their needs. In the course of work, the participants revealed not only their character traits and predilections, but also preferences concerning favourite workshop topics, such as those related to otherness/difference. It was interesting to see the recurrence of certain themes and their associations with selected situations or characters. For example, exercises involving visualization awakened one woman's rich imagination and inspired her to create vivid stories. There were also some particularly expressive people among the participants, whose emotional responses became part of the dynamics of the entire group.

It was appreciated that some of the exercises were simple, but simultaneously open to introduction of variety and variations. The participants themselves also offered suggestions of elements that could be incorporated into the workshop. The facilitators encouraged testing new perspectives, such as freezing in one pose or avoiding habitual circular movements. During one of the exercises, the participants used only selected parts of their bodies, such as the head or the right/left side. There were also more complex tasks that were somewhat challenging for the group. For example, an exercise in which individuals matched in pairs and communicated selected emotions to each other through joint or individual movement. Participants chose to express emotions such as anger, frustration, a sense of freedom, indecision or thoughtfulness. The reflation stage was also a very important part of the whole process. For some, it was "good fun", for others, a chance to mindfully experience their own body and another person's abilities. There were also people for whom it was a deeply moving experience and contribution to general reflections on disability. One of the men, usually a very dynamic person, began to engage in movements that required him to be precise, focused and calm. He said that he found some of the exercises challenging and requiring "some figuring out". The participants included critical judgements as well as mentions of difficult emotions in their reflections. Sometimes, they declared that the workshop left them with a sense of uncertainty

and vague thoughts. There were also exercises in which they were not willing to engage, refusing to leave their comfort zone.

The exercises in which people imitated each other were well-received. They were not performed automatically – they involved making contact with others, exchanging smiles, and approaching others in an unobtrusive manner. It was noticeable that movements got more and more relaxed over the course of subsequent activities. In addition, people began to play selected roles during group exercises on their own initiative. It can be concluded that the tested methods strengthened the participants' courage to perform in front of others in a manner imbued with their individual characters. Interestingly, the objects used during the workshop, which were stroked, stretched, cuddled, and scattered, were able to trigger a variety of emotions, sometimes even conflicting ones. There was no need to control the imagination of the participants, and some of the tasks provided an opportunity to break away from the predictable everyday reality. Collages created by the participants during one of the workshops included references to entertainment, masquerades, posing and dressing up. The sense of "freedom" and water as an element were also reoccurring themes. One of the works included the phrase "eyes wide open", which could indicate an attentive, discerning eye – not infrequently noticeable in the exercises.

Members of the group led by Olga Stobiecka-Rozmiarek had many opportunities to communicate with each other through movement, especially during exercises that included pairing up or imitating others. The workshop allowed them to get closer to each other, often in a playful atmosphere without having to give up their own space. In turn, the employed techniques, e.g., visualisations, made it possible to focus on the "here and now". During the joint discussions, the participants spoke positively about the workshops' results, noting, for example, increased body awareness and stimulated creativity. Methods from the field of Gestalt Theatre Therapy have proven effective in allowing the participants to recognise the needs and capabilities of their own bodies. During the meetings, the group members had numerous opportunities to talk about themselves, but also to remain silent. One woman commented on these silent moments with the following words:

” *It was the only moment in the week when you could be quiet; not talk, just be, lie down.*

The participants were not interested in producing an additional outcome of the activities, a performance in front of an audience, which was proposed to them during the workshop. They were focused on recognising individual preferences, working “for themselves”. This underscores the importance of the workshop process and also provides a learning opportunity for cultural institutions which often strive to achieve tangible results of activities.

It is noteworthy that the Gestalt Theatre Therapy methods were used in a specific place and time, as educational methods, in relation to predetermined needs. Thus, they became a “situated” way of doing things. In this context, one participant in particular appreciated the importance of collective work – the presence of other people and their involvement. As she stated:

” *I felt their strength, the fact that they were helping me.*

Another woman said:

” *I felt that we were a community of sorts.*

It was apparent that the participants felt comfortable forming one united group, although at times people who joined the group later were not able to find a way to get truly included in this group. There were also limitations concerning group work, for example, some participants would arrive at the workshop fatigued after dealing with other demanding activities and thus not always able to fully engage. In addition, the number of people in the group was variable, which affected the flow of the whole process. Sometimes, the participants clearly showed and expressed dissatisfaction with the proposed tasks. In some cases, personal experiences and current moods would result in individuals keeping themselves at a distance from joint activities. In line with assumptions from the field of Gestalt Theatre Therapy, these types of situations produced in the participants certain initial emotional states of and defined the workshop’s “here and now”. The participants’ recognition of their own needs, possibilities and limitations allowed them to move forward.





**Expressive Arts in educational**  
**activities addressed to young adults**  
**at risk of social exclusion**  
**(Kleitoria | Greece)**



In August 2021, Creative YouthLand hosted a youth exchange for 38 young adults aged between 18 and 33 in Kleitoria, a mountainous village in Greece. The objective of the exchange, organised under the name “Youth Empowered”, was to exert positive impact on mental health of young people through arts.

The majority of the group had motivated their need to participate in the exchange by mentioning the challenges of isolation, feeling stuck and lonely, lack of employment prospects, and changes in social life brought by the pandemic. The participants included also members of under-represented groups, such as first and second generation immigrants, people with mental challenges, such as depression and substance use disorders, and people with neurodevelopmental disorders, such as ASD and ADHD. One third of the participants reported that they had received similar support in the past, which had been greatly effective, while the rest of the group had never had access to such opportunities. Some of the participants had participated in similar workshops organised by Creative YouthLand before and expressed the need to have on-going access to such events, given that they had proven to be very effective in the past.

Before the exchange, we held a couple of meetings with our partners and the participants to explore their needs. We had direct conversations with our partners regarding not only the demographic, but also cultural, social, racial, mental and developmental background of the participants. In addition, we provided the participants with our digital surveys in which they were encouraged to describe themselves in a creative way. The surveys included such questions as: “Why do you want to participate in this exchange?”, “How can this exchange help you to support yourself and your community?”, and “What kind of arts skills can you share with the group?”. The participants could also express their needs during daily reflection sessions in smaller groups, where they were given space to share their needs, happy moments, challenges, and new discoveries through creative activities, with the support of facilitators.

The needs of the participants, related to their socio-economic circumstances, were aligned with the objectives of the workshop and are summarised as follows. The participants:

- become equipped with concrete methods and ideas for developing their own sense of empowerment, resilience, and positive mental health, and incorporate them into their lives;

- understand themselves and their peers, which makes them less isolated and more able to understand positive mental health and what they can do to promote it in their own lives and within their communities;
- have skills and competences to deal with burnout and resolve deep-seated issues;
- explore their creative potential as a way of self- discovery, stress reduction, creativity, empowerment, resilience, and positive mental health;
- explore the potential of expressive arts, such as theatre and dance, as a tool for therapy, personal discovery, and self-expression;
- develop their emotional intelligence and empathy;
- learn about body language and body awareness as a pathway towards good health.

## **METHODS**

Taking the participants' needs and their surrounding environment into consideration, we decided to test familiar methods with a new group with the help of the principles of non-formal learning, arts education and outdoors activities. In practice, the exchange consisted of six full days which included sixteen workshops, yoga and meditation exercises in the mornings, and reflection time in the evenings.

The workshops consisted of a variety of sessions that will be summarised below. All mornings began with yoga and stretching exercises to stimulate blood circulation and set the participants' intentions for the day.

We dedicated the first day of the workshop to getting to know each other and doing team building activities based on "team missions", non-formal learning games that allow to integrate a group through funny and experiential games.

On the next day, we began doing breathing exercises for better mind-and-body connection, combined with movement exercises meant to help the participants achieve inner peace and mindfulness. This was followed by a session dedicated

to non-verbal and non-violent communication, body awareness and connecting with others, using approaches based on Argentine tango. In the evening, we did shuffle dance which promotes the release of stress, sends endorphins to the brain, and improves mental focus and concentration. In addition, we had a closing activity focusing on music and breathing techniques that fosters closer connection with one's inner self (soul).

The third day of the workshop was focused on different types of theatre activities. We started with a clowning exercise which was focused on acknowledging our unique sense of humour, evoking joy and delight and learning how they impact mental health by feeling connected, inspired and delighted. We then moved on to the labyrinth theatre, a wonderful activity that helps people identify their own coping mechanisms, boundaries, and the level of resilience to stress, and also reflect on their tendencies in life. In the evening, we had music improvisation jams to raise awareness of the impact of rhythm on focus, connections, and breathing frequency, as well as the role of the body as a regulating or calming agent for anxiety and emotion-related difficulties.

The next day was focused on nature. We did a six-hour advanced-level hike in the mountains which served as an allegory of life experiences. The hike served to encourage mindfulness, resilience, reimagination of one's life, discovering and acknowledging one's limitations, and dealing with obstacles.

The last day of the workshop included practical and manual sessions. We did craft-work, making origami and dream catchers. Using one's hands stimulates different areas of the brain, improving short-term memory. It also has a calming and relaxing effect, as it requires following a simple step-by-step process. Then, we did some juggling and tightrope exercises which can alleviate depressive moods, stress, panic attacks and overwhelming feelings. We ended the day with some self-care activities, such as massage and application of facial masks made of natural and local products to ensure deep relaxation and connect with one's body by nourishing and pampering it.

Throughout the duration of the exchange, every evening, the participants devoted time to individual reflection, sometimes in smaller groups, and sometimes in bigger ones, in order to learn how to gain insights from and understand one's own experience, share personal stories with others and learn from other people's experiences.

## **PREPARATIONS**

The workshop design was inspired by an arts and life skills course attended by the facilitators from Creative Youthland. We held several meetings with all the facilitators to discuss the needs of the participants and create the workshop plan. We also consulted other online resources on the outcomes of previously organised expressive arts workshops.

It was essential to agree that both the facilitators and the participants should be given space and time to take care of themselves when needed, but also to make an effort to step out of their comfort zone into the mindset that encourages learning. On the first day of the project, we wrote down the group's rules in which the participants expressed their needs and agreed to abide by them. Any potential objections and challenges were discussed, and the more introverted individuals were encouraged to speak up in smaller groups.

Examples of the adopted rules included: asking for permission before physically touching another person, staying patient, encouraging creation of a safer space (where people could willingly express themselves), respecting people's backgrounds, supporting others, adopting a proactive approach, taking care of one's surroundings and other people, and respecting others' free time, etc.

The participants were contacted both directly and through intermediate partners. These included people that Creative Youthland has worked with in the past, e.g., team members, volunteers, artists, and people who contacted us to express their willingness to participate. The participants included also individuals that were supported in their personal, emotional and professional development by the afore-mentioned partners or who worked with them in other capacity. Our partners are experts in the field of youth arts with extensive experience in facilitating arts-based activities and non-formal education of young people, and we have run several projects together in the past.

The testing plan was agreed before the actual workshops began. However, we were also prepared to go with the flow and adjust to meet the participants' needs. We created an adaptable workshop structure. For instance, when the group's energy was low we would begin the workshop with stimulating exercises or physical activity. We would change our meeting places from outdoor to indoor spaces, and vice-versa, and adapted our activities to fit the weather (e.g.,

instead of doing craft-work indoors with artificial materials, we would encourage the group to go out and create handcrafts in nature, with natural materials). The activities were designed in such a way that the participants experienced a wide range of intensity, pace, difficulty levels, etc., on a daily basis. If one day consisted of mentally and physically challenging activities, the next day would focus on more relaxing and self-care-focused exercises.

## **IMPACT**

Through the proposed activities, the participants became more self-aware, connected not only with their own selves but also with other people, and acquired tools to cope with challenging situations.

The participants stated that they began to feel more confident with their bodies and physical limitations. Being silly and embracing vulnerability as clowns felt liberating and opened them to new possibilities they had been previously unaware of, while trying to communicate with another person only by touching chests (Argentine tango) was challenging, but also brought them new insights into how they perceive contact and non-verbal communication. They also acknowledged the importance of nature and touching the soil for their mental health, something they appreciated more after the pandemic and the lockdowns it brought around the world.

Several facilitators and youth trainers have shared with us that they used some of our methodologies, such as the labyrinth theatre, in workshops conducted with their own groups as they found them very powerful and enriching.

Compassion received and shown to each other by strangers within the group resulted in new friendships, deep interpersonal relationships, and creation of peer support groups. This effect is usually achieved by having all participants sharing rooms and chores related to the place in which they stay during the workshop. The participants develop the sense of “ownership” of the place and responsibility for the whole group.

In the free time between and after the sessions, the participants spent time together in informal settings, which resulted in learning about other people’s cultures and creating a sense of community.

Thanks to the dance and clown activities, most of the participants felt that they got out of their comfort zone, tried new things and did something they didn't feel they were good at in front of other people.

## **TESTING OUTCOMES AND NEW DISCOVERIES**

The testing process revealed a lot of unexpected possibilities. The tested method can be effectively used with various groups, by adapting and adjusting it to the needs of each group. The participants were receptive to the proposed activities, since they inspire positive sensations, such as joy, playfulness, connecting with others, and accepting each person's presence and existence. We believe that those are the very aspects that people are most interested in when they attend workshops nowadays, in the post-pandemic reality.

It is worth noting the importance of the facilitator. As we found out, the more open, honest and vulnerable the facilitator, the greater the group's openness and trust in the process. Many people, especially after the pandemic, are more eager to establish deep connections, share with others, become part of communities, and seek support groups.

Structured activities which encouraged mixing playing and movement with rhythm and breathing exercises had a direct and easily noticeable impact on people's moods and bodies, through the release of endorphins, the hormones that reduce stress and pain.

This method proved to be not only an effective tool for education and personal development, but a means of reducing stress and tension. However, we recommend further research into the possibility of using this method as a therapeutic tool.





# Use of Gestalt therapy in groups of adults who stutter (Utrecht | the Netherlands)



## **PARTICIPANTS**

The participants of the testing process were a diverse group of people who stuttered (people with a speech impediment). People who stutter often have low self-esteem and sometimes find it difficult to connect with others. Very often, people who stutter don't know any other people with the same speech disorder and often encounter (perceived) negative responses to stuttering in their environment, which can result in them developing low self-esteem. When people who stutter have contact with other individuals with the same speech disorder they feel less alone and develop greater self-confidence.

Most of the participants had participated in some forms of stuttering therapy before, where issues of self-esteem and confidence had also been addressed, but there is always space for more growth in these areas and both on-going support and a new approach to the topic can have beneficial effects.

This is why we chose the title of "Playing with Confidence" for the workshop. None of the participants had ever worked with the Gestalt Theatre Therapy method before. One of the workshop leaders, Sybren Bouwsma, was familiar with the target group (he himself is a person who stutters), but unfamiliar with the method. The other workshop leader, Gaia Theil, is not a person who stutters, but knows more about the Gestalt Theatre Therapy.

For the purpose of this test workshop, we cooperated with the Dutch Stuttering Association, which was helpful in preparing the workshop and finding the participants. Ultimately, there were six participants in total. There were four last-minute cancellations due to Covid.

A week before the workshop, we sent out a questionnaire in which we asked about the needs of the participants. The most important needs mentioned in responses included:

- ” *A fun afternoon during which sharing a story/message is most important.*
- ” *I hope that this interaction, technique and attitude will improve my self-confidence.*
- ” *Learning to “get out of my own head” in a pleasant way.*

” It seems that it would nice to be among other like-minded people. The idea of the workshop appeals to me.

Most of the participants indicated that it was important for them to be more in touch with their own emotions and establish contact with other participants with the same speech disorder.

We also started the actual Gestalt Theatre Therapy workshop with a check-in session, asking the participants about their wishes and expectations concerning the workshop. The most desired elements included: openness, safety, rest, “from my head to my body”, and embracing joy. We included these wishes in the workshop, in so far as it was possible.

## **METHOD**

We have tested different elements from the Gestalt Theatre Therapy method. In the preparation of the workshop, we focused foremost on exercises that are not very speech-oriented to avoid situations where having to speak would be a hindrance to the activities. We primarily included playful exercises that were aimed at building (self-)confidence, in reference to our “Playing with Confidence” title, and rising awareness of one’s body and expressions. Additionally, as a lot of people who stutter find it difficult to say their names, we included an exercise focused on talking about the origin of the participants’ names.

We had many ideas of potential test activities we could conduct, but we had to be a bit flexible to adjust the programme to the time constraints and the size of the group.

In the end, we used the following programme:

- » exploring the space;
- » introduction;
- » meditation/visualisation;
- » telling others something about oneself with the help of the Dixit cards;
- » movement exercise: “Golden circle”;

- » needs/group contract;
- » names-focused exercise;
- » body work exercise (Pizza);
- » mirroring movements;
- » "approach another person as if...";
- » improvisation exercises;
- » finish by saying something positive while lying down.

The participants were very engaged and interested. One of the participants concluded:

” *All in all, it was an incredibly fun day and I learnt a lot about who I am and about the topic of trust. So I want to end with this quote, «Trust is earned when actions meet words.» The group was so open and honest that we immediately established trust in each other.*

The workshop evoked no negative emotions, but the first exercise which required the participants to tell others something about themselves with the Dixit cards provoked some emotional responses. We created some space for addressing these emotions, which made the participants more open for the rest of the day. One of the participants withdrew in the afternoon, because she did not have enough energy to participate in the second part of the workshop.

The sense of togetherness experienced in the group, combined with openness, mutual trust, relaxation, and the games and body work the participants took part in, definitely made them feel more comfortable during the workshop, increasing their level of engagement and interest. This is evidenced by the following positive comments from the evaluation:

- ” *The whole day felt like a warm bath.*
- ” *It was a nice and inspiring day. I got to know myself a bit better, thank you! And got to know new people!*

Most likely, the participants' engagement and interest were affected by the whole atmosphere of the workshop consisting of trust, relaxation, openness, playfulness and body work.

## OUTCOMES

In the context of the tested method, the participants identified the body work exercises and the sense of trust within the group as the most important aspects of the experience. They felt that after the workshop, they were much more in touch with their own selves and in a very positive mood, and that the workshop granted them the ability to increase their confidence.

After the workshop, we asked some participants to write something about their experiences and one of the participants provided a response – here are the reflections of one of the participants:

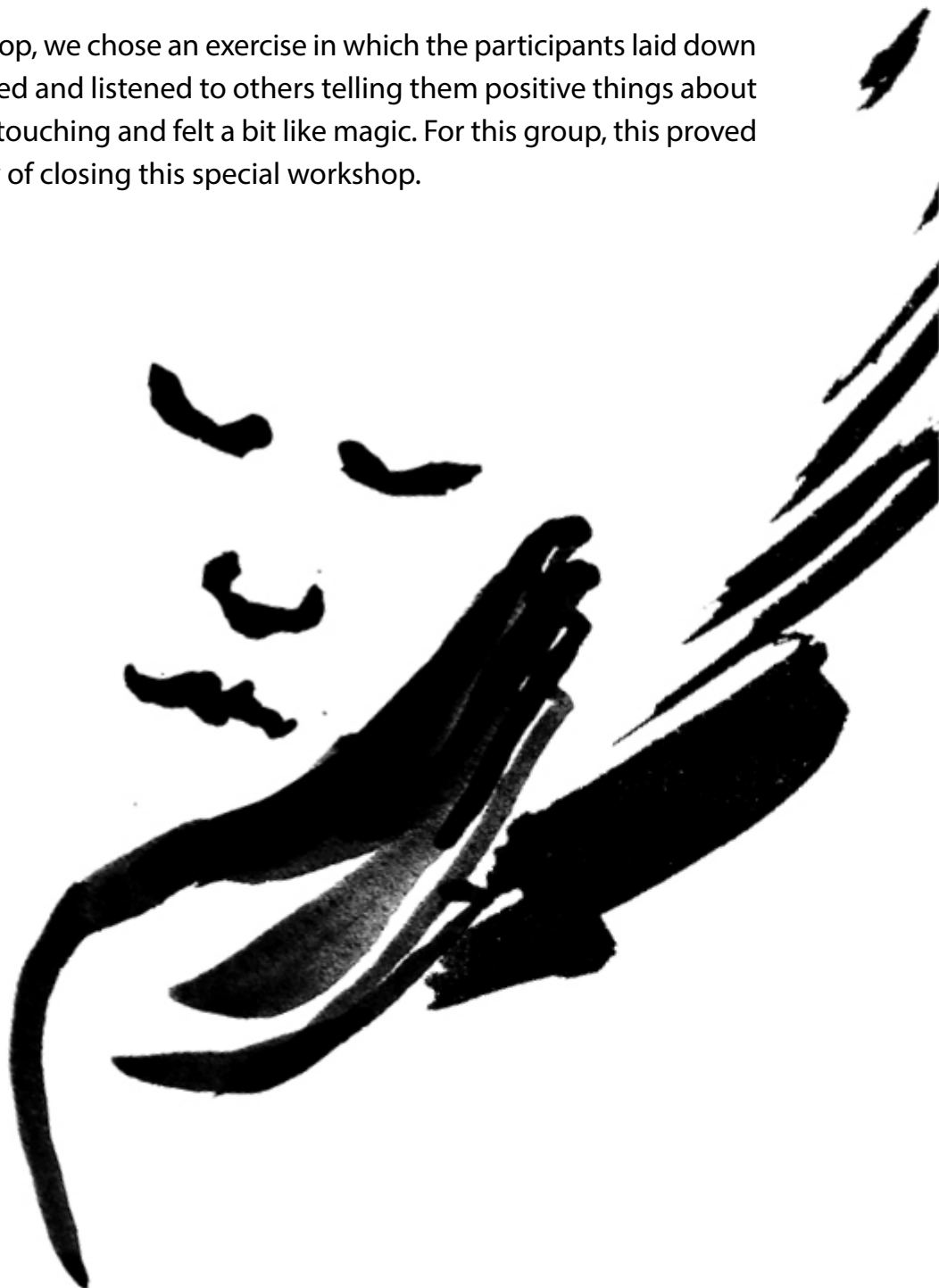
” The day started with a meditation exercise for relaxing and thinking about our expectations for the day. After this exercise, we shared our expectations with each other. For me, it was important to be present in the moment and to be in contact with others. After expressing our expectations, we were allowed to choose an image. The room was filled with images of flowers, dice, etc. Everyone chose an image and explained why he/she had chosen that particular one. There was also time to tell something more about oneself. At the end of the morning, we did an exercise in pairs. The idea was to go outside and tell each other about the origin of our names. When we all returned, we had lunch together in a nearby park. After a nice lunch, we continued the exercises. These exercises varied from mirroring (one person moves and the other copies their movements) to confessing a lie (which we made up). At the end of the day, we expressed our appreciation of each other. In the “regular” life, we rarely think about the things we do well, so it is all the nicer to hear this from someone else. To sum up, it was a very nice day and I learnt a lot about who I am and about the topic of trust. So I want to end with this quote: “Trust is earned when actions meet words.” The group was so open and honest that we immediately established trust in each other.

The method of Gestalt Theatre Therapy has a lot of potential for this target group (people who stutter). Still, it is worth taking some considerations into account. For example, we recommend choosing exercises that are not focused

just on speaking, and to first focus on teambuilding and establishing trust in the group. Not everybody was used to body-focused exercises, so we included the pizza exercise where the participants had to touch each other's backs to introduce more body work activities.

The mirroring exercise involving confident moves really made participants feel more confident. The "approach each other as if..." task was a very playful exercise, but also a powerful way of showing emotions that are normally suppressed.

To close the workshop, we chose an exercise in which the participants laid down with their eyes closed and listened to others telling them positive things about them. It was rather touching and felt a bit like magic. For this group, this proved an appropriate way of closing this special workshop.



**Nature-based learning:**  
**training young adults**  
**working with people who**  
**have experienced trauma**  
**(Sleen | the Netherlands)**





## **PARTICIPANTS**

The group with which we tested the nature coaching and nature connection methods consisted of a diverse group of 12 youth workers that work with young people with trauma experiences. Our participants experience post-traumatic stress as secondary trauma recipients, i.e. recipients and receivers of “second-hand trauma”.

A significant part of the group members experienced trauma themselves or needed sociotherapeutic support for other reasons. The (traumatic) experiences and sociotherapeutic support needs varied widely. For example, some of the participants were refugees who experienced torture and isolation/separation from their families, while other participants experienced bullying at school or grew up in difficult family circumstances. Most of the participants had received therapy or psychological help in the past. About a third of the group (4 persons) have had earlier experiences with the nature-based approach to sociotherapeutic support, but it remained new to most of the participants.

The group was brought together by a week-long training course in self-care for youth workers. The nature coaching/nature connection classes organised by the Anatta Foundation were part of this training.

The participants participated in a training devoted to self-care for youth workers in the Netherlands. The selection process was done on the basis of the background and motivation of the participants. We co-operated with projects implemented by CAAT, an organisation that aims to bring creative and sustainable methods that help participants realise their full potential and promotes:

- » art, multiculturalism and diversity;
- » resilience and integration of vulnerable groups;
- » creative and sustainable solutions.

We have reached some agreements to prepare for the testing process:

1. We are all responsible for creating a safe learning environment.
2. There are no mistakes, just opportunities for learning.
3. When you tell somebody something personal, this information does not leave the group.

We have started the self-care training with a round of questions concerning the fears and needs of all the participants. This took place inside, the day before the outdoor activities began. The participants reported that they needed a safe space, connections, and to listen to each other. We paid extra attention to these needs during the nature workshops.

## **METHOD**

The tested method was nature coaching/connection and different workshop activities were chosen for use with this approach, e.g.: silent walk, nature mandala and nature symbol. The selected nature-based activities prepared for this group have been adapted to fit the theme of self-care. For example, a walk in nature was presented as a walk in an area of self-care where people could find their own pace and path and were asked to be focus on self-care during the walk. More detailed information about the tested methods can be found below.

### **SILENT WALK**

During the silent walk, we asked the participants to be silent, relax, and be aware of their self-care needs. We created a "space of self-care" by creating a threshold (a branch) and asking the participants to think about their needs after they cross it. This manoeuvre allowed for diversity in walking speeds, as well as the level of focus and attention, and a very personal experience of self-care for all participants. For the silent walk, we choose a diverse and natural part of the village where we held the training, with a small wood, cemetery and meadow with grazing animals (mainly horses).

## **NATURE MANDALA**

The word mandala comes from Sanskrit where it literally means “circle”. Mandala is indeed a circular structure with a design that radiates out symmetrically from its unifying centre. It is one of nature’s most perfect configurations. The nature mandalas are made with organic materials found in nature. During the workshops, we asked the participants to look for natural materials in the surroundings and work together to create the circular shape.

## **NATURE SYMBOL**

The participants were asked to find an object (“symbol”) that represents self-care for them. It could be an object that they could hold in their hand, or, in the case of bigger objects, a picture of that object. First, they shared their symbols in small groups and, then, in plenary sessions, in the whole group.

## **CREATING A SPACE**

We created a friendly space during the nature activity itself by explaining what we are going to do, and asking the participants if they had done these kinds of activities before and if they had any questions. We also created the space in a physical sense: we started the silent walk from the threshold which had to be crossed to commence the activity. After crossing the threshold, we asked the participants to imagine a comfortable place of self-care where they really could follow their needs. That helped them to better connect with their needs and really feel as if they had stepped into a different space. At the end of the silent walk, they crossed the threshold once more.

## **CONNECTION**

The workshop addressed the need for connection in a very natural way. During the silent walk, some people started to walk together. There were also some horses on the way that attracted the attention of the participants. The goal was to connect with oneself in nature and become more aware of the issue of self-care. Establishing connections to other participants and animals was a natural

part of the activity. The nature symbol was more of a solo activity, but became a source of a lot of shared experiences in the group. During the making of the mandala, the participants worked together and easily formed connections with each other.

## **OUTCOMES**

In general, individual activities provoked different, but generally very positive reactions. During the silent walk, the participants felt safe and really got in touch with their needs. They walk their own paths, at their own pace, following their intuition. It was some relief for them that they had access to this space and time for themselves where they could truly follow their needs.

The mandala making was more relaxing and helped to reflect on self-care. The nature symbol helped the participants become more aware of what self-care means to them, and to share their experiences with each other.

In general, establishing a closer connection with nature was one of the positive outcomes of the workshop that affected the participants. As this was a group of youth workers, another positive impact was the fact that the participants took the experience home and used it as an inspiration for the people that they work with, so in that way, the workshop's impact got multiplied.

The nature activities worked well for this group as a form of self-care. They helped the participants to open up, connect with others and also find a friendly space to share their experiences.

Measuring the time of the activity could be a point of consideration for future workshops, especially in the context of the silent walk. This is because, as it turned out during the workshop, many participants were distracted by the horses encountered along the way. As organisers, we had a certain amount of time in mind for the walk, but when we told the participants to move to the self-care room, we saw that most people were walking at their own pace and choosing their own paths. We were confronted with the potential conflict between our ideas for the workshop and its planned duration. No one dropped out, but a few participants came back much later than expected, as they came across the horses on their way and really took their time.



# **Emotional support for women at risk of marginalisation (Murcia | Spain)**



The emotional support workshops for women were conducted in a series of three 3-hour-long sessions for groups of 4-7 participants. They were composed of migrant women and women aged between 35 and 65 at risk of social exclusion who live in Murcia, the home-base of Euroacción association. Some of the participants were unemployed, while others worked as seamstresses for a non-government organisation, Proyecto Abraham ([proyectoabraham.org](http://proyectoabraham.org)) Euroacción contacted Proyecto Abraham because of this organisation's expertise and their established contacts with migrant women and other women at risk of social exclusion.

Women in the group need sociotherapeutic support because they feel abandoned and left alone in their difficult circumstances. They pay less attention to their personal needs and desires. At least two of the participants had received psychological support in the past, but they didn't find the experience relevant or impactful in the context of their lives.

Since it was a new group and most of the participants didn't know each other and the team of facilitators, it was important to look for a way of initiating a group-forming process that wouldn't take up too much time. We chose to use Gestalt Theatre Therapy exercises for this purpose.

The activities introduced during the first session were focused largely on listening to the women and trying to understand what is missing from their lives, as well as identifying their needs. This helped to build trust within the group and introduce more unresolved issues into the discussion, suggested by the participants themselves.

The women's needs included the following goals:

- » reducing the feeling of loneliness;
- » improving their self-esteem and reducing their inferiority complexes;
- » adopting and maintaining a positive attitude towards life;
- » reinforcing their sense of independence.

The needs of the participants are connected with their social and economic circumstances. Their migrant status and/or lack of employment creates limitations in terms of, for example, their social outings and hobbies. One of the issues

mentioned by the participants during the sessions was the fact that even if they consider themselves creative, they find it difficult to secure the resources that would allow them to exercise their creativity.

## **EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FOR WOMEN: A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE SESSIONS**

### **SESSION 1**

- » DIXIT: the participants choose one card from a set of the Dixit game cards and use it to introduce themselves.
- » MEDITATION: the participants anchor themselves in the here and now.
- » MOVEMENT IN SPACE: the participants look at the ground, gaze into each other's eyes, wave hands, greet each other with a hug. Note: it's not mandatory to receive and return the greetings.
- » DISCUSSION ROUND: the participants answer the following questions: what has been most difficult for us? What helped us? What didn't help us?
- » MUSIC AND EMOTIONS: the participants name emotions and feelings with the help of drawings, music, and plasticine.
- » SELF-ESTEEM EXERCISE: the participants form a circle; one person enters it, and others do and/or say something positive to that person (a loving look, word, caress, or hug).
- » DISCUSSION ROUND: the participants talk about difficulties with expressing and accepting emotions.
- » CLOSING: the participants come up with a word to describe how they feel after the session.

### **SESSION 2**

- » ACTIVE WAITING: the participants play a Story Cubes game with the help of dices with images instead of numbers on their sides. The participants throw dices and must create a story based on the images.



- » CONNECTING: the participants take a series of three breaths and name a word that expresses how they feel.
- » WARM-UP: the participants repeat the phrase “I’m special because...”, using the sense of continuity of their identity and self-worth.
- » DISCUSSION: about why it’s so hard to see ourselves as special.
- » MOVEMENT: the participants work on their attentiveness to others and their responsiveness to their partner’s behaviour by engaging in dance-related exercises: (a) an “avatar” exercise: person A leads person B by a finger. Then, the music changes, and person B begins to lead person A by a finger; (b) a competitive dancing exercise: when one participant starts to dance, the other participant stops in the exact same position which had been previously taken by the other woman.
- » DISCUSSION ROUND: about shame.
- » EMOTIONAL IMPULSE: the participants walk around the room in a big group, and when the facilitator names an emotion, they make movements that represent their impulsive reactions. Are the reactions neutral? Do they repeat themselves? The participants should try again and do something different.
- » EMOTIONAL IMPULSES IN A SMALL GROUP: joy, anger, disgust, and love.
- » DISCUSSION ROUND: which emotional impulse has been the most difficult? Why? Is it more difficult to connect with one’s emotions when there are other people around or when one’s alone? How do the participants usually manage their emotions? What emotions do they tend to connect with most easily? How do they manage their emotions in their everyday lives? The participants are encouraged to talk about strategies.
- » CLOSING: the participants come up with a word that represents how they feel after the session.

### **SESSION 3**

- » ACTIVE WAITING: an exercise that asks the participants to describe their lives in 3 minutes (first talk), 1 minute (second talk), and then – without words, through eye expression – in 15 seconds (third talk).

- » DISCUSSION ROUND: what have the participants realised about their own lives?
- » ACTIVE LISTENING: one person is asked to talk about any topic for 3 minutes, the other person listens without making any movement or expressing anything with their eyes or body. When the 3 minutes are over, the second person repeats what their partner has said. Then, the roles are reversed, and the activity is repeated. What was more difficult, listening without doing anything, repeating everything that was said by the other person or thinking about what to say about oneself?
- » CONNECTING: the participants take a series of three breaths and name a word that expresses how they feel.
- » WARM-UP: DANCE AS IF YOU WERE... the most shy participant in the group, or the funniest, most spontaneous, coolest, most creative, most serious, and most outlandish person. Alternative warm-up exercises include assigning a different role to a chosen object (pen, keys, etc.); saying words in a different way than usual (rhythm, sound) by all the participants gathered in a circle; following someone's hand (the face should be about 2-3 cm away from the hand of the person that guides the movement).
- » MIRRORS: the participants are divided into groups of two. The pair acts as mirrors for each other. The first mirror is neutral. The other one makes movements and gestures related to bravery, trust, femininity, and masculinity.
- » DISCUSSION ROUND: how the participants are doing with the activities they have done so far.
- » MAIN ACTIVITY: the participants talk about how they present themselves to others and what their needs are. Then, they take part in an exercise in which they create characters that can enrich them in some way, contribute to their development (antagonist, a character that gives them the sense of power and safety, etc.). The participants impersonate a character, move and greet each other in pairs, and introduce themselves to others. An alternative exercise is the "roles on the dance floor" task which involves taking on such roles as an artist, social worker, businesswoman, mother, dancer, clown, politician, old woman, child, footballer, teacher, and nurse.
- » FINAL DISCUSSION: the participants are asked the following questions: What does the character give you? What has the process been like? What will you take away from this afternoon? What will you take away from the workshop?

- » MASSAGE IN PAIRS: consensual touching only.
- » CLOSING: the participants come up with a word describing how they feel after the session.

In this particular methodology, the facilitator is there to guide the activities and the learning/educational process, rather than present solutions. In this case, we felt that some of the participants should be taught strategies for dealing with problems, so they wouldn't be left feeling that there no point to the sessions and that they don't know why they took part in the workshop.

For the participants, one of the most important aspects of the workshop was the chance to anchor themselves in the here and now. They don't commonly experience the sense of just being in the present, since they tend to think too much about their need to control many factors on a daily basis: family, unemployment, bureaucracy, etc.

The participants were engaged and interested in the sessions. The first session was attended by seven women, the second one had four participants, and the subsequent workshop attracted five women. One of the participants couldn't attend any more sessions because she started working. Another one didn't answer her phone after the first session. She has a chronic illness and usually doesn't get involved in any activities. The ones that participated in two or more sessions were very keen on the workshops and even if some activities took them a lot of effort, they still attended the sessions and reflected on the activities afterwards.

Talking about their personal experiences and getting heard by others was very important for these women. They asked for advice on how to manage their emotions in everyday life in the context of their situation. They confirmed that they needed tools to achieve this and were aware that they required support. Lack of economical resources made it more complicated, because they couldn't afford psychological support.

They appreciated the skills they developed during the sessions and support of the group. When the sessions ended, they felt energised and strengthened by the support network they helped to create themselves.

They felt connected with one another and the facilitators and asked for more similar sessions. They felt cared for, understood, and listened to, and saw them-

selves as part of not only their own, but also other people's processes. The participants were comfortable throughout the sessions.

This was possible because of:

- » their trust in the person from Proyecto Abraham;
- » the warm-ups included in each session;
- » the sense of being listened to and understood by the facilitators;
- » the support they received from other participants. They were happy to meet each other in each session. This was of the main reasons why the workshop was successful.

The number of participants was small, which means that the space for development of group dynamics was limited. This had its advantages, as they were also able to relate to each other in different aspects. The women were able to listen to each other without making judgments about each other's different life experiences. Some of the participants forged noticeable bonds with each other from the very beginning.

The activities (especially during the first session) were focused on establishing connections. It was important for the participants to have a safe place to share their experiences and feel listened to.

## **OBSTACLES**

The main obstacle was related to the participants' spotty attendance at or absence from the three sessions. As participation was voluntary, it was up to the women's to decide whether they wanted to attend the sessions. Therefore, the plan for the course of the session and its final shape always remained undefined.

Finding free time was one of the biggest obstacles for these women. When they were offered a job, even a temporary one or without a formal employment contract, their time resources would become limited, because they always agreed to take up said work, which reduced their ability to participate in any unpaid activity.

In addition, all of them have family responsibilities (children and/or grandchildren) and taking care of them is another of their chores, so they sometimes find it difficult to engage in unpaid activities. A possible solution would be to offer the participants financial support that would allow them to better manage their time and decide what events they want to attend.

The hardest part of the process is selection of the participants and keeping them involved. It should be also noted that the participants have problems with moving around the city, which means that the location of the venue is also an important factor and can decrease the size of the group. There is no viable solution given the resources at the disposal of the participants and the organisation. Therefore, the sensible solution is to continue providing these sessions, regardless of the number of the participants in attendance, and adapt them accordingly to match the capabilities of the participants.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Listen to participants' needs. The needs of individual groups will be expressed throughout the whole process and they can be explored as the sessions go on.
2. Work on anchoring participants in the sense of being present in the here and now.
3. Respect participants' pace. They all have their own different paces of self-expression and task processing. They may also need more or less time to connect with their own selves and the group.
4. Create a group. Participants need to feel safe and comfortable within the group. They also need to feel listened to and confident enough to engage with other group members. If the group is not cohesive, its impact on the individual will not be the same.
5. Work on creating a safer space. This piece of advice goes hand in hand with the above-listed recommendation. No meaningful sessions are possible without establishing trust between the workshop's facilitator and participants and among the participants themselves.

**WenDo and Nordoff Robbins**  
**music therapy as forms**  
**of sociotherapeutic support for**  
**women receiving treatment**  
**in addiction treatment wards**  
**of psychiatric hospitals**  
**(Poznań, Gniezno | Poland)**



The overall process of testing the combined WenDo and Nordoff Robbins music therapy methods was conducted over several months of 2021 and included the following elements:

1. Training and seminars on WenDo methods and Nordoff Robbins music therapy, conducted as part of the project “Cultural education of adults in need of sociotherapeutic support”, addressed to the trainers and educators associated with the project’s partner organisations.
2. Development of a way of combining WenDo and Nordoff Robbins music therapy in a workshop form through cooperation between the trainers specialising in these two methods and researchers involved in the project.
3. Diagnosis of the needs, capacities, conditions, and institutional limitations of the addiction treatment ward for women in the “Dziekanka” Psychiatric Hospital in Gniezno: meetings with the management staff, the ward’s therapists and nurses, and the hospital director; individual interviews, as well as a focus group interview with the ward’s employees.
4. Training in the combined methods of WenDo and Nordoff Robbins music therapy carried out in the ZAMEK Culture Centre in Poznań for the employees of the “Dziekanka” Psychiatric Hospital’s addiction treatment ward for women. It was followed by a post-training evaluation which consisted of a group interview with the training’s participants held at the Gniezno hospital.
5. Testing of the combined WenDo and music therapy methods on the addiction treatment ward for women in the “Dziekanka” Psychiatric Hospital in Gniezno implemented over two weekends in September 2021 (each workshop lasting several hours per day).
6. Evaluation of the entire testing process, including in-depth interviews with the ward staff members, a group focus interview with the personnel, evaluation questionnaires filled by the workshop participants, participant observations conducted by two researchers during every workshop, and interviews with the trainers involved in the testing process.

The process was planned and prepared on the basis of a preliminary diagnosis which had been carried out during one of the projects which CK ZAMEK helped to implement in 2018. The initiative, titled “A small thing for a great cause”, was carried out by the staff and students of the Institute of European Culture of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Gniezno and involved cultural education activities conducted on the women’s addiction treatment ward of the “Dziekanka” Psychiatric Hospital. Conclusions from the project’s evaluation convinced us that cross-sectoral partnerships between health and cultural institutions is both needed and necessary to provide holistic sociotherapeutic support for women undergoing treatment for addiction.

## **METHODS**

The idea of combining WenDo and Nordoff Robbins music therapy emerged out of cooperation between trainers (Magda Szewciów and Dominika Dopierała) and researchers (Ewelina Banaszek, Katarzyna Chajbos-Walczak and Marta Kosińska) during the training and seminars conducted as part of the project “Cultural education of adults in need of sociotherapeutic support”. The testing process was led by certified trainers of both methods who cooperate with CK ZAMEK on a daily basis: Magda Szewciów (Warsztaty Zmiany) and Dominika Dopierała (Nordoff Robbins Poland Foundation).

Their interest in combining the two methods was motivated by their realisation that both music therapy activities and WenDo gender-based violence prevention training include ways and methods that can help boost women’s sense of agency. They provide women with better understanding and sense of their own resources, as well as modes of expression that have not only an aesthetic appeal (vocal evocation, singing, shouting), but also profound cultural significance. Both music therapy and WenDo activate women’s voices – both literally (through specific exercises) and metaphorically (using voice as a sign of women’s presence in the sociocultural reality and public spaces).

The embodied, voice- and body-based music therapy exercises which allow the participants to broaden their spectrum of expression through free, individual, but also collective improvisation have proven to be an excellent tool for achieving the goals of the WenDo training that include:



- » effective, consistent, and assertive communication;
- » ability to recognise and diagnose situations in which boundaries are crossed;
- » ability to make decisions;
- » responding to situations of boundary crossing, discrimination, and gender-based violence;
- » using physical self-defence in cases of an attack/assault.

The trainers and researchers involved in the process of testing these methods worked together to deepen this unique synergy of anti-discrimination education and music therapy's goals and tools. They achieved it by exploring the areas common to both WenDo and Nordoff Robbins music therapy: voice, movement, as well as a sense of boundaries, self-confidence, and agency.

## **VOICE**

Music therapy exercises include techniques aimed at voice activation through breath and diaphragm work and making various sounds, from singing to shouting. They can be used to achieve educational goals related to using voice as a tool for overcoming stage fright and shame. During the workshop, voice training turned into a conversation about voice in general and the cultural constraints limiting women's freedom in using their voices, while the use of shouting prompted a discussion on the basics of physical and psychological self-defence.

## **MOVEMENT**

Both WenDo and music therapy employ activities aimed at encouraging people to move – from free movement exercises, through structured and specific self-defence-related moves, to getting the body moving through music therapy by combining movement with voice work. During the workshops, these activities served as a prelude to introducing elements of self-defence – basic punches and releases performed with a shout, as well as defensive body postures.

## **A SENSE OF BOUNDARIES**

The workshops also aimed to explore women's position in the social hierarchy and the way women's bodies function physically in public spaces. The training included body work aimed at learning to recognise physical boundaries through music therapy and take up space while moving to the rhythm. A conversation about women's place in the public sphere, expressed through concrete physical actions, was meant to allow the participants to practise responding to boundary violations and strengthen their belief that they have the right to occupy space.

## **A SENSE OF CONFIDENCE AND AGENCY**

The WenDo method includes an exercise that strengthens the participants' sense of agency/influence. It was combined with a music therapy activity that allows them to experience being a leader in creating sounds/melodies, performing in front of a group, and influencing the rest of the participants in the process of collective improvisation.

## **TARGET GROUP**

The workshops, organised to test the combination of Nordoff Robbins music therapy and the WenDo gender-based violence prevention training, were addressed to around sixty patients of the 24-hour addiction treatment ward for women in the "Dziekanka" Psychiatric Hospital in Gniezno. It is one of several wards in Poland that are intended for and fully staffed by women. This "feminine" character of the ward is a response to the fact that women's addiction issues are determined by situations in which gender plays a significant role. Such circumstances include, e.g., situations in which women's male partners also deal with substance use disorders, situations in which women experience violence (physical, psychological, sexual) from men, and ones in which women deal with financial, familial, and social dependency on male family members.

Initial discussions, reconnaissance, and interviews with female ward staff, conducted by the researchers involved in the project, highlighted the gender-based discrimination, violence and dependency of the women receiving treatment at

the ward. The workshop goals and methods developed by the trainers were first “tested” on the female employees of the addiction treatment ward and subjected to evaluation and in-depth discussion. During these activities, the therapists working at the hospital were able to identify, on a case-by-case basis, exercises that could be potentially “triggering” for the patients, i.e., activate emotions that could not be addressed during the workshop. However, the ward therapists were aware of the exercises and the topics discussed with the patients during the workshop and were prepared to address the resulting issues with the women during the normal everyday therapeutic process conducted as part of the addiction treatment.

What is more, the target group was also strongly diverse in terms of their economic, social, and cultural capital. The workshop groups included women from various socio-economic backgrounds, with very different core competencies. It is worth noting that both the participants’ capitals and backgrounds – although diverse – were overwhelmingly anything but “middle-class.” The process of testing of the two methods was thus different from the typical workshops held in cultural institutions for participants who are aware of the training offer and choose the workshops of their own volition. In this case, only a few of the participants had ever visited a cultural institution, attended a training course, had an opportunity to use instruments and make music, or heard about anti-discrimination education. Thus, it was a situation where highly culturally competent trainers and researchers worked with women from very different socio-cultural backgrounds. Therefore, one of the aims of this educational activity was to ensure that the language and concepts foreign and incomprehensible to the target group were not imposed on its members.

On the other hand, we became aware that, regardless of the differences in social, cultural and economic capitals among the project’s participants, any of us could develop a substance use disorder in the future. The stories shared by the patients of the ward showed that the mechanisms of addiction are embedded in the cultural determinants that affect women irrespective of their social positions. After all, social drinking habits, which are deeply rooted in the Polish culture, apply to all social classes and groups. We discovered similarities in our ways of thinking, acting, and reacting to problems and difficult situations. This encouraged us to become deeply involved in the testing and work through the issues and emotions evoked during the process.

We assumed that the group of women undergoing treatment in the addiction treatment ward needed support primarily in strengthening their own resources required to face their addiction issues. These resources included a sense of agency, support from loved ones, self-confidence, acceptance of their own weaknesses and, simultaneously, awareness of their strengths. In addition, the women mentioned that they needed to relax, loosen up, feel empowered, have fun, and enjoy themselves. They emphasised that these needs were difficult to fulfil in a hospital setting. They also expressed concerns that they would have little chance to participate in similar meetings after leaving the hospital. They also mentioned financial difficulties and insufficient therapeutic and cultural offers in the vicinity of their places of residence.

## **WORKSHOP PROGRAMME**

The women that participated in the workshops showed great enthusiasm and commitment. Music therapy elicited most vivid responses, as music is not allowed during the eight-week stay on the addiction treatment ward, because it is seen as a potential trigger for behaviours related to addiction. The participants were very enthusiastic about music, which evoked many memories and mentions of their childhood and motherhood, as evident in their comments.

The women reported that music accompanies them in their daily life: "I listen to music even when I go out to buy groceries". They said that music calms them down and brings them joy. Some participants stated also that they had been struggling with depression for years, and that they tended to forget about music when they were depressed, and the workshop reminded them of its existence. They talked about their own singing and about songs and instruments from their childhood ("oh, a flute; this reminds me of primary school. It was such a long time ago..."), as well as lullabies sung to their children. They often recalled situations from their everyday life and their roles as mothers, which, according to them, they neglected as a result of their addiction issues. In this context, they regarded music as an opportunity to be together with their family and children, as a tool for establishing contact and free expression. They stated that they would like to buy some instruments for their children when they leave the hospital. They readily admitted that the workshops made them feel relaxed and happy:

” *Can you come here every day?*

” *If the hospital offered music therapy in the morning instead of gymnastics, I would be standing here already at a quarter to eight.*

Music proved to be a great medium for initiating conversations during which women talked about their circumstances and sometimes affirmed the stages they had reached in their therapeutic process:

” *I'm glad I dared to find my own way in life, sober.*

The women felt joy, motivation to act and make changes in their lives, and a sense of inner strength and calm. Out of approximately sixty participants, only one woman dropped out of the workshops, explaining that she was in a bad mood.

The facilitators regularly checked the patients' well-being, asked them whether they felt ready to perform certain tasks, and adapted the forms of activities to the group's capacities. Both the patients and the hospital staff observing the workshops commented on the partnership-like relations between the facilitators and the participants, which helped the latter feel relaxed and confident. The facilitators emphasised also that the degree and mode of the women's participation in the workshops was dictated by their own wishes and abilities. According to the trainers, the fact that participation was voluntary and the women could choose its form provided them with a sense of agency.

## **ANTI-DISCRIMINATION TOPICS THAT EVOKED PARTICULARLY STRONG RESPONSES IN THE TARGET GROUP**

The parts of the workshop that referred to anti-discrimination content were seamlessly interwoven with music therapy exercises. Although WenDo workshops are a form of anti-discrimination education rather than therapy, the participants found many of the issues raised during the sessions particularly interesting and reported that they would like to learn more about them and explore them further.

The trainers remained very cautious in their response to these wishes, taking into account the specificity of the group and the fact that many of the partici-

pants needed individual therapeutic interventions. They were careful to maintain boundaries between the topics that fell within the scope of the workshop and the issues that should be communicated to the therapists or medical staff that maintain regular contact with the patients. The trainers highlighted the sensitive and potentially “triggering” character of such workshop situations and drew attention to the need to maintain close communication between the workshop facilitators and the regular hospital staff.

The topics which the participants wanted to explore in more depth included:

- » the concept of sisterhood introduced by the trainers as a form of mutual support among women, solidarity despite differences, acceptance of differences and the pursuit of a sense of teamwork regardless of any conflicts and divisions. This idea was new for many of the women on the ward who showed a strong desire to discuss it.
- » the difference between acceptance and tolerance, as well as between empathy and assertiveness. These issues are related to the social skills of maintaining one’s own boundaries and refraining from overstepping the boundaries of other people. Many of the women indicated not only that they found it difficult to understand these concepts, but more importantly, to apply them in practice in their lives, especially in the context of their substance use disorders. It was a novel idea for the participants to treat assertiveness as a form of “taking care of one-self”, or empathy and self-care.
- » issues related to aggression, violence, and expression. The participants found it difficult to accept assertive female behaviour, highlighting the fact that, in social terms, acts of assertiveness are often perceived as manifestations of aggression, which “do not suit women.” They found it important to distinguish between aggression and violence, but the trainers did not allow personal stories involving experiences of violence to be discussed during the workshops.

## **THE POTENTIAL OF THE COMBINED METHODS OF NORDOFF ROBBINS MUSIC THERAPY AND WENDO AS PERCEIVED BY THE THERAPISTS AND MEDICAL STAFF WORKING ON THE WOMEN'S ADDICTION TREATMENT WARD**

The process of testing the combined methods included also training, talks, consultations and interviews with the staff of the addiction treatment ward. The therapists, head nurse, and the head of the ward received training in both methods and were later invited to evaluate their potential use in supplementing the addiction treatment process.

Some of the benefits of using both methods to supplement the therapy indicated by the above-mentioned women included:

### **The potential for relieving stress and pressure, aiding relaxation, and reducing tensions associated with the therapy:**

- ” *When we all started singing, dancing, shouting, and playing instruments together, I felt that barriers collapse. I experienced a relaxed and fun atmosphere, good cooperation and mutual understanding without words. I stopped feeling anxious and ashamed. I became motivated to work, be active. Meeting other people gave me joy and satisfaction (a therapist's opinion).*

### **The potential for unlocking the appetite for change, exploration, experimentation, and creativity:**

- ” *The exercises allowed me to activate my imagination and force my brain to think. I learnt to name things, express my feelings.*

### **The potential for practicing articulation and verbalisation of thoughts and feelings:**

- ” *Female patients often find it difficult to verbalise their own thoughts and emotions, and the use of instruments and voice work could help them to externalise what they think and feel without necessarily forcing them to use words.*

- ” *Music, including music therapy, encourages people who are ‘closed-off’ to open up. Music brings people together, allows them to express their emotions. It unites them and has a soothing effect, while shared music-making develops interpersonal bonds.*

### **The potential for supporting group processes on the ward and some forms of group therapy:**

- ” *There’s a need to strengthen group and integration processes, and work with patients’ self-esteem. Which method brings the best results depends very much on the individual.*
- ” *Contact with this kind of art will help them find joy, stimulate empathy, deal with aggression and impulsiveness, and teach them tolerance and cooperation and integration with a group, as well as better communication.*

### **The potential for empowering female patients:**

- ” *I focused on the tasks, on using my own potential. It also taught me how important it is to be aware of one’s own agency, one’s decision-making power.*
- ” *WenDo techniques would be of great value – patients are often victims of abuse, and knowledge in this area could strengthen their confidence in their own agency, which could perhaps translate into a greater sense of safety and self-confidence.*

### **The potential for activating movement creativity and body expression to supplement the therapeutic process:**

- ” *It would also help with getting in touch with one’s own body, avoiding cutting oneself off from it, and taking advantage of its potential.*

### **The potential for strengthening self-esteem and helping with the consequences of exposure to violence:**

- ” *The patients find it rather difficult to properly verbalise their feelings, set boundaries, and express their needs in an assertive manner. They are often cut off from their own feelings. They exhibit submissive and aggressive behaviours. Most of the female patients have experienced violence, including self-aggression.*



*Work on setting boundaries and being able to express oneself would be highly recommended for them.*

**The potential for introducing tension regulation techniques other than the ones associated with behaviours related to addiction:**

- ” *Unfortunately, difficulties with proper regulation of tension and self-soothing are common for female patients, so it would be very valuable for them to do relaxation and breathing exercises, experience joy while sober, and explore different sources of pleasure or relief.*

**The potential for practising behaviours that de-escalate aggression:**

- ” *I suspect that the working methods aimed at preventing escalation of aggression, which we did not learn during the sessions, would also be of great value to the patients.*

**THE RISKS OF USING THE COMBINED METHODS OF NORDOFF ROBBINS MUSIC THERAPY AND WENDO AS PERCEIVED BY THE THERAPISTS AND MEDICAL STAFF WORKING ON THE WOMEN'S ADDICTION TREATMENT WARD**

The therapists indicated few risks associated with the potential use of the tested methods to supplement the addiction therapy provided by the hospital. They focused mainly on the risks that could potentially trigger reactions of the participants:

**Anti-discrimination education exercises that involve social exposure:**

- ” *[They] can trigger patients' anxiety, as well as their fear of pain and shame for failing to try one's hand at the task or not succeeding in it. The patients are afraid of being laughed at by the group.*

**"Triggering" exercises and content:**

- ” *This workshop could potentially evoke bad memories and make the women feel angry and aggressive.*

### **Physical self-defence exercises:**

- ” Given that these are often people with multiple physical health deficits (vitamin and mineral deficiencies, resulting in bone decalcification, anaemia, and weakened muscle strength) and mental health problems, I would be worried about potential injuries, e.g., bruises, abrasions, swelling, and broken bones.

### **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The in-depth and multi-dimensional evaluation of the process of the joined testing of music therapy and WenDo allows to conclude that this methodological combination has great potential for use on addiction treatment wards, in the scope of:

- » supplementing the therapeutic process;
- » supporting the therapeutic process.

The testing process highlighted foremost the first of these above-mentioned potentials. WenDo and music therapy proved to be excellent tools supporting the women's therapeutic effort in the area of creative expression, general creativity, free play, and engaging in relaxed and optimistic behaviour. These forms of influence of the tested methods have a relieving effect on the therapeutic process and, at the same time, support the patients in generating positive attitudes.

In this context, it is also worth noting the potential uses of music therapy and anti-discrimination education that help women develop their social and cultural competencies. Art therapy and anti-discrimination training introduce a number of processes associated with positive psychology: focusing on possibilities and potential, as well as developing the already existing competencies of individuals taking part in the therapeutic process.

The capacity of the tested methods to support the therapeutic process is certainly an area worth further exploration. It would require continued in-depth collaboration between trainers and therapists. Such cooperation could exploit the opportunities linked to potentially “difficult” topics – particularly those related to anti-discrimination education – and treat them not as “triggers”, but as

prompts unlocking further milestones in the therapeutic process or revealing information that would not have otherwise been expressed in therapy.

Challenges to the potential integration of music therapy and WenDo into therapeutic activities conducted on hospital wards involve financial, staff and time constraints that make it difficult to organise regular meetings for female patients and train hospital staff in WenDo.

It is difficult for medical institutions in Poland to raise funds for cultural education or art therapy activities. Therefore, entities working in the areas of cultural education – cultural institutions and NGOs – should be the ones to propose such activities and raise funds for their implementation. Planning of such activities should take place in close cooperation and consultation with hospital staff, include a research component, and be followed by an evaluation process.



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