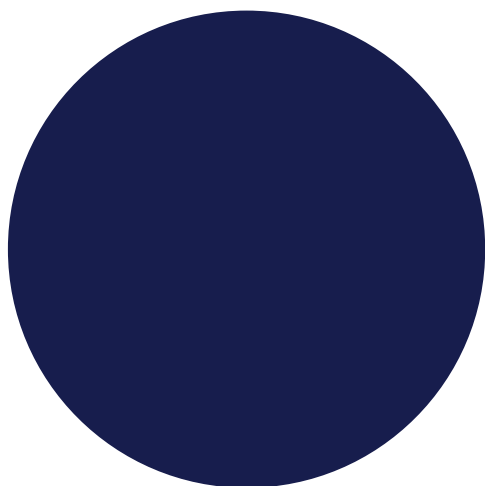




# **EMPATHEATRY HANDBOOK: THE STAGE IS OURS!**

**PRACTICAL INSIGHTS ON  
INCLUSIVE YOUTH WORK**



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**AUTHORS:**

DOROTEJA JEMEC, NINA BEGANOVIĆ, TEODORA ŠVET, FANNY  
ROUX, ILYA PRINGOT, LISA JOYCE, ANJA MAROJEVIC, MAJA JOTIĆ,  
NADIA OÑATIBIA, ANA BUSTAMANTE, MERITXELL  
MARTÍNEZ I BELLAFON

**EDITORS:**

OLIVIJA GRAFENAUER, DOROTEJA JEMEC

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PROOFREADING:  
ANJA MAROJEVIC

**SPECIAL THANKS TO:**

MARTIN KERIN, ILYA PRINGOT, ANA MARIA STAN

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JAN HRUŠOVAR

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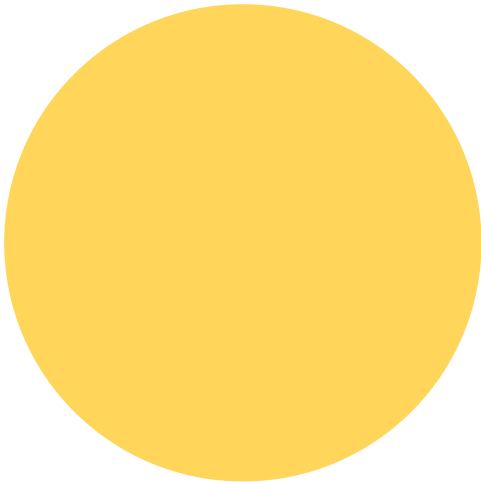
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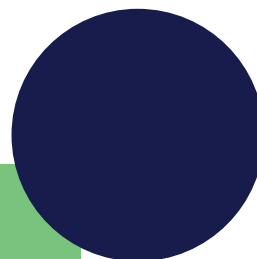
# TABLE OF CONTENT

- INTRODUCTION 2
- ABOUT THE PROJECT 3
- PREPARING FOR WORKSHOPS 5
- CREATING A SAFER SPACE 11
- CHALLENGES 16
  - WORKING WITH LANGUAGE BARRIERS 16
  - GEOGRAPHICAL DISTANCE / RURAL LOCATION 20
  - GROUP DYNAMIC 22
- DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE 26
  - SELF-AWARENESS 27
  - EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION 29
  - EMPATHY DEVELOPMENT 32
  - SOCIAL SKILLS 34
  - MOTIVATION 35
- TIPS ON CONTINUOUS WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE 36
- FINAL THOUGHTS 41
- HELPFUL RESOURCES 42





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# INTRODUCTION

THIS HANDBOOK WAS CREATED BY THEATRE EDUCATORS AS PART OF THE ERASMUS+ PROJECT EMPATHEATRY: DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE THEATRE GROUPS FOR EMOTIONALLY EMPOWERED AND ACTIVE YOUTH. DURING THE PROJECT, WE HELD THEATRE WORKSHOPS WITH UNDERPRIVILEGED YOUNG PEOPLE IN SLOVENIA, BELGIUM, SPAIN, AND IRELAND. THE HANDBOOK IS BASED ON OUR DIRECT EXPERIENCE CONDUCTING THESE AND SIMILAR WORKSHOPS—WHAT WE DID, WHAT WORKED, THE CHALLENGES WE FACED, AND WHAT WE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY.

THE HANDBOOK IS INTENDED FOR YOUTH WORKERS, THEATRE PEDAGOGUES, MENTORS, TEACHERS, AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS WHO WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES AND ARE SEEKING FOR NEW AND INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO INCORPORATE INTO THEIR PRACTICE. IT OFFERS PRACTICAL EXERCISES, REFLECTIONS ON KEY TOPICS, AND ADVICE ON HOW TO HANDLE COMMON CHALLENGES WHEN LEADING CREATIVE WORKSHOPS. THESE TOOLS CAN HELP YOU IMPLEMENT MORE INCLUSIVE AND ENGAGING METHODS INTO YOUR WORK.

IN THE HANDBOOK, YOU WILL FIND A COLLECTION OF APPROACHES AND IDEAS THAT YOU CAN ADAPT TO YOUR OWN CONTEXT AND NEEDS. THEY ARE NOT INTENDED TO PRESENT THE RIGHT OR ONLY WAY TO WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE BUT TO OFFER GUIDELINES AND POSSIBLE METHODS TO CONSIDER WHEN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING ACTIVITIES. YOU CAN READ IT FROM START TO FINISH OR USE IT AS A REFERENCE WHEN YOU NEED IDEAS OR SUPPORT.

WE HOPE THAT THE HANDBOOK WILL INSPIRE YOU TO INCLUDE DIFFERENT CREATIVE PRACTICES IN YOUR WORK.



# ABOUT THE PROJECT

EMPATHEATRY: DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE THEATRE GROUPS FOR EMOTIONALLY EMPOWERED AND ACTIVE YOUTH WAS A PROJECT WITH WHICH WE AIMED TO INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY OF THEATRE ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES AND THUS ENCOURAGE THEIR HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT.

WITHIN THE PROJECT WE HELD ACTIVITIES TO EMPOWER YOUTH WORKERS, THEATRE PEDAGOGUES AND SIMILAR PROFILES IN THEIR WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AND DEVELOP QUALITY METHODS THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY COOPERATION. ON THE BASIS OF THE ACTIVITIES, WE WROTE GUIDELINES<sup>1</sup> FOR WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES.

WE HELD DIFFERENT THEATRE WORKSHOPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEWER OPPORTUNITIES IN EACH OF THE 4 COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT (SLOVENIA, BELGIUM, IRELAND AND SPAIN).

**IN SPAIN** WE WORKED WITH TOOLS FROM THE THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED (IMAGES, FORUM THEATRE, SCENES OF OPPRESSION), IMPROVISATION, GROUP RHYTHM DYNAMICS, AND COLLECTIVE CREATION. THE PROCESS FOLLOWED AN APPROACH OF DEVISING THEATRE SCENES THROUGH BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL AND SYMBOLIC IMAGERY. WE WORKED WITH A GROUP OF YOUNG MIGRANTS—MOSTLY ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS—CONNECTED TO ONE CASAL DELS INFANTS IN BARCELONA. THE GROUP WAS DIVERSE IN TERMS OF LANGUAGES, CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS, AND PERSONAL TRAJECTORIES. OVER SEVERAL SESSIONS, PARTICIPANTS EXPLORED THEATRICAL EXPRESSION THROUGH BODY WORK, STORYTELLING, IMAGE THEATRE, AND IMPROVISATION. THEY COLLECTIVELY CREATED SCENES BASED ON LIVED EXPERIENCES, WHICH WERE THEN ASSEMBLED INTO A DEVISED PERFORMANCE. THE WORKSHOP CULMINATED IN A PUBLIC PRESENTATION THAT HIGHLIGHTED THE VOICES, STORIES, AND CREATIVE WORK OF THE GROUP.

**IN IRELAND**'S GROUP THE YOUNG PEOPLE UNDERTOOK A SERIES OF WORKSHOPS WHICH GENERALLY CONSISTED OF A GROUP WARM-UP AND CIRCLE GAMES AIMED AT SOME ASPECT OF THEATRE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (VOICE, MOVEMENT, IMPROVISATION ...) AFTER WHICH THE PARTICIPANTS WORKED IN SMALLER GROUPS TO DEVISE A SHORT PERFORMANCE WHICH THEY SHARED WITH THE GROUP AND TOOK FEEDBACK. IN ADDITION TO THE REGULAR ACTIVITIES OF THE GROUP THEY ALSO UNDERTOOK THE "MAGIC SHOP" ACTIVITY AND "IDENTITY COLLAGE". THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE GROUP ARE FACING THE CHALLENGE OF RURAL ISOLATION, TRAVELLING LONG DISTANCES TO ATTEND THE THEATRE GROUP EACH WEEK.

**IN SLOVENIA** WE WORKED WITH THE METHODS OF IMPROVISATIONAL THEATRE. IN A SERIES OF WORKSHOPS THAT WERE HELD IN COOPERATION WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION CENTRE JANEZ LEVEC LJUBLJANA WE WORKED WITH PUPILS AGED 15–20 WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES AND PUPILS WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDERS. DURING THE WORKSHOPS THE YOUNG PEOPLE EXPLORED BASICS OF IMPROV THEATRE, SUCH AS STORYTELLING, COOPERATION ON STAGE, EXPRESSING AND PLAYING WITH EMOTIONS, "WHO, WHERE, WHAT", ETC. ALL THESE TOOLS LED TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF SHORT IMPROVISED SCENES.

**IN BELGIUM**, WE EXPLORED THEATRE THROUGH VARIOUS WORKSHOPS (LIKE IMPROVISATION, SOUND DESIGN, MOVEMENT, PUPPETS ETC.) WHICH ALLOWED EACH PERSON TO EXPLORE THEIR OWN INTEREST. THE CHILDREN THAT PARTICIPATED IN THESE WORKSHOPS ARE FROM SOCIALLY VULNERABLE AREAS IN BRUSSELS, AND ARE AGED BETWEEN 10 AND 13 YEARS OLD. THE SESSIONS STARTED WITH A "CHECK-IN" WITH THE WHOLE GROUP, AFTER WHICH THEY GOT SPLIT INTO FOUR SMALLER GROUPS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WORKSHOPS. IN ONE OF THE SESSIONS, THE CHILDREN WENT TO A THEATRE COMPANY, CALLED "THEATRE DES MARTYRS", WHERE THEY GOT TO BE THE ACTOR, DIRECTOR, SCENOGRAPHER AND MAKE-UP ARTIST.

AS A CONCLUSION TO THE LOCAL WORKSHOPS, WE ALSO HELD A YOUTH MOBILITY EXCHANGE IN LJUBLJANA, BRINGING TOGETHER PARTICIPANTS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, THEIR EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE.

# WORKSHOP PREPARATION

WHILE OUR METHODOLOGY EMPHASIZES FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTING TO THE NEEDS OF BOTH INDIVIDUALS AND THE GROUP, IT IS IMPORTANT TO START WITH A CLEAR WORKSHOP STRUCTURE TO CREATE A SAFER AND SUPPORTIVE SPACE FOR EVERYONE TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES.

WHILE PREPARING FOR A SERIES OF WORKSHOPS, IT IS IMPORTANT TO THINK ABOUT THE ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS AS WELL AS THE CONTENT. GATHERING SOME BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE GROUP IN ADVANCE IS VERY IMPORTANT—SUCH AS THE EXPECTED NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR PROFILES (E.G., AGE, ABILITIES, REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING). SINCE IT IS NOT ALWAYS POSSIBLE TO GET THIS INFORMATION BEFOREHAND, IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE FLEXIBLE WITH YOUR ACTIVITIES IN AN OPEN FIRST SESSION, SO YOU CAN ADAPT THEM TO THE NEEDS OF DIFFERENT GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS.

DESIGN THE FIRST SESSION TO INCLUDE ACTIVITIES WITH A FOCUS ON COOPERATION, PLAYFULNESS AND GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER. TRUST AND FEELING COMFORTABLE ENOUGH TO BE OPEN AND VULNERABLE ARE IMPORTANT FOR CREATIVITY.

“WHILE PREPARING FOR A SERIES OF WORKSHOPS, IT IS IMPORTANT TO THINK ABOUT THE ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS AS WELL AS THE CONTENT. GATHERING SOME BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE GROUP IN ADVANCE IS VERY IMPORTANT”

MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE ADEQUATE SPACE AND TIME FOR THE PLANNED ACTIVITIES; IDEALLY, THE ROOM SHOULD BE PRIVATE AND FREE FROM DISTRACTIONS LIKE NOISE, CLUTTER, OR OTHER PEOPLE. ALSO, GATHER ALL THE NECESSARY EQUIPMENT BEFOREHAND AND CHECK THAT EVERYTHING IS WORKING PROPERLY.

BEFORE CONDUCTING ACTIVITIES, IT IS IMPORTANT TO THINK ABOUT THE GOALS YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE AND TO UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE PROPOSING WITH THE ACTIVITIES AND WHY. IF YOU ARE PLANNING LONG-TERM ACTIVITIES (A SERIES OF SESSIONS), YOU CAN DIVIDE YOUR GOALS INTO LONG-TERM AND SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES.

## EXAMPLE OF A LONG-TERM GOAL (SLOVENIA):

- FORMING A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES AND SHAPING A POSITIVE SOCIAL DYNAMIC WITHIN THE GROUP.
- LEARNING BASIC SKILLS OF IMPROVISATIONAL THEATRE, ADAPTED TO THE SPECIFIC NEEDS AND INTERESTS OF THE PARTICIPANTS.
- USING THESE SKILLS TO CREATE BASIC IMPROVISED SCENES.

## EXAMPLE OF A LONG-TERM GOAL (BELGIUM):

- OFFER HIGHLY DIVERSE ACTIVITIES, HIGHLIGHT THE VARIOUS PROFESSIONS RELATED TO THE STAGE, AND AVOID TEXT READING (TO NOT DISADVANTAGE CHILDREN WHO ARE NOT COMFORTABLE WITH THE FRENCH LANGUAGE).

## EXAMPLE OF SHORT-TERM GOAL (SPAIN)

- CREATING A SAFER SPACE FOR THEATRICAL EXPLORATION.
- FOSTERING GROUP TRUST AND ACTIVE LISTENING.
- ENCOURAGING EMOTIONAL AND NARRATIVE EXPRESSION FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

## EXAMPLE OF SHORT-TERM GOAL (IRELAND)

- CREATING AN ENSEMBLE GROUP WHERE EACH MEMBER SUPPORTS THE OTHERS AND FEELS SUPPORTED BY THEM.
- DEVELOPING CHARACTERS AND STORYTELLING.
- LEARNING THE IMPORTANCE OF MAKING AND ACCEPTING OFFERS IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS.
- BEING PLAYFUL.

IN BETWEEN SESSIONS, IT IS ENCOURAGED TO HOLD REGULAR PREPARATORY MEETINGS WITH THE FACILITATION TEAM. THESE MEETINGS ALLOW THE TEAM TO REVIEW AND ADJUST EACH SESSION'S ACTIVITIES AND ALSO PROVIDE SPACE TO EXCHANGE REFLECTIONS ON HOW THE GROUP IS EVOLVING: WHAT DYNAMICS ARE WORKING, WHAT NEEDS TO BE MODIFIED, AND SETTING GOALS FOR THE NEXT SESSION. IT ALSO HELPS MAINTAIN A SHARED FOCUS BETWEEN MENTORS AND STRENGTHEN THE SENSE OF HORIZONTAL TEAMWORK.

BEFORE EACH SESSION TALK TO YOUR CO-FACILITATOR AND DISCUSS WHO WILL LEAD WHICH ACTIVITIES AND HOW THE OTHER CAN SUPPORT THAT. PLAN THE STRUCTURE OF THE SESSION BEFOREHAND, INCLUDING APPROXIMATE TIMINGS FOR EACH ACTIVITY, BUT BE PREPARED TO ADAPT TO THE GROUP DYNAMIC.



## EXAMPLE OF A SESSION STRUCTURE (SLOVENIA)

1. ENERGISER GAMES FOR BETTER FOCUS AND “WAKING UP THE BODY”.
2. EXERCISES CHOSEN BASED ON THE THEATRE SKILL OF THE DAY (FOR EXAMPLE IF THE AIM OF THE WORKSHOP WAS TO PRACTICE IMPROVISED STORYTELLING, THEN THE EXERCISES WOULD BE ABOUT SPEAKING, BUILDING ON ASSOCIATIONS OF OTHERS AND FORMING SENTENCES).
3. CREATING IMPROVISED SCENES, BASED ON THE THEATRE SKILL OF THE DAY.

1. GROUP THEATRICAL TRAINING (BODY, RHYTHM, VOICE, LISTENING, PLAY).
2. NARRATIVE AND SYMBOLIC EXPLORATION (PERSONAL STORIES, IMAGE WORK, IMPROVISATION).
3. COLLECTIVE SCENIC CREATION (SCENES, TEXTS, MOVEMENT-BASED CHOREOGRAPHY).
4. TECHNICAL REHEARSALS AND FINAL SHARING (USE OF VENUE, LIGHTS, MICROPHONES, OPEN SCENE).



## EXAMPLE OF A SESSION STRUCTURE (SPAIN)





## EXAMPLE OF A SESSION STRUCTURE (IRELAND)

1. CIRCLE CHECK IN AND WARM UP  
(ENERGISING AND FOCUSING ACTIVITY)
2. DIRECTED GROUP ACTIVITY IN LINE  
WITH THE GENERAL THEME  
(EG.MOVEMENT OR VOICE OR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT)
3. SMALL GROUP SELF DIRECTED/  
IMPROVISED RESPONSES TO A  
PROMPT
4. PERFORMANCE TO THE REST OF THE  
GROUP AND FEEDBACK FROM THE  
GROUP
5. TOWARDS THE END OF THE YEAR  
THERE WOULD BE MORE TIME ALLO-  
CATED TO DEVISING IN A WHOLE  
GROUP WITH FOUR ELECTED DIRE-  
CTORS AND REHEARSAL OF SCENES IN  
THE PERFORMANCE SPACE

BE PREPARED TO CHANGE THE WORKSHOP PLAN ACCORDING TO THE FLOW OF THE SESSION;  
IF SOMETHING MEANINGFUL OR ENGAGING EMERGES THAT THE PARTICIPANTS WANT TO  
EXPLORE, THEN BE PREPARED TO FOLLOW THAT AND REMAIN FLEXIBLE.

# FLEXIBILITY

FLEXIBILITY IN THE WORKING PROCESS IS KEY TO ENSURING THAT PARTICIPANTS GAIN THE MOST FROM THE EXPERIENCE – NOT ONLY IN LEARNING THEATRE SKILLS, BUT ALSO IN DEVELOPING RELATED ABILITIES SUCH AS COOPERATION, EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION, PUBLIC SPEAKING, CREATIVITY ETC. EVERY GROUP IS DIFFERENT, AND EVEN THE SAME GROUP CAN CHANGE OVER TIME. THE ABILITY TO RECOGNISE AND RESPOND TO THESE CHANGES IS THEREFORE ESSENTIAL. IT IS BEST TO HAVE BASIC STEPS PREPARED AS A GUIDELINE, BUT THEN ADAPT THEM ALONG THE WAY.

THE BASIC SKILLS THAT ARE TO BE ADDRESSED SHOULD BE PLANNED BEFOREHAND BUT ORGANISED ALONG THE PROCESS. FOR INSTANCE, THE IDEA OF THE PROCESS IS TO FOCUS ON EXPRESSING THE BODY AND THE GROUP HAS TROUBLE RELAXING ENOUGH TO HAVE A GOOD TIME IN LEARNING THIS SKILL. BUT THEY RESPOND WELL TO EXERCISES ABOUT EXPRESSING EMOTIONS SO NEXT WORKSHOPS CAN BE PLANNED IN A WAY THAT INCORPORATES EMOTIONS MORE. ALSO, BE FLEXIBLE AT THE END OF THE PROCESS IN A SENSE THAT YOU GIVE THE PARTICIPANTS THE CHANCE TO DECIDE HOW THEY WANT TO CONCLUDE THEIR TIME TOGETHER. AS ALL GROUPS ARE DIFFERENT, IT IS ALSO NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN FLEXIBILITY OF THE GOAL OF THE WORKSHOPS. FOR SOME GROUPS, THE FINAL PERFORMANCE CAN BE AN EXTRA MOTIVATION, WHILE FOR OTHERS IT MAY BE EXPERIENCED AS TOO STRESSFUL. THE ROLE OF THE MENTORS HERE IS MAINLY TO TALK WITH PARTICIPANTS, LISTEN TO THEM AND FIND A BALANCE BETWEEN ENCOURAGING AND MAKING SURE THAT PARTICIPANTS FEEL SAFE AND CONSIDERED. THE DURATION OF THE WORKSHOPS IS ALSO SOMETHING THAT CAN BE ADAPTED IF NEEDED, BUT BE SURE TO DISCUSS THIS WITH THE PARTICIPANTS BEFOREHAND.

BE PREPARED TO STAY FLEXIBLE WITHIN EACH WORKSHOP IN A SENSE THAT THE PREPARED SET OF EXERCISES CAN BE CHANGED BASED ON THE GROUP'S RESPONSE TO THE TOPIC. APPLYING DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES (WARM UPS, GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER, MOVEMENT, VOICE, IMPROVISATION, STATUS, CHARACTERISATION, ETC.) AT APPROPRIATE MOMENTS AND IN ALIGNMENT WITH THE GROUP'S INTERESTS IS KEY TO MAINTAINING THEIR ENGAGEMENT AND CREATIVE ENERGY. YOU SHOULD ALWAYS FIND A BALANCE BETWEEN CHALLENGING THEM AND ALLOWING THEM TO PROGRESS, WHILE STILL HAVING FUN AND ENJOYING THE WORKSHOPS. DRAW THE ADAPTATIONS FROM THEIR FEEDBACK AND YOUR OBSERVATIONS OF THEIR BEHAVIOUR.

# FEEDBACK

FEEDBACK IS A VALUABLE TOOL FOR DEVELOPING SELF-REFLECTION AND TO SELECT WORK-ABLE ASPECTS OF THE CREATIVE OUTPUT. PARTICIPANTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO EXPLORE FREELY AND EXPERIMENT WITH ALL IDEAS, WITHOUT WORRYING ABOUT RIGHT OR WRONG. AFTERWARDS, THEY CAN REFLECT ON WHAT WENT WELL AND WHERE TO IMPROVE. THIS ENCOURAGES CREATIVITY, AUTONOMY AND SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING. WHILE GIVING FEEDBACK, PRAISE EACH PARTICIPANT ON AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL (REFERRING TO WHAT THEY ACTUALLY DID RATHER THAN A GENERAL "THAT'S GOOD").

**"ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS NOT TO REACT WITH NEGATIVE COMMENTS ABOUT THEMSELVES WHEN THEY MAKE A MISTAKE, BUT TO CELEBRATE IT, AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE WHOLE GROUP TO LEARN"**

GUIDE GROUP FEEDBACK ALONG THE LINES OF WHAT WAS OBSERVED AND WHAT WAS UNDERSTOOD (OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE), WHAT WORKED WELL AND WHAT THEY WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY IN THE FUTURE. WHEN THEY MAKE A MISTAKE, REGULARLY REASSURE THEM THAT MISTAKES ARE WELCOME AND THEY CAN ALLOW THEMSELVES TO MAKE THEM. ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS NOT TO REACT WITH NEGATIVE COMMENTS ABOUT THEMSELVES WHEN THEY MAKE A MISTAKE, BUT TO CELEBRATE IT, AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE WHOLE GROUP TO LEARN. ADDRESS AND REFRAME NEGATIVE OR PERSONAL COMMENTS AND HAVE AN EXPLICIT UNDERSTANDING WITH THE GROUP TO GIVE FEEDBACK ON THE ACTIVITY, NOT THE PERSON. A GOOD STRATEGY TO ACHIEVE THIS IS TO INSTRUCT THEM, TO GIVE FEEDBACK FROM THEIR OWN FEELINGS, HOW IT MADE THEM FEEL, INSTEAD OF ACCUSING SOMEONE ELSE OF MAKING MISTAKES. EG. " I FELT THIS EXERCISE WAS TOO CHAOTIC AND I DIDN'T FEEL COMFORTABLE" INSTEAD OF "YOU WERE ALL TOO LOUD AND OBNOXIOUS".

# CREATING A SAFER SPACE

CREATING A SAFER SPACE IS A CRUCIAL STEP IN WORKING CREATIVELY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE.

CREATING A SAFER SPACE ENABLES ALL PARTICIPANTS TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES WITHOUT FEAR OF JUDGEMENT AND IN A WAY THAT RESPECTS THE BOUNDARIES AND NEEDS OF OTHERS. THIS IS NECESSARY EVEN IF THE GROUP KNOWS EACH OTHER BEFOREHAND, SINCE THERE COULD BE A PRE-EXISTING POWER DYNAMIC PRESENT. IT IS IMPORTANT TO BUILD A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS WITH PLAYFUL, COLLABORATIVE AND PARTICIPATIVE ACTIVITIES, NAME GAMES AT THE BEGINNING OF WORKSHOPS, AND PAIR OR SMALL GROUP DYNAMICS THAT ENCOURAGE ACTIVE LISTENING, MUTUAL CURIOSITY AND COMFORT WITHIN THE GROUP.

WHEN INTRODUCING ACTIVITIES, EXPLAIN EACH STEP CLEARLY AND SLOWLY AND CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING TO BE SURE THAT IT HAS BEEN HEARD. REHEARSING EACH STEP TOGETHER OR DEMONSTRATING ELEMENTS YOURSELF CAN BE A GOOD WAY TO CHECK UNDERSTANDING AND BREAK DOWN ANY FEAR OF MISUNDERSTANDING. ENCOURAGE BUT NEVER FORCE PARTICIPATION; GIVING PRAISE FOR PARTICIPATING AND REASSURANCE THAT THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAY TO PARTICIPATE CAN HELP.

TAILOR THE EXERCISES IN A WAY SO THAT EVERYBODY CAN PARTICIPATE. THE EXPLANATION FOR EACH EXERCISE CAN BE ADAPTED IF PARTICIPANTS HAVE A DIFFERENT RESPONSE TO WAYS OF EXPLAINING THE RULES. FOR INSTANCE, IT IS A GOOD PRACTICE TO REASSURE THOSE WHO HAVE TROUBLE UNDERSTANDING AND NEED MORE TIME TO ASK FOR MORE EXPLANATION. ON THE OTHER HAND, YOU CAN ADD EXTRA CHALLENGES FOR PARTICIPANTS WHO GROW RESTLESS QUICKLY AND WANT THE PROCESS TO BE FASTER. IF AN EXERCISE BY DEFAULT CALLS FOR A LOT OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND THERE ARE PARTICIPANTS WITH MOBILITY ISSUES, CHANGE THE EXERCISE TO STILL TEACH THE SAME SKILLS BUT IN A LESS PHYSICALLY CHALLENGING WAY. AT THIS POINT IT IS ALSO ESSENTIAL TO MAKE SURE THAT PARTICIPANTS ARE PATIENT WITH EACH OTHER AND THAT MENTORS HAVE ZERO TOLERANCE FOR NEGATIVE COMMENTS.

# CREATING A SAFER SPACE

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



### EXERCISE: GROUP AGREEMENT

**OBJECTIVE:** ESTABLISH GROUP RULES FOR SAFER SPACE THAT EVERYONE AGREES ON AND CAN BE USED AS A REFERENCE WHEN GROUP DYNAMIC GETS BROKEN IN FUTURE SESSIONS.

**INSTRUCTION:** ASK QUESTIONS LIKE “WHAT DO YOU NEED IN ORDER TO HAVE A GOOD TIME?”, “HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE TREATED (AND TREAT OTHERS?)”, “WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD IN A GROUP?” ETC. COLLECT AND DISCUSS THE ANSWERS AND WRITE THEM DOWN ON A POSTER THAT CAN STAY IN THE WORKSHOP SPACE. COME BACK TO THE AGREEMENT WHEN NEEDED. ADDRESS PROBLEMS ALONG THE WAY AND DON’T NORMALISE BEHAVIOURS THAT NEGATIVELY IMPACT THE WORK PROCESS, THE GROUP AND INDIVIDUALS. CREATING A GROUP AGREEMENT IS RECOMMENDED TO BE DONE AT ONE OF THE FIRST WORKSHOPS TO CREATE A SAFER ENVIRONMENT AND PREVENT FURTHER PROBLEMS, NOT ONLY IN RESPONSE TO PROBLEMS THAT ALREADY ARISE.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** IF PARTICIPANTS ARE HESITANT AND THERE IS A CONCERN THAT THEY WILL NOT DARE TO SPEAK UP THEIR THOUGHTS AND NEEDS, THEY CAN ALSO WRITE DOWN THEIR ANSWERS ON A PIECE OF PAPER. THIS ALLOWS THEM ALL TO EXPRESS THEIR NEEDS, BUT ANONYMOUSLY. NEVERTHELESS IT IS STILL IMPORTANT TO DISCUSS WITH THE WHOLE GROUP WHAT HAS BEEN HIGHLIGHTED.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THIS EXERCISE CONNECTS THE GROUP BY FINDING COMMON VALUES OF THE PARTICIPANTS AND DISCUSSING HOW CERTAIN BEHAVIOURS CAN NEGATIVELY IMPACT INDIVIDUALS AS WELL AS THE WHOLE GROUP DYNAMIC AND LEARNING PROCESS. WHEN THE GROUP CAN FIGURE OUT THEIR RULES AND VALUES TOGETHER, THEY FEEL MORE CONNECTED TO THE RULES AND DON’T FEEL LIKE THEY ARE BEING ORDERED TO ACT A CERTAIN WAY.

# CREATING A SAFER SPACE

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



### EXERCISE: CROSS PRESENTATION

**OBJECTIVE:** TO FOSTER MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND EMPATHY THROUGH THE EXCHANGE OF PERSONAL STORIES, ENCOURAGING CONNECTIONS BASED ON EMOTIONAL RESONANCE RATHER THAN LABELS OR PREDEFINED CATEGORIES.

**INSTRUCTION:** PARTICIPANTS ARE DIVIDED INTO PAIRS AND INTERVIEW EACH OTHER. THEY ARE INVITED TO TALK ABOUT THEIR LIFE STORIES, INTERESTS, HOBBIES, CULTURAL REFERENCES, OR ANYTHING THEY WISH TO SHARE. THEN, IN A GROUP CIRCLE, EACH PERSON INTRODUCES THEIR PARTNER TO THE REST OF THE GROUP, HIGHLIGHTING SOMETHING MEANINGFUL FROM WHAT THE OTHER SHARED.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** IF THERE ARE LANGUAGE BARRIERS, PARTICIPANTS CAN USE GESTURES, DRAWINGS, OR WORDS IN THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGES. VISUAL PROMPTS (CARDS, IMAGES, OBJECTS) CAN ALSO BE OFFERED TO HELP SPARK CONVERSATION. IN LARGER GROUPS, THE ACTIVITY CAN BE DONE IN TRIOS TO BETTER MANAGE TIMING AND FLOW.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THIS EXERCISE HELPS CREATE A HORIZONTAL AND INCLUSIVE DYNAMIC FROM THE BEGINNING, WHERE EACH PARTICIPANT FEELS HEARD AND REPRESENTED BY SOMEONE ELSE. BY SHIFTING THE FOCUS TO SPEAKING ABOUT ANOTHER PERSON, IT ENCOURAGES ACTIVE LISTENING, REDUCES THE PRESSURE OF SELF-PRESENTATION, AND NURTURES EMPATHY. IT IS ESPECIALLY EFFECTIVE IN NEW OR DIVERSE GROUPS, AS IT BREAKS THE ICE IN A DEEPER WAY—CONNECTING PEOPLE THROUGH THEIR STORIES RATHER THAN SURFACE IDENTITIES.



# CREATING A SAFER SPACE

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



### EXERCISE: THREE SHOUTS

**OBJECTIVE:** TO END THE SESSION IN A SYMBOLIC AND EMOTIONALLY CONNECTED WAY, REINFORCING THE GROUP'S SENSE OF BELONGING, CREATING A SHARED RITUAL, AND GENERATING A POSITIVE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE THAT SUPPORTS CONTINUITY IN THE PROCESS.

**INSTRUCTION:** AT THE END OF THE SESSION, PARTICIPANTS STAND IN A CIRCLE. TOGETHER, THEY AGREE ON THE MEANING OF THREE COLLECTIVE SHOUTS, WHICH ARE PERFORMED IN UNISON AND WITH INTENTION. FOR EXAMPLE: THE FIRST SHOUT MAY REPRESENT A WISH TO MEET AGAIN; THE SECOND, A CELEBRATION OF THE GROUP AND WHAT WAS SHARED; AND THE THIRD, GOOD WISHES FOR WHAT IS TO COME. THE EXERCISE CAN BE ACCOMPANIED BY MOVEMENTS, JUMPS, OR SHARED GESTURES. THE FACILITATOR SHOULD CLEARLY INTRODUCE THE INSTRUCTION, EMPHASIZING THE COLLECTIVE CREATION OF THE MOMENT.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** IF THE GROUP IS VERY SHY OR THE SPACE LIMITS NOISE, THE SHOUTS CAN BE REPLACED WITH SYMBOLIC GESTURES, COORDINATED WHISPERS, OR GROUP MOVEMENTS (SUCH AS A WAVE WITH THE HANDS, A SUSTAINED CLAP, ETC.). THE NUMBER OR TYPE OF SHOUTS CAN ALSO BE ADAPTED BASED ON WHAT THE GROUP PROPOSES.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THIS REPEATED EXERCISE SERVES AS A RITUAL OF CLOSURE THAT OFFERS EMOTIONAL GROUNDING, MARKS THE PASSAGE OF TIME, AND STRENGTHENS GROUP BONDS. IT ALLOWS THE SESSION TO END ON A HIGH NOTE, WITH ENERGY AND SHARED JOY, CREATING A COMMON EXPERIENCE THAT DOES NOT RELY ON VERBAL LANGUAGE. THIS SYMBOLIC RITUAL FOSTERS EMOTIONAL STABILITY AND ENCOURAGES A SENSE OF UNITY AND CONTINUITY THROUGHOUT THE CREATIVE PROCESS.

# CREATING A SAFER SPACE

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



**EXERCISE:** APPLE, APPLE, APPLE

**OBJECTIVE:** TO HAVE FUN AND RELAX, TO PROMOTE CONCENTRATION AND AWARENESS OF EVERYONE IN THE ROOM, TO ALLOW PARTICIPANTS TO COMFORTABLY FOCUS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CIRCLE WHILST CONCENTRATING ON SOMETHING ELSE, AND WHILE DEMONSTRATING THAT IT IS OKAY (INDEED FUN) TO 'FAIL'.

**INSTRUCTION:** IN A CIRCLE WITH THE FACILITATOR IN THE CENTRE, EACH PERSON NAMES A FRUIT OR VEGETABLE WITH A FAIRLY SHORT NAME. THE JOB OF THE PERSON IN THE MIDDLE IS TO REPEAT THE SAME WORD 3 TIMES BEFORE THE "OWNER" OF THAT FRUIT OR VEGETABLE CAN SAY IT ONCE. IF THEY FAIL TO SAY IT, THEY GO IN THE MIDDLE. START SLOWLY TO DEMONSTRATE THE CONCEPT AND ALLOW PEOPLE TO SUCCEED IN NAMING THE FRUIT THEN SPEED UP UNTIL SWAPS START TO HAPPEN.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** THIS GAME COULD ALSO WORK WITH DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF OBJECTS AS A SUPPORT FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING, FOR EXAMPLE, USING ANIMALS. ALTERNATIVELY, IT COULD BE ADAPTED TO HELP LEARN THE NAMES OF PEOPLE IN THE ROOM BY USING PARTICIPANTS' ACTUAL NAMES.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THIS GAME ALLOWS THE PERSON IN THE CENTRE TO BE AT HIGH FOCUS WITH THE EYES OF THE WHOLE GROUP TRAINED ON THEM BUT WITHOUT THE ANXIETY OF PERFORMING, AS THEY ARE SIMPLY REPEATING A WORD THREE TIMES AND TRYING TO CATCH SOMEONE OUT. THIS HELPS THEM TO FEEL RELAXED WHEN THEY ARE IN HIGH FOCUS IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE OR FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES. THIS GAME ALSO HELPS EVERYONE TO GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND CAN WORK AS A FUN ICEBREAKER. THE GAME ALSO HELPS WITH TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FACT OF WHETHER WE SAID IT IN TIME OR NOT, AS IT IS OFTEN A CLOSE CALL... THE FACILITATOR MAY INITIALLY HAVE TO ACT AS A REFEREE, BUT EVENTUALLY PEOPLE SHOULD BE TAKING THAT RESPONSIBILITY THEMSELVES AND REALISING THAT IT IS FUN AND OKAY TO 'FAIL'.

# CHALLENGES

## WORKING WITH LANGUAGE BARRIERS

### WHAT WAS THE CHALLENGE? (SPAIN)

THE SPANISH GROUP WAS DIVERSE IN CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND GENERATION. A HORIZONTAL DYNAMIC WAS ENCOURAGED WITH EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION. ALL CONTRIBUTIONS WERE VALIDATED: TECHNICAL, EMOTIONAL, AND SYMBOLIC. THE MIXTURE OF LANGUAGES WAS SEEN AS A RESOURCE, NOT A BARRIER.

ONE OF THE MAIN CHALLENGES DURING THE WORKSHOP IN SPAIN WAS NAVIGATING THE LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY WITHIN THE GROUP. PARTICIPANTS PRIMARILY SPOKE DARIJA, CLASSICAL ARABIC, WOLOF, AND FRENCH, WHILE THE WORKSHOP WAS FACILITATED MAINLY IN SPANISH.

### WHAT WORKED, EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE (SPAIN)

TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATION AND INCLUSION, INFORMAL TRANSLATION WAS OFFERED BY FACILITATORS OR PEERS. HOWEVER, MUCH OF THE WORK RELIED NOT ON DIRECT TRANSLATION, BUT ON THE USE OF GESTURES, REPETITION, BODY-BASED EXERCISES, AND NON-VERBAL INSTRUCTION. THE THEATRE SPACE BECAME A CONTEXT WHERE THE SPOKEN WORD WAS JUST ONE AMONG MANY EXPRESSIVE TOOLS, AND THE GROUP GRADUALLY DEVELOPED A SHARED PHYSICAL LANGUAGE.

INTERESTINGLY, THE LANGUAGE BARRIER SOMETIMES BECAME A CREATIVE OPPORTUNITY: WHEN INSTRUCTIONS WERE NOT FULLY UNDERSTOOD, PARTICIPANTS WOULD REINTERPRET THEM, RESULTING IN NEW VARIATIONS OF THE EXERCISES, WHICH WERE THEN INCORPORATED INTO THE WORKSHOP. INSTEAD OF CORRECTING THESE "ERRORS," FACILITATORS WELCOMED THEM AS MOMENTS OF CO-CREATION AND PLAY. MOREOVER, MULTIPLE LANGUAGES BEGAN TO EMERGE SPONTANEOUSLY IN THE SCENES, CONTRIBUTING TO THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE STORIES AND ALLOWING THE GROUP TO LEARN ABOUT EACH OTHER'S LINGUISTIC WORLDS. FAR FROM BEING A LIMITATION, THE PRESENCE OF SEVERAL LANGUAGES ENRICHED THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND REINFORCED THE WORKSHOP'S INTERCULTURAL AND INCLUSIVE DIMENSION.

**"INTERESTINGLY, THE LANGUAGE BARRIER SOMETIMES BECAME A CREATIVE OPPORTUNITY: WHEN INSTRUCTIONS WERE NOT FULLY UNDERSTOOD, PARTICIPANTS WOULD REINTERPRET THEM, RESULTING IN NEW VARIATIONS OF THE EXERCISES"**

# CHALLENGES

## WORKING WITH LANGUAGE BARRIERS

### ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



#### EXERCISE: INTERCULTURAL SOUND NECKLACE

**OBJECTIVE:** TO VALUE THE GROUP'S LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY THROUGH THE COLLECTIVE CREATION OF A SOUND COMPOSITION, RECOGNISING EACH LANGUAGE AS A VALID AND EXPRESSIVE ARTISTIC TOOL.

**INSTRUCTION:** EACH PARTICIPANT CHOOSES A MEANINGFUL WORD IN THEIR MOTHER TONGUE. IT CAN BE A WORD CONNECTED TO THEIR PERSONAL STORY, CHILDHOOD, A STRONG EMOTION, OR A POWERFUL IMAGE. IN SMALL GROUPS, PARTICIPANTS ARE INVITED TO CREATE A SHORT RHYTHMIC OR MUSICAL PIECE USING THESE WORDS AS THE SONIC BASE. THE COMPOSITION CAN BE ENRICHED WITH CLAPS, FOOT STOMPS, SNAPS, OR OTHER FORMS OF BODY PERCUSSION.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** IF THE GROUP IS LARGE OR THERE ARE PARTICIPANTS WHO FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE WITH RHYTHM-BASED TASKS, A SIMPLER VERSION CAN BE USED IN WHICH THE WORDS ARE REPEATED CHORALLY OR PAIRED WITH EXPRESSIVE MOVEMENTS. ANOTHER OPTION IS TO TURN IT INTO A SOUND NECKLACE, WHERE EACH PERSON SAYS THEIR WORD AND THEN PASSES THE TURN TO THE NEXT, CREATING A FLOWING COLLECTIVE SEQUENCE THAT CONNECTS EVERYONE THROUGH SOUND.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THIS EXERCISE TRANSFORMS DIVERSITY INTO ARTISTIC MATERIAL, PROMOTING HORIZONTAL RECOGNITION AMONG LANGUAGES AND CULTURES. IT FOSTERS THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF EACH INDIVIDUAL'S ROOTS, STIMULATES ACTIVE LISTENING, AND CHALLENGES THE DOMINANCE OF A SINGLE LANGUAGE. THROUGH PLAYFUL SOUND EXPLORATION, IT STRENGTHENS GROUP COHESION AND OPENS NON-VERBAL CHANNELS OF EXPRESSION, ENSURING THAT EVERYONE FEELS INCLUDED AND REPRESENTED.

# CHALLENGES

## WORKING WITH LANGUAGE BARRIERS

### WHAT WAS THE CHALLENGE? (SLOVENIA)

DURING THE EXCHANGE PROGRAM IN SLOVENIA, THE CHALLENGE WAS HOW TO CREATE A MEANINGFUL THEATRE WORKSHOP FOR SUCH A DIVERSE GROUP. WE HAD A BIG AGE RANGE OF THE PARTICIPANTS WITH THE YOUNGEST BEING 14 AND OLDEST BEING 28. OUT OF THE FOUR COUNTRIES, ONLY THE IRISH PARTICIPANTS FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE ENGLISH INSTRUCTIONS AND OTHERS NEEDED IN TIME TRANSLATION. THERE WERE ALSO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN THEATRE EXPERIENCE, CONFIDENCE LEVELS, AS WELL AS ATTENTION SPAN AND ABILITY TO FOCUS ON THE ACTIVITY.

### WHAT WORKED, EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE (SLOVENIA)

IN THE EXCHANGE PROGRAM IN SLOVENIA, WE DECIDED TO TACKLE THE CHALLENGE OF LANGUAGE BARRIERS BY FOCUSING OUR TRAINING ON NONVERBAL THEATRE. WE FOCUSED ON CREATING IMAGINARY SPACE, INTERACTING WITH IMPROVISED SPACE AND SHOWING EMOTIONS AND EMOTIONAL REACTIONS WITH OUR BODY. EACH EXERCISE WAS EXPLAINED IN ENGLISH AND THEN TRANSLATED TO THE PARTICIPANTS BY THEIR ACCOMPANYING MENTOR. WE ALSO MADE SURE TO TAKE IT SLOW AND SHOW THE EXERCISE TO THE GROUP FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING. SINCE THERE WERE NO WORDS NEEDED FOR MANY OF THESE EXERCISES, ALL THE PARTICIPANTS COULD WORK WITH EACH OTHER AND CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER. WITH THIS, WE ESTABLISHED CONNECTION AND TRUST, WHICH HELPED US IN TRYING OUT MORE CHALLENGING EXERCISES, AS THE MORE RESERVED AND **LESS EXPERIENCED** PARTICIPANTS RELAXED A LITTLE AND WERE MORE COMFORTABLE WITH THE SCENE WORK. TO ACCOMMODATE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ENERGY AND ATTENTION SPANS, WE MADE THE WORKSHOPS SHORTER, WITH BRAKES IN-BETWEEN AND A DIVERSE FUN AND ACTIVE PROGRAM.

**"WE ALSO MADE SURE TO TAKE IT SLOW AND SHOW THE EXERCISE TO THE GROUP FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING... ...WITH THIS, WE ESTABLISHED CONNECTION AND TRUST, WHICH HELPED US IN TRYING OUT MORE CHALLENGING EXERCISES"**



# CHALLENGES

## WORKING WITH LANGUAGE BARRIERS

### ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



#### EXERCISE: SECRET HANDSHAKE

**OBJECTIVE:** TO MAKE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS BY GIVING THEM TIME AND THE OPORTUNITY TO CREATE SOMETHING TOGETHER IN PAIRS.

**INSTRUCTION:** THE ACTIVITY HAS NUMEROUS STAGES. PARTICIPANTS WALK AROUND THE SPACE FREELY. ON THE CLAP OF A MENTOR THEY ALL STOP AND PAIR UP WITH A PERSON CLOSEST TO THEM. THEY HAVE APPROXIMATELY 1 MIN TO MAKE UP THEIR OWN SECRET HANDSHAKE. WHEN THEY ARE DONE, THEY PROCEED TO WALK FREELY AGAIN AND WHEN THE MENTOR SAYS SECRET HANDSHAKE, THEY NEED TO FIND THEIR SECRET HANDSHAKE PARTNER AND EXECUTE THEIR HANDSHAKE. WHEN THEY ARE DONE THEY CONTINUE WALKING AGAIN. NEW ELEMENTS ARE INTRODUCED IN THE FOLLOWING ROUNDS—ALWAYS WITH NEW PARTNERS AND EACH WITH ITS OWN ACTIVATION CUE:

**"SONG!"** – IN PAIRS, PARTICIPANTS SING A PART OF A SONG THEY BOTH KNOW AND LIKE.  
**"DANCE!"** – IN PAIRS, PARTICIPANTS COME UP WITH A SHARED DANCE MOVE.  
**"ITEM!"** – IN PAIRS, THEY EACH DESCRIBE AN ITEM THAT IS DEAR TO THEM AND THEN SYMBOLICALLY GIVE IT TO THEIR PARTNER FOR SAFEKEEPING.

THEY CAN ALSO GIVE EACH OTHER NICKNAMES, SAY THEIR FAVOURITE WORD IN THEIR LANGUAGE, ETC.. YOU CAN COME UP WITH MORE SECRET CONNECTIONS ON YOUR OWN. ASK THEM TO FIND A NEW PERSON EACH TIME. IN THE END THEY WALK FREELY AROUND THE ROOM AND THE MENTOR SWITCHES BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT ACTIONS.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** IF THE PARTICIPANTS DON'T SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE, FOCUS MAINLY ON PHYSICAL EXPRESSIONS, NOT ON TASKS THAT INVOLVE A LOT OF TALKING. FOR EXAMPLE SECRET HANDSHAKE, DANCE, FAVOURITE ANIMAL, ONE WORD IN YOUR LANGUAGE, THE EMOTION YOU ARE CURRENTLY FEELING, ETC..

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THIS EXERCISE CREATES CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PARTICIPANTS IN A FUN AND SAFE WAY. BONDING THROUGH SHORT PAIR ACTIVITIES HELPS CREATE A SENSE OF CONNECTION TO THE WHOLE GROUP, AS EACH PARTICIPANT IS PAIRED WITH AT LEAST 5 DIFFERENT PEOPLE. THIS PROCESS ENCOURAGES COLLABORATION AND CREATIVITY IN A FUN AND LIGHT WAY HELPING PARTICIPANTS TO RELAX MORE EASILY AND QUICKLY WITH EACH OTHER.



# CHALLENGES

## GEOGRAPHICAL DISTANCES/RURAL LOCATION

### WHAT WAS THE CHALLENGE? (IRELAND)

IN IRELAND, MANY YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ATTEND CLARE YOUTH THEATRE RELY ON LIFTS FROM PARENTS OR LIMITED PUBLIC TRANSPORT, WHICH ONLY RUNS ABOUT FOUR TIMES A DAY. COUNTY CLARE IS A RURAL AREA IN THE MIDWEST, WITH SMALL TOWNS AND VILLAGES. WE ARE FORTUNATE TO HAVE SPACE IN THE MAIN TOWN CENTRE, ENNIS, WHICH HAS GOOD BUS LINKS AND IS A SAFE PLACE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO WAIT FOR LIFTS OR BUSES. SOME YOUNG PEOPLE STOP ATTENDING THE WORKSHOPS BECAUSE THE TRAVEL IS TOO MUCH.

ENNIS IS 77KM FROM THE FAR SOUTHWEST OF THE COUNTY, 40KM FROM THE NORTH, AND 58KM FROM THE EAST. WE HAVE STARTED AN ADDITIONAL YOUTH THEATRE TO THE WEST OF THE COUNTY TO SUPPORT THOSE WHO CANNOT TRAVEL SO FAR BUT IT REMAINS FAIRLY SMALL. BALANCING ACCESS ACROSS THE COUNTY AND HAVING ENOUGH PEOPLE ABLE TO ATTEND THE WORKSHOPS EVEN IN THE MORE "OUT OF THE WAY" LOCATIONS IS AN ONGOING CHALLENGE. COUNTY CLARE VILLAGES ARE CLOSE-KNIT, EACH WITH ITS OWN SCHOOL, CHURCH, SHOP, AND SPORTS TEAM, AND THERE'S TRADITIONALLY NOT MUCH MIXING BETWEEN THEM, EXCEPT THROUGH COMPETITION. THE YOUTH THEATRE GIVES YOUNG PEOPLE A CHANCE TO MEET OTHERS FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTY AND TO MAKE FRIENDS BASED ON SHARED INTERESTS RATHER THAN SIMPLY ON GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION.

### WHAT WORKED, EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE (IRELAND)

WE RUN DURING THE SCHOOL TERM AND TAKE A BREAK OVER THE SUMMER, AS MANY YOUNG PEOPLE ARE AWAY AND IT DISRUPTS THE GROUP DYNAMIC. WE START IN SEPTEMBER AT THE BEGINNING OF SCHOOL WITH RETURNING AND NEW MEMBERS. EARLY IN THE TERM, WE USUALLY GO ON A GROUP TRIP WHICH ACTS AS AN INSPIRATION FOR FURTHER WORK AND ALSO AS A BONDING EXPERIENCE.

WE GENERALLY TAKE PART IN THE ENNIS BOOK FESTIVAL, WHERE PARTICIPANTS CREATE AND PERFORM PERSONAL RESPONSES TO A CHOSEN PIECE OF LITERATURE. AFTER THAT, WE BEGIN TO WORK ON OUR MAIN PERFORMANCE. THE YOUNG PEOPLE DEVISE THE PIECE THEMSELVES—WRITING, IMPROVISING, BUILDING CHARACTERS, AND DESIGNING THE STAGE—WITH SUPPORT FROM TWO FACILITATORS.

OLDER, MORE EXPERIENCED MEMBERS FORM A DIRECTORIAL TEAM AND HELP GUIDE THE GROUP, MAKING SURE EVERYONE CAN BE INVOLVED IN THE WAY THEY WANT. THIS SHARING OF EXPERIENCE HELPS KEEP THE ENSEMBLE DYNAMIC WORKING IN A CONTINUOUSLY STRONG WAY WITH NEW MEMBERS COMING IN AND OLDER ONES LEAVING EACH YEAR. . WE BELIEVE IN GIVING YOUNG PEOPLE AUTONOMY AND WORKING TOGETHER WITH A "ONE FOR ALL, ALL FOR ONE" APPROACH

# CHALLENGES

## GEOGRAPHICAL DISTANCE/RURAL LOCATION

### ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



#### EXERCISE: SELF-COLLAGING

**OBJECTIVE:** TO FACILITATE GROUP BONDING AND SELF-EXPRESSION WHILE ALLOWING PARTICIPANTS TO EXPLORE CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CREATIVE VISUAL REPRESENTATION.

**INSTRUCTION:** PARTICIPANTS CREATE PERSONAL COLLAGES USING PROVIDED MATERIALS (PENS, PAPER, SCISSORS, AND MAGAZINES). THEY SELECT AND ARRANGE VISUAL ELEMENTS THAT REPRESENT ASPECTS OF THEMSELVES, WITH THE OPTION TO INCORPORATE ELEMENTS RELATED TO CHARACTERS THEY ARE DEVELOPING FOR THE MAIN PERFORMANCE. THE ACTIVITY ENCOURAGES INFORMAL CONVERSATION AND SOCIAL INTERACTION WHILE WORKING.

#### POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:

- EXTEND SESSION TIME TO ALLOW FOR PROPER SHARING AND GROUP FEEDBACK.
- SCHEDULE THE ACTIVITY EARLIER IN THE SESSION TO ENSURE ADEQUATE TIME FOR PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION.
- PROVIDE DIGITAL COLLAGING TOOLS AS AN ALTERNATIVE MEDIUM.
- INCLUDE GUIDED PROMPTS OR THEMES TO HELP PARTICIPANTS FOCUS THEIR SELECTIONS.
- CREATE SMALLER SHARING GROUPS IF TIME IS LIMITED.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THIS ACTIVITY SERVES MULTIPLE EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES: IT PROMOTES GROUP COHESION THROUGH INFORMAL SOCIAL INTERACTION, SUPPORTS CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT FOR PERFORMANCE WORK, AND ENCOURAGES SELF-REFLECTION AND EXPRESSION. THE COLLABORATIVE NATURE OF WORKING WHILE CHAT- TING HELPS BUILD RELATIONSHIPS ESSENTIAL FOR ENSEMBLE WORK. THE SHARING COMPONENT IS CRUCIAL AS IT DEVELOPS CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS THROUGH GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK, ALLOWING PARTICIPANTS TO LEARN FROM OBSERVING OTHERS' CREATIVE CHOICES AND REFLECTING ON THEIR OWN WORK. THE ACTIVITY BRIDGES PERSONAL IDENTITY WITH CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT, MAKING THE PERFORMANCE WORK MORE AUTHENTIC AND PERSONALLY MEANINGFUL.

# CHALLENGES

## GROUP DYNAMIC

### WHAT WAS THE CHALLENGE (SLOVENIA)

ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES WAS FINDING A BALANCE BETWEEN GIVING PARTICIPANTS FREEDOM TO PARTICIPATE AT THEIR OWN PACE, AND MORE STRICT BEHAVIOURAL CORRECTIONS. AS PARTICIPANTS OFTEN CAME TO THE EXERCISES TIRED AND UNMOTIVATED, WITH PRE-EXISTING ARGUMENTS AND FEARS ABOUT WHAT OTHERS WILL THINK ABOUT THEM, IT TOOK A LOT OF EFFORT TO GET THEM TO DO THE EXERCISES WITH ENTHUSIASM, AND TO ALLOW THEMSELVES AND OTHERS TO MAKE MISTAKES. THEY ALL KNEW EACH OTHER QUITE WELL AS THEY LIVED IN THE SAME DORMITORY OF CENTER JANEZA LEVCA. THE CHALLENGE WAS MANAGING PRE-EXISTING GROUP DYNAMICS, WHEN MIXING PARTICIPANTS WHO WERE ALREADY SOCIALLY ESTABLISHED IN THE GROUP WITH THOSE WHO WERE LESS CONFIDENT.

### WHAT WORKED, EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE (SLOVENIA)

AT FIRST WE GAVE THEM MORE SPACE, BUT WE SOON REALISED THAT THESE WERE INDIVIDUALS WHO NEEDED MORE MOTIVATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT. THE MORE CONSISTENT AND CLEAR WE WERE IN OUR GUIDANCE, THE MORE ENTHUSIASTIC THEY BECAME, AND THE MORE FUN THEY HAD.

THIS SHOWED US THAT WHILE OUR INITIAL LENIENCY CAME FROM A PLACE OF CAUTION, WHAT THEY TRULY NEEDED WAS A MORE FIRM APPROACH (E.G., INSISTING THAT THEY ALL STAND DURING THE EXERCISES (DOES NOT APPLY TO PHYSICAL RESTRAINTS), ENCOURAGING THEM TO DO THE EXERCISES ENERGETICALLY, ENCOURAGING SPONTANEITY AND MAKING MISTAKES, ZERO TOLERANCE OF MOCKING OTHERS, ETC.).

THROUGH COOPERATIVE IMPROVISATIONAL GAMES, WE GRADUALLY FOSTERED A HEALTHIER GROUP DYNAMIC. BY PLACING STRONG EMPHASIS ON ACCEPTING FAILURE AND USING IT AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION—ONE OF THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF IMPROVISATIONAL THEATRE—WE HELPED PARTICIPANTS GRADUALLY COME OUT OF THEIR SHELL.

#### MAIN POINTS:

- GROUP AGREEMENT
- CONSISTENCY
- ENCOURAGEMENT
- EXAMPLES THROUGH EXERCISES

# CHALLENGES

## GROUP DYNAMIC

### ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



**EXERCISE: WHAT IS TRUE FOR ME**

**OBJECTIVE:** MAKE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS BY GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND DISCOVERING POINTS OF COMMON GROUND.

**INSTRUCTION:** PARTICIPANTS STAND IN A CIRCLE, WHILE ONE PERSON STANDS IN THE CENTER OF THE CIRCLE. THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE CIRCLE MARK THEIR PLACE. THE PERSON IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CIRCLE SAYS A STATEMENT THAT IS TRUE FOR THEM (E.G. I LIKE SUMMER, I LIKE DANCING, I PLAY GUITAR, MY FAVOURITE GENRE OF MOVIES IS HORROR...) WHEN THE PERSON THAT SAID THE STATEMENT CLAPS, ALL THE PARTICIPANTS FOR WHOM THIS STATEMENT APPLIES CHANGE THEIR PLACE ON THE CIRCLE. THEY CAN'T RETURN TO THE SAME PLACE THEY WERE STANDING BEFORE THE STATEMENT WAS SAID. IF THE STATEMENT DOES NOT APPLY TO THEM THEY STAY IN PLACE. SINCE THERE IS ONE LESS PLACE IN THE CIRCLE THAN THERE ARE PARTICIPANTS, WE EACH TIME GET A PERSON IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CIRCLE WHO SAYS A NEW STATEMENT. AFTER A FEW CIRCLES ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS TO SAY MORE PERSONAL STATEMENTS (THAT THEY FEEL COMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT) TO FIND OUT NEW THINGS ABOUT EACH OTHER, AVOIDING STATEMENTS ABOUT THEIR APPEARANCE.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** YOU CAN ADAPT THE EXERCISE IN A WAY THAT PARTICIPANTS DON'T NEED TO CHANGE PLACES. PERSONS FOR WHOM THE STATEMENT IS TRUE CAN JUST STEP FORWARD OR RAISE THEIR ARM. THE NEXT PERSON IN THE CIRCLE CAN THEN MAKE A STATEMENT UNTIL EVERYONE HAS HAD A TURN.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THIS EXERCISE ALLOWS PARTICIPANTS TO GET TO KNOW AND SHARE THINGS WITH EACH OTHER IN A FUN WAY. THIS TYPE OF BONDING CREATES A SENSE OF CONNECTION AS EACH PARTICIPANT FINDS OUT WHAT THEY HAVE IN COMMON WITH OTHERS. THE GAME MOVES ON VERY QUICKLY, FREEING THEM FROM THE STRESS OF BEING IN THE SPOTLIGHT, WHILE STILL SERVING AS A GOOD ENTRY POINT FOR DEALING WITH THE FEELING OF EXPOSURE.

# CHALLENGES

## GROUP DYNAMIC

### WHAT WAS THE CHALLENGE? (BELGIUM)

ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FOR TADA IN BELGIUM WAS NAVIGATING THE COMPLEX GROUP DYNAMICS AMONG PARTICIPANTS, ESPECIALLY THE STRONG EXISTING FRIENDSHIPS AND PAST TENSIONS BETWEEN THEM. SINCE MANY OF THE CHILDREN ALREADY KNEW EACH OTHER FROM SCHOOL OR OTHER ACTIVITIES, IT WAS HARD FOR THEM TO FEEL TRULY FREE IN THE EXERCISES. SOME WOULD HIDE THEIR DISCOMFORT BEHIND LAUGHTER WITH FRIENDS, WHILE OTHERS FELT EXPOSED PERFORMING IN FRONT OF PEERS WITH WHOM THEY HAD UNRESOLVED CONFLICTS. THIS MADE IT DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO LET GO AND ENGAGE FULLY IN THE THEATRICAL WORK.

### WHAT WORKED, EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE (BELGIUM)

WE HAD TO PUT A LOT OF FOCUS ON BUILDING TRUST WITHIN THE GROUP, NOT JUST IN TERMS OF TEAM SPIRIT, BUT ALSO IN HELPING EACH CHILD FEEL CONFIDENT IN THEIR OWN PERFORMANCE AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION. THE THEATRE-BASED ACTIVITIES REQUIRED VULNERABILITY, AND THAT MEANT HELPING THEM MOVE PAST THEIR FEAR OF JUDGMENT AND CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT. WHILE THE PRE-EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS GAVE US A SOLID BASE TO BUILD ON, THEY ALSO REQUIRED EXTRA CARE TO ENSURE THAT EVERYONE FELT INCLUDED AND RESPECTED.

“THE THEATRE-BASED ACTIVITIES REQUIRED VULNERABILITY, AND THAT MEANT HELPING THEM MOVE PAST THEIR FEAR OF JUDGMENT AND CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT.”



# CHALLENGES

## GROUP DYNAMIC

### ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



#### EXERCISE: THE HAT

**OBJECTIVE:** TO PRACTISE TALKING IN FRONT OF A GROUP, EMBODYING A CHARACTER, INTERACTING WITH OTHER CHARACTERS, AND EXPRESSING EMOTIONS IN A SOCIAL SETTING.

**INSTRUCTION:** TO BEGIN, EACH PERSON WILL RANDOMLY DRAW A SLIP OF PAPER WITH A TYPE OF CHARACTER ON IT (AVOID WELL-KNOWN FIGURES - FOCUS ON CREATING, NOT IMITATING). THIS CHARACTER MUST BE KEPT SECRET, NO ONE IS ALLOWED TO SHOW OR REVEAL WHAT THEY RECEIVED! ONCE EVERYONE HAS THEIR CHARACTER, WE MOVE INTO THE EMBODIMENT EXERCISE. ONE BY ONE, PARTICIPANTS WILL SIT IN A CHAIR PLACED AT THE CENTER OF THE ROOM AND INTRODUCE THEIR CHARACTER TO THE GROUP, STAYING FULLY IN CHARACTER THE ENTIRE TIME. THE GROUP OR FACILITATOR WILL THEN ASK QUESTIONS, AND THE PERSON MUST RESPOND AS THEIR CHARACTER, USING THEIR VOICE, GESTURES, AND IMAGINATION. THEY SHOULD STAY FOCUSED AND AVOID BREAKING CHARACTER WITH LAUGHTER OR DISTRACTION, KEEPING IN MIND THAT EACH CHARACTER HAS ITS OWN EMOTIONAL WORLD AND PERSONALITY. IN THE FINAL PART OF THE SESSION, CHILDREN WILL FORM SMALL GROUPS OF THREE OR MORE TO CREATE A SHORT IMPROVISED SCENE. EACH GROUP WILL CHOOSE A PROTAGONIST WHO IS CONFRONTED WITH AN UNEXPECTED EVENT, AND THE GROUP WILL ACT OUT THE SITUATION, STAYING IN CHARACTER AND REACTING NATURALLY WITHIN THE IMAGINED SCENARIO.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THE PEDAGOGICAL AIM OF THIS WORKSHOP IS TO HELP PARTICIPANTS STEP INTO PERSPECTIVES DIFFERENT FROM THEIR OWN. BY EMBODYING A CHARACTER, THEY EXPLORE HOW EMOTIONS AND REACTIONS CAN VARY DEPENDING ON PERSONALITY OR CONTEXT. THIS ENCOURAGES EMPATHY, EMOTIONAL AWARENESS, AND ADAPTABILITY. IT ALSO SUPPORTS SELF-EXPRESSION IN A STRUCTURED BUT CREATIVE ENVIRONMENT.



# DEVELOPING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

LONG-TERM GOALS OF THE WORKSHOPS WERE DEEPLY LINKED TO THE BROADER OBJECTIVES OF THE EMPATHEATRY PROJECT, WHICH FOCUSED ON DEVELOPING EMPATHY THROUGH INCLUSIVE THEATRE AND ARTISTIC PRACTICE, ESPECIALLY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE FACING FEWER OPPORTUNITIES. THE WORKSHOPS AIMED TO STRENGTHEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, PROMOTE ACTIVE CULTURAL PARTICIPATION, AND SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE'S SENSE OF AGENCY AND BELONGING. AS PART OF THE PROJECT, THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE WAS ASSESSED AMONG YOUNG PARTICIPANTS. WE GATHERED INFORMATION THROUGH QUESTIONNAIRES BASED ON DANIEL GOLEMAN'S MODEL OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, STRUCTURED AROUND FIVE CORE PILLARS: SELF AWARENESS, EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION, EMPATHY DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL SKILLS AND MOTIVATION. THE DATA WAS GATHERED AT THE BEGINNING AND END OF 10 THEATRE WORKSHOPS LED BY TRAINED THEATRE PEDAGOGUES. WHERE NEEDED, ITEMS WERE SIMPLIFIED AND WORKSHOPS INCLUDED PHYSICAL POSITIONING EXERCISES (E.G., PLACING ONESELF ON A 1-4 OR 1-5 SCALE) AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO WRITTEN RESPONSES. ALTHOUGH THE WORKSHOPS WERE NOT ACTIVELY FOCUSED ON EXPLORING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, BASED ON OUR PREVIOUS WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE, WE EXPECTED THAT THE GROUP WOULD ALSO BE BUILDING IT THROUGH THE EXERCISES.

THE DATA INDICATE A COMPLEX PICTURE<sup>2</sup>: WHILE SOME NUMERIC SCORES DECLINED, MENTOR REFLECTIONS AND WORKSHOP FEEDBACK SUGGEST STRONG PERCEIVED IMPACT. PARTICIPANTS DEVELOPED GREATER EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY, COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY, AND PERSONAL INSIGHT. DIFFERENCES IN NATIONAL DATA REFLECT BOTH METHODOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL FACTORS. OVERALL, THE THEATRE WORKSHOPS PROVED EFFECTIVE IN PROMOTING EMOTIONAL GROWTH, ESPECIALLY IN EMPATHY, TEAMWORK, AND SELF-REFLECTION. FUTURE ASSESSMENTS MAY BENEFIT FROM COMBINING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE MEASURES, EMPHASISING PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES ALONGSIDE STRUCTURED SCORES. FOR BETTER RESULTS, THE WORKSHOPS SHOULD BE LONGER, AND WE SHOULD ALSO KEEP TRACK OF HOW EACH PERSON IS DOING. THIS WAY, WE COULD WORK WITH EACH PERSON INDIVIDUALLY ON SPECIFIC AREAS AND SEE HOW THE ACTIVITIES ARE INFLUENCING THEIR DEVELOPMENT. THE DESCRIBED APPROACH EXCEEDS THE CAPACITY OF THE PROJECT, BUT THIS PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS IS CERTAINLY A GOOD BASIS FOR FURTHER MONITORING THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THEATRE GROUPS.

## NOTES ON IMPROVEMENTS IN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE BASED ON THE 5 PILLARS:

# SELF-AWARENESS

WE NOTICED AN IMPROVEMENT IN YOUNG PEOPLE ACCEPTING THEIR OWN ASSOCIATIONS, FEELING MORE COMFORTABLE IN USING THEIR BODY TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES AND GETTING THE COURAGE TO TRY AND FAIL. THEATRE ACTIVITIES ARE DESIGNED TO BE OBSERVED. WHEN OBSERVING OTHER PARTICIPANTS, THERE IS THE IMPLICIT KNOWLEDGE OF BEING OBSERVED YOURSELF IN TURN. THIS PROVIDES AN ATMOSPHERE OF ENHANCED SELF-AWARENESS. WHEN WORKING IN PAIRS OR GROUPS AND WHEN IMPROVISING, THERE IS INSTANT FEEDBACK IN REAL TIME ON YOUR ACTIONS, DEMONSTRATING A VERY REAL SELF-EFFICACY (OR EFFECT OF ONE'S OWN ACTIONS).

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



**EXERCISE:** STATUES WITH WORDS ABOUT DREAMS AND HUMANITY

**OBJECTIVE:** TO REFLECT ON IDENTITY, DESIRE, AND BELONGING THROUGH ABSTRACT WORDS AND SYMBOLIC GESTURES, CREATING A POETIC SPACE FOR COLLECTIVE EXPLORATION.

**INSTRUCTION:** PARTICIPANTS WALK FREELY AROUND THE ROOM WHILE SOMEONE READS ALOUD A SERIES OF PHRASES OR INDIVIDUAL WORDS RELATED TO THEMES LIKE "DREAMING," "WALKING," "BEING HUMAN," OR "INHABITING THE WORLD," IN VARIOUS LANGUAGES. WHEN A WORD RESONATES WITH THEM, THEY PAUSE AND FORM A STILL STATUE WITH THEIR BODY THAT EXPRESSES THEIR CONNECTION TO THAT WORD. THE ACTIVITY CAN BE REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES WITH DIFFERENT WORDS AND PACING.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** THE EXERCISE CAN ALSO BE DONE COLLECTIVELY, BUILDING GROUP STATUES IN RESPONSE TO A SHARED WORD. SOUNDS, LIGHTING, OR MUSIC MAY BE ADDED TO ACCOMPANY THE MOVEMENT AND ENHANCE THE ATMOSPHERE. IT CAN BE USED AS A WARM-UP TO ACTIVATE THE "SYMBOLIC BODY," WITHOUT NEEDING TO SPEAK, OR AS A SPRINGBOARD FOR WRITING SHORT TEXTS INSPIRED BY THE IMAGES CREATED.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THIS ACTIVITY OFFERS A SENSORY AND SYMBOLIC APPROACH TO IDENTITY, MOVING AWAY FROM DIRECT OR RATIONAL STORYTELLING. THE USE OF ABSTRACT WORDS AND EMBODIED EXPRESSION ALLOWS PARTICIPANTS TO CONNECT WITH MORE POETIC AND UNIVERSAL ASPECTS OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE. IT ALSO ENABLES EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION WITHOUT THE NEED FOR VERBAL EXPOSITION, ENCOURAGING EACH PERSON TO FIND THEIR OWN LANGUAGE THROUGH GESTURE AND SHARED SILENCE.

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



### EXERCISE: ATOMS

**OBJECTIVE:** TO COLLABORATE IN CREATING SILENT, BODY-BASED PICTURES AND TO OBSERVE HOW OTHER GROUPS APPROACH THE TASK AND WHAT KINDS OF IMAGES THEY CREATE.

**INSTRUCTION:** EVERYONE WALKS FREELY AROUND THE SPACE. WHEN THE FACILITATOR CLAPS AND ANNOUNCES A GROUP SIZE, PARTICIPANTS QUICKLY FORM GROUPS WITH THE NEAREST PEOPLE TO REACH THAT NUMBER. THEN THE FACILITATOR GIVES AN INSTRUCTION/NAME FOR THE PICTURE THEY SHOULD MAKE AND STARTS COUNTING DOWN FROM 10 TO 0. DURING THAT TIME EACH GROUP COLLABORATES IN SILENCE TO FORM THE PICTURE AND THEN FREEZES. EVERYONE TAKES SOME TIME TO OBSERVE HOW OTHER GROUPS DID IT, BEFORE WE MOVE ON TO THE NEXT PICTURE IN NEW GROUPS. IT IS BEST TO START WITH NUMBER 1-EACH PERSON CREATES THE PICTURE INDIVIDUALLY AND GRADUALLY INCREASE THE GROUP SIZE UNTIL EVERYONE PARTICIPATES TOGETHER IN ONE LARGE GROUP.

EG: "WALK FREELY, CLAP, GROUPS OF 4, MAKE A STATUE/PICTURE OF AN ELEPHANT TOGETHER. 10, 9, 8,.. STOP! OK LET'S OBSERVE HOW YOU DID-MENTOR COMMENTS A BIT ON SOME STATUES, WHAT THEY SEE, AND HOW THEY TACKLED IT DIFFERENTLY.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** THE MENTOR CAN COUNTDOWN SLOWER, TO GIVE PARTICIPANTS MORE TIME, IF IT SEEMS LIKE THEY NEED IT.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THIS ACTIVITY PROMOTES COLLABORATION AND CREATIVITY IN A GROUP. SINCE PARTICIPANTS IN GROUPS CAN'T COMMUNICATE VERBALLY, THERE CAN'T BE A "LEADER" WHO INSTRUCTS OTHERS WHAT TO DO. EACH INDIVIDUAL HAS THE SAME CONTRIBUTION TO THE PICTURE AND THEY ALL NEED TO WORK TOGETHER TO MAKE IT HAPPEN.

# EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION

THEATRE ACTIVITIES ALLOW ONESELF TO 'TRY ON DIFFERENT HATS'; TO STEP OUT OF THE ROLE OF 'ME' AND TO ASSUME THE PERSPECTIVE OF ANOTHER. THIS PROCESS PROVIDES A SPACE TO EXPLORE, EXPRESS, AND REHEARSE A WIDE RANGE OF EMOTIONAL RESPONSES, WHICH CAN INCREASE OUR RESILIENCE WHEN FACED WITH SUCH SITUATIONS AND EMOTIONS IN REAL-LIFE CONTEXTS.

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



### EXERCISE: STORYTELLING WITH MUSIC

**OBJECTIVE:** TO FACILITATE EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION THROUGH A CONNECTION WITH MUSIC, ALLOWING MEMORIES, SENSATIONS, AND PERSONAL STORIES TO EMERGE IN AN ACCESSIBLE AND NON-INTRUSIVE WAY.

**INSTRUCTION:** EACH PARTICIPANT SELECTS A SONG THAT HOLDS PERSONAL MEANING. IT MAY REMIND THEM OF SOMEONE, A PLACE, A SPECIFIC TIME IN THEIR LIFE, OR SIMPLY EVOKE A STRONG FEELING. A SHORT EXCERPT OF THE SONG IS PLAYED OR MENTIONED, AND PARTICIPANTS ARE INVITED TO SHARE THE STORY OR EMOTION CONNECTED TO THEIR CHOICE. EVERYONE DECIDES HOW MUCH THEY WISH TO SHARE. AS A CONTINUATION, A SHORT SCENE, A FROZEN IMAGE, OR A MOVEMENT SEQUENCE INSPIRED BY THESE STORIES CAN BE CREATED COLLECTIVELY.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** IF SOMEONE PREFERS NOT TO SPEAK, THEY CAN WRITE OR DRAW THEIR EXPERIENCE, OR ASK SOMEONE ELSE TO READ IT ALOUD. INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC CAN BE USED TO ENCOURAGE EMOTIONAL CONNECTION WITHOUT LYRICS, AND PARTICIPANTS MAY CHOOSE TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES THROUGH MOVEMENT INSTEAD OF WORDS. IN MULTILINGUAL GROUPS, PARTICIPANTS CAN DESCRIBE THEIR FEELINGS WITH A WORD IN THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE ACCOMPANIED BY A GESTURE.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** MUSIC IS A POWERFUL EMOTIONAL BRIDGE, ESPECIALLY IN MIGRANT CONTEXTS, WHERE IT CAN ACTIVATE DEEP MEMORIES, RECONNECT INDIVIDUALS WITH PLACES OF ORIGIN, OR HELP PROCESS DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES. THIS EXERCISE ALLOWS PARTICIPANTS TO NARRATE FROM EMOTION, WHILE THE GROUP LISTENS WITHOUT JUDGMENT, REINFORCING EMPATHY AND CONNECTION. IT ALSO OPENS UP EXPRESSIVE POSSIBILITIES FOR THOSE WHO MAY BE RESISTANT TO VERBAL EXPRESSION OR HAVE LESS THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE.

# EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



### EXERCISE: ACCUSATION AND ACCEPTANCE

**OBJECTIVE:** TO PRACTICE RESPONDING TO A MADE-UP ACCUSATION USING THREE DIFFERENT APPROACHES AND OBSERVE HOW DIFFERENT REACTIONS CAN INFLUENCE THE OUTCOME.

**INSTRUCTION:** PARTICIPANTS STAND IN A CIRCLE. ONE PERSON STARTS WITH ACCUSING THEIR NEIGHBOUR OF SOMETHING MADE UP (EG. YOU KISSED MY BOYFRIEND!). THE ACCUSED REACTS BY ACCEPTING THEIR FAULT AND EXPLAINING WHY THEY DID IT. THEN THEY ACCUSE THEIR NEXT OF SOMETHING ELSE, UNTIL EVERYONE IN A CIRCLE HAS HAD A GO.

IN THE FIRST CIRCLE, WE FIND AN EXCUSE FOR DOING THE THING, WITH WHICH WE TRY TO BE A RIGHTEOUS AND GOOD PERSON. (EG. I HAVE KNOWN THAT YOUR BOYFRIEND IS CHEATING ON YOU WITH MANY GIRLS AND THAT YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE MY WORD, SO I DID IT IN FRONT OF YOU TO SHOW YOU HE IS NOT WORTHY OF YOUR LOVE.)

THE SECOND TIME AROUND WE REACT NEUTRALLY, TAKING ACCOUNTABILITY AND FEELING REMORSE. (EG. YES, I KISSED HIM IN THE MOMENT BECAUSE THERE WAS THIS INTENSE CHEMISTRY AND I REALLY NEEDED SOME EXTERNAL VALIDATION. I KNOW IT WAS WRONG AND I FELT REALLY BAD AFTERWARDS).

THIRD TIME AROUND WE REACT PROUDLY, PLAYING AN EVIL CHARACTER (E.G. YES, I KISSED HIM, BECAUSE I WANTED YOU TO HURT. YOU HAVE IT TOO GOOD AND I WANT YOU TO SUFFER.)

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** IT CAN ALSO BE DONE IN PAIRS, SO THAT THEY CAN PRACTICE THE DIFFERENT REACTIONS MORE TIMES IN A ROW.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THIS ACTIVITY SHOWS HOW REACTIONS TO ACCUSATIONS CAN SHIFT THE SCENE. IT HEAVILY APPLIES TO HOW WE REACT IN REAL LIFE AS WELL. MANY PEOPLE RESORT TO FINDING EXCUSES FOR WHY THEY HAD TO DO SOMETHING, SO THEY SEEM MORE RIGHTEOUS IN THEIR ACTIONS. THIS EXERCISE SHOWS HOW BEING HONEST AND ADMITTING A MISTAKE (WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES) CAN RESULT IN A MORE PEACEFUL AND HONEST RESOLUTION.



## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



### EXERCISE: COLOURED CLOTHS

**OBJECTIVE:** TO DEMONSTRATE EMOTIONS THROUGH SHORT SCENES.

**INSTRUCTION:** IN SMALL GROUPS OF 3 OR 4 CHOOSE ONE OF THE LARGE COLOURED CLOTHS (BLUE, GREEN, RED, YELLOW, ORANGE, PURPLE) AND DEVISE A SHORT SCENE THAT INCLUDES THE CLOTH AS A PROP OR COSTUME ITEM BASED ON THE EMOTION THAT THE COLOUR INSPIRES FOR YOU. THERE IS A USEFUL TIME LIMIT OF 10 MINUTES TO DEVELOP THE SCENE BEFORE THEY ARE PERFORMED TO THE REST OF THE GROUP WHO GUESS THE INTENDED EMOTION. THE PERFORMERS THEN EXPLAIN THEIR CHOICES OF EMOTION AND HOW THEY EXPRESSED IT.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** OTHER OBJECTS (SUCH AS SHOES OR HATS) CAN BE USED RATHER THAN THE COLOURED CLOTH.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** WORKING IN SMALL GROUPS DEVELOPS THE OFFERING AND ACCEPTING OF IDEAS BETWEEN THE MEMBERS WITHOUT THE PRESSURE OF TOO MANY PEOPLE. THE USE OF A PROMPT ALLOWS FREE REIGN TO THE IMAGINATION IN HOW TO INTERPRET AND PRESENT A PIECE TO THE GROUP (IT COULD BE MOVEMENT ONLY OR DIALOGUE OR NARRATED, FOR EXAMPLE). THE USE OF COLOURS PROMOTES A CREATIVE ASSOCIATION OF IDEAS (RED AS DANGER OR ANGER OR BLOOD, YELLOW AS COWARDLY OR SUNNY, BLUE AS COLD OR WATERY OR SAD FOR EXAMPLE). THE GUESSING OF THE EMOTION INTRODUCES A PLAYFUL ELEMENT WHICH ALSO ALLOWS THE PERFORMERS TO UNDERSTAND HOW THEIR WORK IS PERCEIVED AND FURTHERMORE OFFERS THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK ABOUT THE PROCESS OF DECIDING ON THE EMOTION AND HOW THEY COULD REPRESENT IT. IN THE CASE OF USING A VARIETY OF SHOES AS A PROMPT THE EXERCISE CAN FORM A GOOD BASIS FOR CHARACTERISATION AND EMPATHY (EG. WALKING IN ANOTHER'S SHOES)



# EMPATHY DEVELOPMENT

THROUGH THEATRE ACTIVITIES WE OFTEN NEED TO IMAGINE WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO BE SOMEONE-OR SOMETHING-OTHER THAN OURSELVES, WHETHER THAT IS ANOTHER PERSON, AN ANIMAL, OR EVEN AN INANIMATE OBJECT. THIS PRACTICE OF IMAGINING YOURSELF AS THE OTHER CAN HELP DEVELOP EMPATHY. AS YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGE IN THESE EXERCISES, THEY OFTEN BECOME MORE ACCEPTING OF OTHERS AND THEMSELVES, WHILE ALSO LEARNING TO COPE WITH VULNERABILITY AND FAILURE. TOWARD THE END OF THE LESSONS THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO SUPPORT AND CONGRATULATE THEIR TEAM-MATES.

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



### EXERCISE: EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

**OBJECTIVE:** TO EXPLORE AND EXPRESS DIFFERENT EMOTIONS, REPRESENT AND INTENSIFY THEM.

**INSTRUCTION:** THE SCENE IS PLAYED WITHOUT WORDS. ONE PERSON STARTS THE SCENE WITH A PHYSICAL ACTION. AT SOME POINT THIS PERSON GIVES A STRONG SUGGESTION (SOMETHING IMPORTANT HAPPENS, SOMETHING GOES WRONG, ETC.). BEFORE THE SCENE STARTS, THE OTHER PERSON DECIDES IN WHICH EMOTION THEY WILL ENTER THE SCENE. WHEN A STRONG SUGGESTION FROM THE OTHER PERSON OCCURS, THEY ENTER THE SCENE AND REACT TO WHAT JUST HAPPENED IN THE EMOTION THEY PREVIOUSLY DECIDED ON (NOT IN THE EMOTION THEY WOULD NATURALLY REACT TO). THEN TRY TO JUSTIFY THIS FEELING AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** WHEN THEY FEEL CONFIDENT ENOUGH, WE CAN START DEFINING EMOTIONS FOR THEM, TO CHALLENGE THEM IN SHOWING EMOTIONS THEY MIGHT NOT CHOOSE ON THEIR OWN OR ARE NOT SO FAMILIAR WITH. WE CAN ALSO ADD THE USE OF WORDS.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THE EXERCISE ENCOURAGES PARTICIPANTS TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH DIFFERENT EMOTIONS AND THEIR LEVELS. BY REPRESENTING DIFFERENT EMOTIONS, THEY BECOME MORE FAMILIAR WITH THEM AND START TO THINK ABOUT HOW THEY ARE EXPRESSED EXTERNALLY AND, AT THE SAME TIME, HOW THEY ARE FELT INTERNALLY.

# EMPATHY DEVELOPMENT

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



**EXERCISE:** DR JOHNSON'S FILES

**OBJECTIVE:** TO WARM-UP, EXPRESS DIFFERENT EMOTIONS, RELATIONAL 'SHOW, DON'T TELL'.

**INSTRUCTION:** IN A CIRCLE PARTICIPANTS MIME PRESENTING A STACK OF FILES TO ANOTHER PARTICIPANT ACROSS THE CIRCLE WHILE SAYING 'THESE ARE DR. JOHNSON'S FILES'. THE CHALLENGE IS TO MOVE AND SPEAK IN DIFFERENT WAYS EACH TIME (IN DIFFERENT EMOTIONS, EG. KNOWINGLY, TIMIDLY, ANGRILY, ETC) WHICH SUGGESTS DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE TWO PARTICIPANTS AND VARIOUS IMPORTANCE AND FEELINGS ABOUT THE FILES.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** USING A DIFFERENT SHORT PHRASE AND MIMED OBJECT.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** THIS IS A PLAYFUL WAY FOR EACH PARTICIPANT TO INTERACT WITH THE OTHERS AND TO SHOW DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS AND EMOTIONS THROUGH INTONATION AND ACTION, TO 'SHOW DON'T TELL'. DR. JOHNSON'S FILES WAS A CREATION OF THE GROUP THEMSELVES AND HAS LASTED FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS AS A FAVOURITE WARM-UP ACTIVITY.

IN GROUP OR PAIR WORK, THE SHARED GOAL OF ACHIEVING A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME NATURALLY ENCOURAGES COLLABORATION, COMMUNICATION, AND MUTUAL SUPPORT, WHICH ALLOWS FOR AN AWARENESS OF THE POSITIVE EFFECT EACH HAS ON THE OTHER. THROUGH THEATRE ACTIVITIES, PARTICIPANTS ALSO PRACTISE ACTIVE LISTENING, TURN-TAKING, AND CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK. OVER TIME, THESE EXPERIENCES CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONFIDENCE IN SOCIAL SETTINGS, STRONGER INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, AND AN IMPROVED CAPACITY FOR TEAMWORK.

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



### EXERCISE: CONFLICT IMAGE + OPPOSITE IMAGE

**OBJECTIVE:** TO EXPLORE REAL-LIFE CONFLICT AND ITS POTENTIAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PHYSICAL EXPRESSION AND VISUAL METAPHOR, USING THE BODY AS A TOOL FOR CRITICAL REFLECTION.

**INSTRUCTION:** IN SMALL GROUPS, PARTICIPANTS CREATE A FROZEN IMAGE THAT REPRESENTS A SPECIFIC CONFLICT. THIS CAN BE PERSONAL, SOCIAL, COMMUNAL, OR SYMBOLIC. ONCE THE FIRST IMAGE IS PRESENTED, PARTICIPANTS ARE ASKED TO TRANSFORM IT (WITHOUT BREAKING THE FLOW) INTO A SECOND IMAGE THAT REFLECTS A POSSIBLE RESOLUTION, SHIFT, OR ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE. THE ENTIRE PROCESS IS CONDUCTED IN SILENCE.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** THIS ACTIVITY CAN BE APPROACHED GRADUALLY, STARTING WITH A COLLECTIVE IMAGE BUILT PERSON BY PERSON TO SUPPORT GROUP COMPOSITION. ANOTHER VARIATION IS TO USE OBJECTS OR DRAWINGS TO REPRESENT BOTH THE CONFLICT AND ITS TRANSFORMATION, ALLOWING FOR A MORE VISUAL OR TACTILE FORMAT. A BRIEF NARRATION OR KEYWORD CAN ALSO BE ADDED BEFORE OR AFTER EACH IMAGE TO REINFORCE THE SYMBOLIC CONTENT.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** INSPIRED BY THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED, THIS EXERCISE ENABLES PARTICIPANTS TO EXAMINE COMPLEX CONFLICTS WITHOUT RELYING ON VERBAL EXPLANATION. THE BODY BECOMES A DIRECT AND SYMBOLIC EXPRESSIVE MEDIUM, OFFERING NEW WAYS OF SEEING A SITUATION. THE "OPPOSITE IMAGE" IS NOT MEANT TO REPRESENT A PERFECT SOLUTION, BUT RATHER A TRANSFORMATIVE POSSIBILITY THAT EMERGES FROM COLLECTIVE EXPERIMENTATION. IT IS A POWERFUL TOOL FOR QUESTIONING NORMALIZED FORMS OF VIOLENCE AND OPENING DIALOGUE THROUGH ARTISTIC PRACTICE.

# MOTIVATION

YOUNG PEOPLE OFTEN PARTICIPATE IN THE WORKSHOPS BECAUSE IT MAKES THEM FEEL GOOD, WHETHER THAT IS THROUGH GREATER OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIALISING (AS IS OFTEN THE CASE) OR THROUGH DEVELOPING THEIR SKILLS OR SIMPLY HAVING FUN. THERE IS AN EMPHASIS ON ALLOWING THE GROUP TO BE AS SELF-DIRECTED AND AUTONOMOUS AS POSSIBLE. FACILITATORS PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN CREATING AN INCLUSIVE AND RESPECTFUL ENVIRONMENT, ENSURING THAT EVERY PARTICIPANT FEELS SEEN AND VALUED. AS THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT TOPIC THAT SIGNIFICANTLY CONTRIBUTES TO THE CONTINUOUS WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE, IT WILL BE DISCUSSED ON ITS OWN IN THE NEXT CHAPTER.



# TIPS ON CONTINUOUS WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

THE MOTIVATION OF THE GROUP DEPENDS VERY MUCH ON THE PROFILE OF THE GROUP, THEIR AGES AND THE REASON THAT THEY FORMED IN THE FIRST PLACE AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES OF GROUPS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE PROJECT.

PARTICIPATION OF IRELAND'S GROUP WAS FOR EXAMPLE ENTIRELY VOLUNTARY AND THEY HAVE A WAITING LIST FOR MEMBERSHIP (LIMITED THROUGH AVAILABLE RESOURCES). PART OF THE SUCCESSFUL CONTINUATION OF THE YOUTH THEATRE IS DUE TO THE FREEDOM OF PARTICIPATION (NOT ALL MEMBERS ATTEND EVERY WEEK), THE MUTUAL RESPECT THAT IS ENCOURAGED IN THE GROUP, THE AUTONOMY OF PRACTICE (SCRIPTS ARE NOT USED AND ALL PERFORMANCES ARE DEvised BY THE YOUNG PEOPLE THEMSELVES), THE OPPORTUNITY TO SOCIALISE IN A STRUCTURED BUT PLAYFUL WAY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF PROGRESSION TO MORE RESPONSIBLE ROLES WITHIN THE GROUP. OF THESE INFLUENCES, AUTONOMY IS KEY AND IT IS A RESULT OF THE ONGOING NATURE OF THE YOUTH THEATRE; THAT YOUNGER PARTICIPANTS BECOME OLDER MENTORS OVER THE YEARS AND CARRY THE ETHOS OF PRACTICE THROUGH WITH THEM REQUIRING MINIMAL INPUT FROM THE FACILITATORS. A NEWLY FORMED GROUP REQUIRES A LOT OF WORK AND INPUT TO CREATE A SUPPORTIVE AND SAFER PLACE FOR CREATIVE EXPRESSION; ATTAINMENT OF THIS ENVIRONMENT IS MUCH ACCELERATED WHEN ESTABLISHED MEMBERS WELCOME NEW MEMBERS ON A ROLLING BASIS WITH AN INTACT ETHOS AND WAYS OF WORKING ALREADY ESTABLISHED.

THE SLOVENIAN GROUP, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAD NO PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE IN THEATRE. THEY WERE PUPILS LIVING IN A DORM FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS, MAINLY WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES AND AUTISM. WE APPROACHED THEM AND OFFERED THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND ACTIVITIES IN THEIR DORM, THEIR OWN ENVIRONMENT. THIS MADE IT EASIER FOR THEM TO ACCESS THE WORKSHOPS – THEY DIDN'T NEED TO DRIVE SOMEWHERE ELSE AND SPEND EXTRA TIME COMMUTING. WE COULD ALSO MOTIVATE THEM BEFORE EVERY WORKSHOP TO ATTEND, SINCE THEY WERE ALL LIVING THERE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THIS HAS ALSO RAISED ITS OWN CHALLENGES, SINCE THE PARTICIPANTS HAVE NOT DECIDED IN ADVANCE THAT THEY WANT TO ATTEND THEATRE WORKSHOPS AND ACTIVELY SIGNED UP FOR THEM. WHILE SOME OF THE PARTICIPANTS WERE INTERESTED IN THEATRE, MOST OF THEM CAME MORE OUT OF CURIOSITY AND AS THE RESULT OF ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THEIR DORM TEACHERS. THE MENTORS THEREFORE FOCUSED A LOT OF PLANNING ON SLOWLY AND GRADUALLY INTRODUCING THEM TO WHAT IMPROV THEATRE IS, AND ABOVE ALL TO RELAX THEM, TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO BE MORE SPONTANEOUS, EXPRESSIVE, TO MAKE MISTAKES AND ALLOW THEMSELVES TO HAVE FUN, ETC. GIVEN THEIR ALREADY ESTABLISHED RELATIONSHIPS (BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE PREJUDICES ABOUT EACH OTHER), THIS REQUIRED A GREAT AMOUNT OF ATTENTION.



# TIPS ON CONTINUOUS WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

PARTICIPANTS OFTEN CAME TO THE EXERCISES TIRED AND UNMOTIVATED, WHICH HAD A STRONG IMPACT ON THE GROUP DYNAMICS. IF ONLY ONE PARTICIPANT WAS IN A BAD MOOD, THIS QUICKLY SPREAD TO THE OTHERS. WE THEREFORE STARTED THE EXERCISES WITH SIMPLE, FUN GAMES THAT IMMEDIATELY RELAXED THE PARTICIPANTS, MADE THEM LAUGH, BUT DID NOT REQUIRE THEM TO EXERT TOO MUCH MENTAL EFFORT. IN ADDITION, WE OBSERVED WHICH TOPICS AND EXERCISES THEY PREFERRED AND FOUND MORE INTERESTING. WE WERE ALWAYS STRIKING A BALANCE BETWEEN CHALLENGING THEM AND ALLOWING THEM TO PROGRESS, WHILE STILL HAVING FUN AND ENJOYING THE WORKSHOPS.

DURING THE INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE HELD IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE EMPATHEATRY PROJECT IN MAY 2025, THE POWER OF THE GROUP'S INFLUENCE ON INDIVIDUALS WAS ALSO STRONGLY EVIDENT. THE EXCHANGE TOOK PLACE IN SLOVENIA, WITH 2 PARTICIPANTS FROM EACH PARTNER COUNTRY WHO PREVIOUSLY ATTENDED THE LOCAL THEATRE WORKSHOPS. AS THE WORKSHOPS WERE LED BY MENTORS FROM SLOVENIA, THEY WERE MAINLY FOCUSED ON IMPROV THEATRE. THE GROUP WAS VERY MOTIVATED, RELAXED AND MOST OF THEM ALREADY HAD PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THEATRE. THE PARTICIPANTS, WHO WERE A LOT MORE RESERVED IN THE LOCAL WORKSHOPS, RELAXED MUCH MORE IN THIS GROUP, HAD MORE FUN, BECAME MUCH MORE CREATIVE, EXPRESSIVE AND ASSERTIVE. THIS KIND OF GROUP MERGING PROVED TO BE VERY POSITIVE AND GAVE US AN INSIGHT INTO HOW MUCH A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT INFLUENCES THE INDIVIDUAL, THEIR BEHAVIOUR, AND MOTIVATION. MERGING PARTICIPANTS WITH MORE EXPERIENCED GROUPS OF YOUNG IMPROVISERS WAS ALSO PLANNED AT OUR LOCAL WORKSHOPS IN SLOVENIA. BUT DUE TO THE SHORTENED WORKSHOP TIME AND THE SPECIFICS OF OUR GROUP, IT TURNED OUT THAT WE WOULD NEED MORE TIME TO BE ABLE TO DO SO. HOWEVER, WE WOULD DEFINITELY RECOMMEND THIS PRACTICE, AS WE FIND IT VERY IMPORTANT AND POSITIVE, BOTH IN TERMS OF INCLUSIVENESS AND IN TERMS OF MOTIVATION AND A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT.



## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



**EXERCISE:** CREATING A THEATRE PIECE

**OBJECTIVE:** TO CREATE AN END OF YEAR PERFORMANCE.

**INSTRUCTION:** OVER THE COURSE OF THE YEAR AND IN RESPONSE TO A GENERAL THEME THE MEMBERS WILL DEVELOP THEIR OWN CHARACTERS. A DIRECTORIAL TEAM OF AROUND THREE TO FOUR OF THE MORE EXPERIENCED MEMBERS WILL LEAD THE GROUP IN DEVISING A STORY THAT CAN INCLUDE ALL THE CHARACTERS. SCENES WILL THEN BE IMPROVISED AND REHEARSED TO CREATE A SHOW. ANY MEMBERS WHO SHOW AN INTEREST CAN BECOME INVOLVED IN COSTUMING, LIGHTING, SOUND AND POSTER DESIGN.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** AFTER INITIAL DIRECTION FROM THE FACILITATORS WITH THE VIEW TO CREATING A STRONG ENSEMBLE THE GROUP THEN BECOME ENTIRELY RESPONSIBLE FOR DEVISING THEIR OWN SHOW WHICH IS PRESENTED TO FRIENDS AND FAMILY AT THE END OF THE YEAR. THIS ALLOWS THEM A STRONG SENSE OF OWNERSHIP OF THEIR CREATIVE OUTPUT AND ALSO A VERY STRONG SENSE OF MUTUAL SUPPORT AND INTERDEPENDENCE. FOR THE AGE GROUP THAT WE WORK WITH (14-22) THIS SENSE OF AUTONOMY IS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THEIR PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND IS ALSO ONE OF THE REASONS THAT THEY RETURN EACH YEAR. AS FACILITATORS IT IS OUR TASK TO 'SCAFFOLD' THE GROUP AND ALLOW THEM TO WORK WITHIN THAT TO THEIR OWN DESIGN.

# TIPS ON CONTINUOUS WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



### EXERCISE: AUTONOMOUS SCENE CREATION

**OBJECTIVE:** TO ENCOURAGE CREATIVE AUTONOMY AND SHARED GROUP RESPONSIBILITY IN THE THEATRICAL PROCESS, GIVING PARTICIPANTS FULL CONTROL OVER CONTENT, STAGING DECISIONS, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR OWN WORK.

**INSTRUCTION:** PARTICIPANTS ARE INVITED TO CHOOSE A STORY OR THEME THEY WISH TO EXPLORE. THEY CAN USE CREATIVE PROMPTS FROM PREVIOUS SESSIONS, SUCH AS: STATUES INSPIRED BY POETIC TITLES, IMAGES OF CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION, OR EMOTIONS EVOKED BY MEANINGFUL MUSIC. USING THESE STIMULI, PARTICIPANTS WRITE DIALOGUES, DEFINE SCENOGRAPHY, COSTUME, SCENE STRUCTURE, AND REHEARSE INDEPENDENTLY. THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE IS TO OBSERVE THE PROCESS ATTENTIVELY, INTERVENE ONLY WHEN NECESSARY, AND OFFER ENOUGH SPACE FOR AUTONOMY TO EMERGE WITHOUT THE GROUP FEELING ABANDONED. THE SUPPORT IS ACTIVE BUT NON-DIRECTIVE.

**POSSIBLE ADAPTATION:** THIS ACTIVITY CAN BE DONE IN SMALL GROUPS, EACH DEVELOPING A DIFFERENT SCENE, OR AS ONE LARGE GROUP WITH SHARED ROLES (DIRECTION, WRITING, ACTING, SET DESIGN, ETC.). THE FINAL PIECE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE BASED ON TEXT—IT CAN ALSO BE PHYSICAL, MUSICAL, OR VISUAL. ANOTHER VARIATION IS TO INVITE PARTICIPANTS TO CREATE A SCENE FOR SOMEONE ELSE IN THE GROUP, AS AN EXERCISE IN CARE AND EMPATHY.

**PEDAGOGICAL RATIONALE:** ALLOWING PARTICIPANTS TO LEAD THEIR OWN CREATIVE PROCESS STRENGTHENS THEIR SENSE OF AGENCY, IMAGINATION, AND OWNERSHIP. IT IS NOT ONLY ABOUT PERFORMING A SCENE, BUT ABOUT BEING FULLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DECISIONS BEHIND IT. THIS PRACTICE FOSTERS HORIZONTAL COLLABORATION, ENCOURAGES COLLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING, AND AFFIRMS EACH PERSON'S ARTISTIC PERSPECTIVE AS LEGITIMATE AND VALUABLE WITHIN THE GROUP.

# TIPS ON CONTINUOUS WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



### EXERCISE: TAKE THE PARTICIPANTS TO A SHOW

THE SLOVENIAN PARTICIPANTS GOT A BIG BOOST OF MOTIVATION FROM SEEING AN IMPRO SHOW. THE PARTICIPANTS THEMSELVES EXPRESSED A WISH TO GO ON A TRIP TOGETHER, SO WE MADE IT POSSIBLE AND COMBINED THIS IDEA WITH A GROUP WATCH OF AN IMPRO SHOW.

AS THE PARTICIPANTS HAD NO PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE OF IMPRO THEATRE AND DID NOT KNOW WHAT IMPRO SHOWS LOOKED LIKE, THE VISIT GAVE THEM A BETTER IDEA AND EXAMPLES OF WHAT IMPRO THEATRE CAN BE. AFTER THE SHOW IT IS GOOD TO DISCUSS WHAT THEY LIKED AND ALSO WHAT THEY DIDN'T LIKE.

ALLOWING CRITIQUE IS CRUCIAL, AND SO IS GIVING GUIDANCE ON HOW TO CRITIQUE ART IN A PRODUCTIVE WAY. SOMETIMES WHEN BEGINNERS SEE PROFESSIONALS ON STAGE, THEY COMPARE THEMSELVES TO THEM AND FEEL INADEQUATE, SO IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT PROFESSIONALS ALSO BEGAN JUST LIKE THEM, AND IT WAS PRACTICE AND TIME THAT GOT THEM TO WHERE THEY ARE NOW. THIS UNDERSTANDING CAN MOTIVATE PARTICIPANTS TO CONTINUE LEARNING AND IMPROVING.

## ACTIVITY EXAMPLE:



### EXCERCISE: THEATRE VISIT

THE GROUP OF TADA PARTICIPANTS HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT A THEATRE AND EXPLORE ITS BACKSTAGE AREAS. DURING THE VISIT, THE STUDENTS WERE INTRODUCED TO VARIOUS TECHNICAL AND CREATIVE PROFESSIONS THAT ARE ESSENTIAL TO A THEATRE PRODUCTION BUT OFTEN REMAIN UNSEEN BY THE AUDIENCE. THESE INCLUDED ROLES SUCH AS LIGHT AND SOUND TECHNICIANS, COSTUME DESIGNERS, STAGE MANAGERS, AND SET BUILDERS. THIS VISIT ALLOWED THE PARTICIPANTS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW A THEATRE FUNCTIONS BEHIND THE SCENES AND HOW DIFFERENT PROFESSIONALS COLLABORATE TO BRING A PERFORMANCE TO LIFE. ENCOUNTERING THESE EXPERTS IN THEIR ACTUAL WORK ENVIRONMENT GAVE THE STUDENTS A CONCRETE SENSE OF THE DIVERSITY OF CAREER PATHS IN THE CULTURAL SECTOR. THE EXPERIENCE HAD A NOTICEABLE EFFECT ON THE MOTIVATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS. SEEING THESE PROFESSIONS IN PRACTICE HELPED THEM CONNECT MORE DEEPLY WITH THE PROJECT AND SPARKED THEIR CURIOSITY. MANY EXPRESSED INCREASED ENGAGEMENT AND A STRONGER SENSE OF PURPOSE IN THE ACTIVITIES THAT FOLLOWED, AS THEY COULD SEE HOW THEIR OWN CONTRIBUTION FIT INTO A BROADER, REAL-LIFE CONTEXT.

# FINAL THOUGHTS

THIS HANDBOOK BRINGS TOGETHER A COLLECTION OF METHODS, REFLECTIONS, AND CREATIVE PRACTICES DEVELOPED IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES THROUGHOUT THE EMPATHEATRY PROJECT. AT ITS CORE, IT OFFERS AN INVITATION TO USE THEATRE NOT ONLY AS A FORM OF EXPRESSION, BUT AS A COLLECTIVE PROCESS OF EMPATHY, AGENCY, AND EMOTIONAL CONNECTION—ESPECIALLY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE FACING STRUCTURAL BARRIERS. THE METHODS, REFLECTIONS, AND ACTIVITIES INCLUDED ARE BASED ON OUR DIRECT EXPERIENCES AND ARE MEANT TO SUPPORT THEATRE PEDAGOGUES, YOUTH WORKERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS IN DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE, CREATIVE PRACTICES IN YOUR OWN WORK.

ACROSS ALL EXPERIENCES, COMMON THEMES EMERGED: THE IMPORTANCE OF BODY-BASED WORK IN CONTEXTS WITH LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY; THE CREATION OF SAFE, NON-JUDGMENTAL SPACES WHERE PARTICIPANTS CAN EXPLORE THEIR IDENTITIES; AND THE VALUE OF FLEXIBILITY AND CO-CREATION, WHERE FACILITATORS ADAPT TO THE EVOLVING NEEDS AND DYNAMICS OF EACH GROUP.

RATHER THAN OFFERING A FIXED RECIPE, THIS HANDBOOK PROPOSES A MODULAR AND ADAPTABLE FRAMEWORK. THE ACTIVITIES INCLUDED CAN BE SHAPED, COMBINED, OR TRANSFORMED DEPENDING ON THE SETTING, THE PEOPLE, AND THE GOALS. EACH GROUP IS DIFFERENT, AND WHAT WORKS IN ONE SETTING MAY NOT WORK IN ANOTHER. WHAT MATTERS IS BEING PRESENT, LISTENING, AND CREATING A SPACE WHERE PARTICIPANTS FEEL RESPECTED, SEEN, AND SAFE TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES.

WE HOPE THIS HANDBOOK WILL SUPPORT AND INSPIRE YOU IN DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE, EMOTIONALLY ENGAGED, AND ARTISTICALLY RICH THEATRE SPACES—WHERE EVERY PARTICIPANT CAN BE BOTH SEEN AND HEARD.

# HELPFUL RESOURCES

LA XIXA'S WORK IS GROUNDED IN AN INTERDISCIPLINARY METHODOLOGY THAT INTEGRATES POPULAR EDUCATION, THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED, PROCESS WORK, AND EMBODIED TOOLS. A VARIETY OF TOOLS AND GUIDES CAN BE FOUND ON THEIR WEBSITE: [HTTPS://WWW.LAXIXATE-ATRE.ORG/ES/RECURSOS](https://www.laxixateatre.org/es/recursos)

AUGUSTO BOAL – THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED (1979)

A SEMINAL TEXT OUTLINING THE METHODS AND PHILOSOPHY OF THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED, FOCUSING ON THEATRE AS A SPACE FOR DIALOGUE, EMPOWERMENT, AND COLLECTIVE TRANSFORMATION.

AUGUSTO BOAL – GAMES FOR ACTORS AND NON-ACTORS (1992)

A COMPREHENSIVE MANUAL OF PRACTICAL EXERCISES AND GAMES DRAWN FROM BOAL'S GLOBAL WORK WITH COMMUNITIES.

PAULO FREIRE – PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED (1970)

A FOUNDATIONAL WORK ON CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND POPULAR EDUCATION, PROPOSING DIALOGUE, CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING, AND CO-CREATION AS PILLARS OF TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION.

ARNOLD MINDELL – THE LEADER AS MARTIAL ARTIST / SITTING IN THE FIRE

KEY TEXTS FROM PROCESS ORIENTED PSYCHOLOGY (PROCESS WORK), WHICH OFFER TOOLS FOR NAVIGATING GROUP CONFLICT, DEEP DEMOCRACY, AND EMOTIONAL PROCESS IN FACILITATION.

VIOLA SPOLIN - IMPROVISATION FOR THE THEATRE

VIOLA SPOLIN IS KNOWN AS THE FOUNDER OF IMPROVISATIONAL THEATRE. IN THESE BOOKS SHE SHARES METHODS OF TEACHING AND MANY IMPROVISATION GAMES.

IMPROV ENCYCLOPEDIA IS AN ONLINE COLLECTION OF IMPROVISATIONAL THEATRE EXERCISES WITH CLEAR INSTRUCTION AND A LOT OF OTHER SOURCES AS WELL.

[HTTPS://IMPROVENCYCLOPEDIA.ORG/](https://improvenyclopedia.org/)

HOOPLA IMPROV IS ALSO A GREAT WEBSITE FULL OF INFORMATION ABOUT THEATRE IMPROVISATION AND THEIR OWN IMPROV ENCYCLOPEDIA FULL OF GAMES YOU CAN TRY, FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS OF EXPERIENCE.

[HTTPS://WWW.HOOPLAIMPRO.COM](https://www.hooplainpro.com)





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