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SOMATIC MOVEMENT

A Body-Oriented Toolkit for the
Stages of Group Development



#BodyMindYouthWork



Introduction



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Somatic Movement - an Erasmus+ Training Course focused on strengthening youth workers' capacity to support young people's well-being through body-based, awareness-oriented, and group-dynamic methods (based on Tuckman's model). The project brings together participants from eight countries to explore somatic practices, resilience, self-care, and emotional regulation through experiential learning, collaboration, and creativity. A structured seven-day program of workshops, nature connection, conflict management, collective creativity, and reflection, participants co-create practical resources while building international partnerships for ongoing youth work impact.



The definition of youth work.

The role & profile of a Youth Worker



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During one of the first sessions of the mobility, participants co-created their shared definition of youth work, rooted in their daily experiences within the organizations they represent. They concluded that youth work is a deeply meaningful activity where we support young people in their personal and professional development, while also contributing to the growth of the communities we serve—whether online or offline. This foundational understanding set the tone for the entire project, connecting individual practices to collective impact.

We then defined the role of the youth worker and co-created a detailed profile that captures their essential traits: empathetic in connecting with young people, educated through formal and informal learning, deeply committed to continuous personal and professional development, and skilled in selecting and applying the right tools to meet the learning goals of the groups or communities they work with. There was unanimous agreement that, given youth work primarily happens at group and community levels, it is crucial for every youth worker to understand the specific group dynamics of youth work.

Throughout the course, we used Tuckman's model as our framework. Guided by this model, we defined how each stage of group dynamics manifests in youth work, and participants co-elaborated the following:

Stage 1: Forming



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Core dynamic: Everyone's super polite and looking to the lead facilitator for cues.

Behaviors:

- Young people rely on safe, familiar patterns and look to the youth worker for clear direction and structure;
- Strong need for group acceptance and a sense of safety;
- Discussions stay task-oriented: defining the activity scope, approach, and initial impressions;
- Serious topics or personal feelings are sidestepped to avoid tension.

The challenge: To progress, group members must step beyond comfortable topics and embrace the risk of open conflict.

The way forward: Offer clear guidance, establish structure, and clearly define the group's mission and first steps.

Tool - Moving Constellations

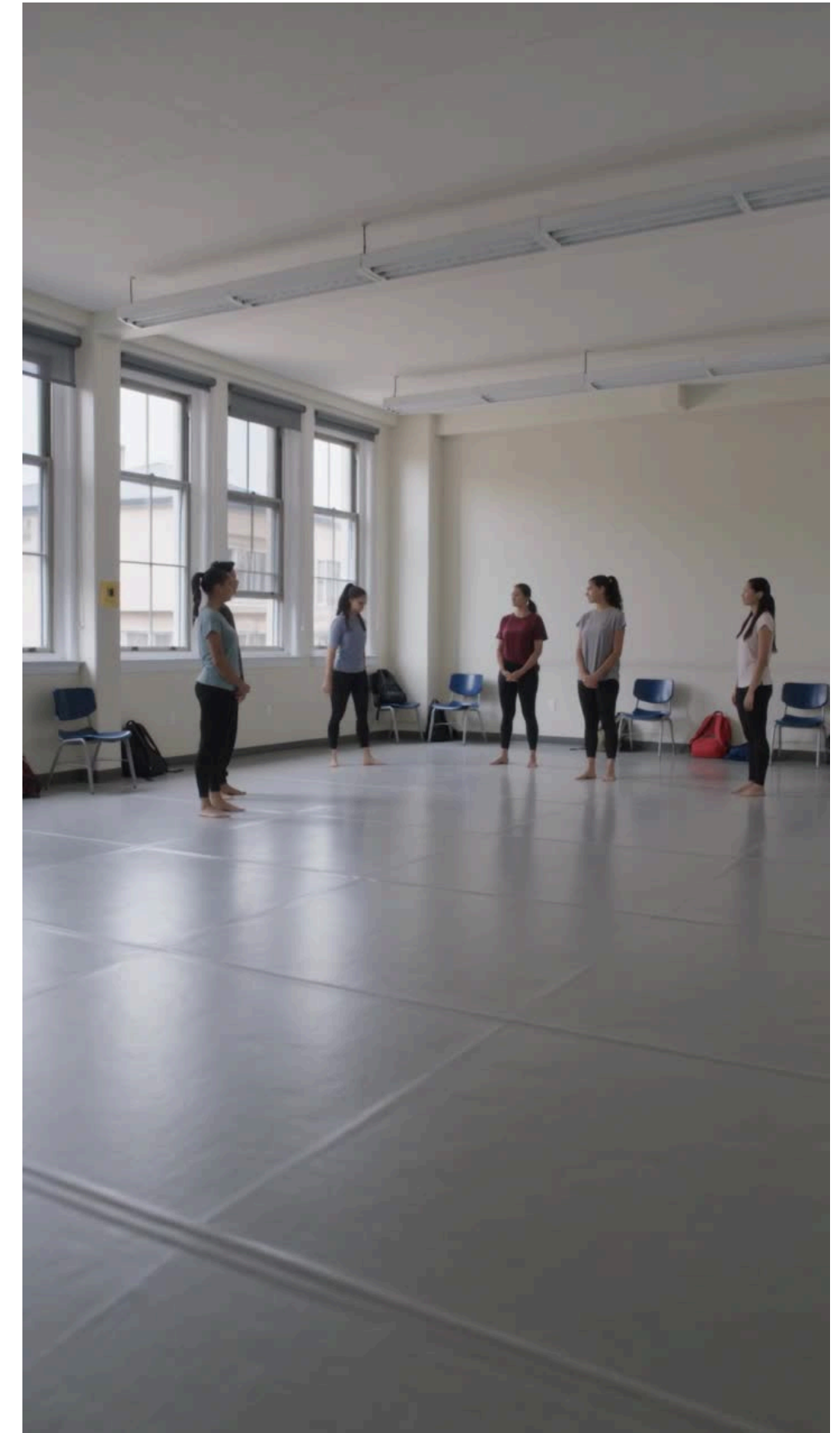
Purpose: The activity supports: psychological safety, first connection without pressure, nonverbal communication, curiosity and gentle interaction, body awareness and grounding, inclusion beyond language barriers. It is especially suitable for the beginning of a youth exchange, training course, or intercultural camp.

Group size: 10-40 people

Space & Materials: Large open room or outdoor flat space, speaker (optional), calm instrumental music (optional)

Facilitation Flow:

- 1. Arrival Into the space** - Invite participants to walk freely through the space. Instructions: walk silently; notice your breathing; notice how your feet touch the ground; explore different speeds; gently become aware of the other people sharing the space.
- 2. Gradually invite:** changing direction; soft stretching while walking; opening posture; relaxing shoulders and jaw. This helps regulate nervous systems and reduces first-day social tension.



Stage 2: Storming



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Core dynamic: Competition & inevitable conflict emerges

Behaviors:

- Conflicts naturally emerge as the group organizes around the activity or task;
- Individuals adjust their ideas and beliefs to fit emerging group structures;
- Questions surface about roles, responsibilities, rules, and leadership within the group;
- Some members dominate discussions, while others stay silent out of fear of failure or rejection.

The challenge: The group grapples with tensions around leadership, structure, power dynamics, and authority.

The way forward: Facilitate open communication—listening actively is key. Help shift the group from "testing and proving" mindsets toward collaborative problem-solving.

Tool - The Human Knot of Perspectives



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Purpose: This activity helps a group navigate tension and differences safely, experience frustration and cooperation physically, explore leadership, boundaries, and communication styles, transform conflict into collaboration and build trust through embodied problem-solving.

Group size: 12-35 people

Space & Materials: Large open room or outdoor flat space, music (optional), flipchart for debrief insights.

Facilitation Flow:

Space Claiming - Participants walk freely through the room. Invite them to explore: taking more space; taking less space; changing rhythm; walking with confidence; walking cautiously; noticing how others influence movement. Then add prompts: “Walk as if your opinion matters.” / “Walk as if you strongly disagree with someone.” / “Walk as if you want connection but also need boundaries.” / “Notice what happens in your body near strong personalities.”

No discussion yet.

Tool - The Human Knot of Perspectives



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The Knot

Step 1 – Forming the knot - Participants stand in a close circle.

Instructions: a) close eyes b) extend hands into the center c) grab two different hands d) Open eyes

The group now becomes **physically “knotted.”**

Step 2 – The challenge - Untangle the knot **WITHOUT** letting go of hands.

Rules:

- speaking is allowed, but facilitator may pause speech periodically;
- no forceful pulling;
- participants may step over or under arms;
- everyone’s physical comfort matters.

The activity naturally creates frustration, competing leadership, confusion, impulsive reactions, negotiation and cooperation attempts, exactly what storming often looks like.



Stage 3: Norming



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Core dynamic: Cohesion builds and information flows freely

Behaviors:

- Group cohesion becomes the defining feature as trust solidifies;
- Members actively recognize each other's contributions and strengthen community bonds;
- Leadership becomes shared naturally; subgroups or cliques dissolve;
- Creativity flourishes with open sharing of feelings, ideas, and experiences;
- A real sense of belonging and relief emerges among members.

The challenge: Members may start fearing the group's eventual end and resist any changes.

The way forward: Keep encouraging open feedback and shared leadership. Reinforce the positive momentum while preventing the group from becoming too comfortable or static.

Tool - The Rhythm of Us

Purpose: At the norming stage, the group usually begins to: develop trust, create shared norms, cooperate more naturally, regulate conflict more effectively, recognize interdependence and balance individuality and belonging.

This activity strengthens: group cohesion, collective rhythm, embodied cooperation, mutual awareness, trust in shared processes and intercultural inclusion through nonverbal connection. The focus is not on solving tension anymore, but on learning how to move together.

Group size: 10-40 people

Space & Materials: Large open room or outdoor flat space, music (optional), soft rhythmic instrumental music (optional)

Facilitation Flow:

Grounding Into collective presence - Invite participants to stand in a circle. Facilitator guides noticing breath, feeling feet on the floor, softening shoulders, becoming aware of the group's shared presence. Then introduce synchronized breathing: inhale together / exhale together.

Gradually add: gentle swaying, synchronized arm movements, collective stretching.

Purpose: creates regulation and co-presence; supports nervous system synchronization; establishes group rhythm.



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Stage 4: Performing



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Core dynamic: Interdependence drives focused problem-solving

Behaviors:

- The group achieves true interdependence—members work confidently alone, in subgroups, or as a full unit;
- Roles and authority flex dynamically to meet the group's needs;
- Participants are self-assured, no longer seeking group approval;
- Unity peaks: morale soars, loyalty deepens, and productivity hits high gear;
- Focus shifts fully to real problem-solving and meaningful achievements.

The challenge: Even at this peak, members may fear the group's eventual end and resist necessary changes.

The way forward: Delegate tasks and empower participants. Shift your role to oversight, support, and guiding the group toward optimal solutions.

Tool - The Living Collective



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Purpose: At the performing stage, the group has usually developed trust, flexibility, a shared identity, effective communication, collaborative problem-solving skills, emotional safety, and a strong capacity for autonomy. This activity invites participants to use these capacities creatively and collectively through embodied collaboration. The focus is on co-creation, collective intelligence, fluid leadership, synchronized action, meaningful expression, and high-level cooperation. The group becomes capable of functioning almost like a living organism, adapting, responding, and creating together with a strong sense of connection and shared purpose.

Group size: 12-40 people

Space & Materials: Large open room or outdoor flat space, music (optional), scarves, fabric pieces, natural objects, chairs (optional)

Core Concept:

Participants collaboratively create a collective embodied performance that represents their shared journey, intercultural cooperation, collective resilience, transformation, community, and the evolving story of the group. The emphasis is placed on the collaborative process itself rather than on the artistic quality of the final result.

Tool - The Living Collective

Facilitation Flow:

Participants walk freely through the space.

Facilitator gradually invites:

- awareness of group rhythm;
- synchronizing breathing while moving;
- expanding awareness from self -> pairs -> whole group.

Add prompts:

- “Move as a group with one shared nervous system.”;
- “Notice when leadership naturally shifts.”;
- “Notice how little verbal communication is needed now.”.

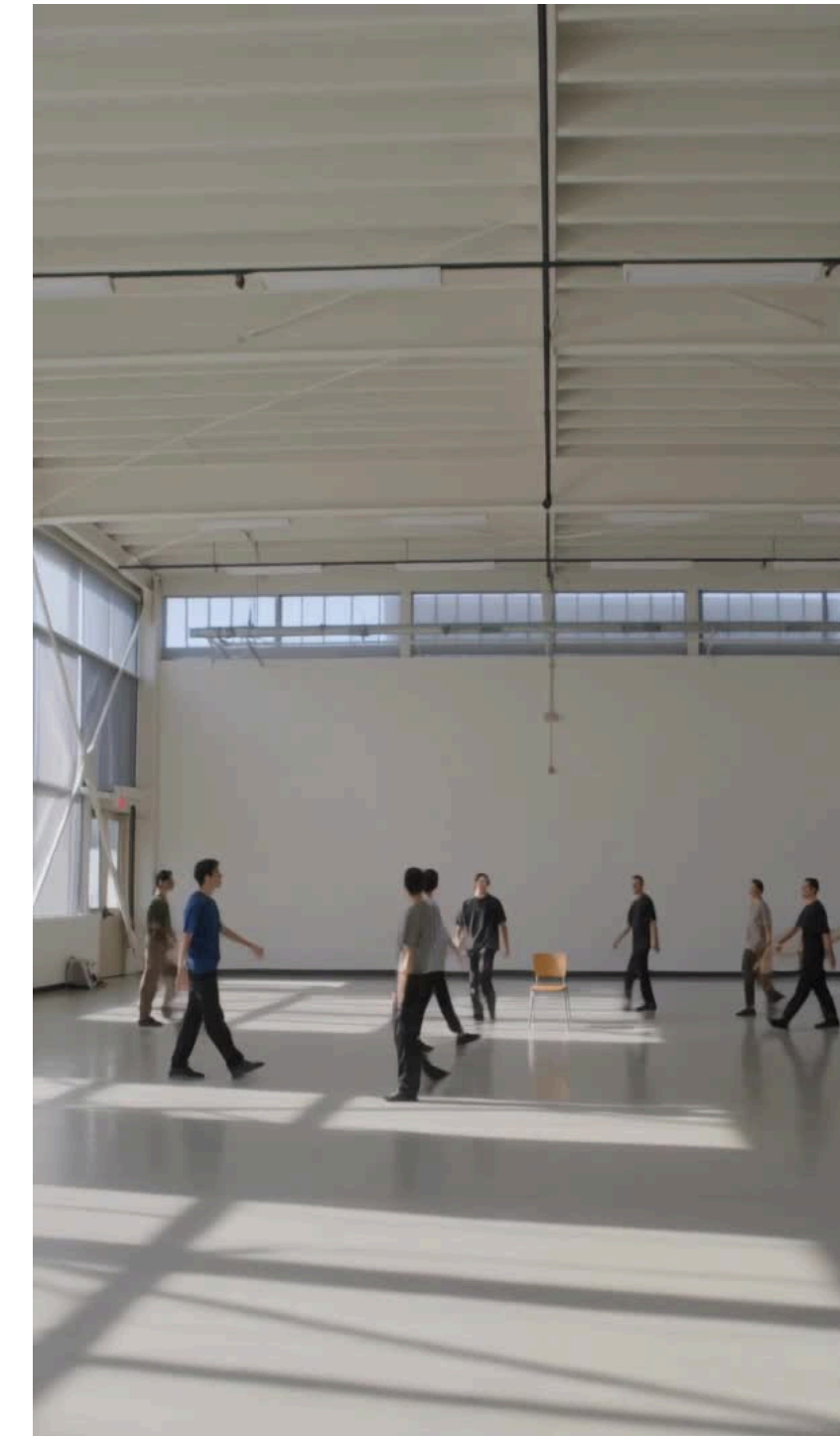
Gradually reduce verbal instructions.

Purpose:

- activates embodied group cohesion;
- reinforces collective trust and autonomy.



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Stage 5: Adjourning



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Core dynamic: Disengagement with recognition of the journey

Behaviors:

- The group winds down task behaviors and begins disengaging from relationships;
- Ending the process can spark apprehension or a "mini-crisis" of separation;
- A structured close allows recognition of everyone's participation and achievements;
- Members get space for personal goodbyes and heartfelt reflections.

The challenge: Balancing the sense of loss with celebration of the group's shared accomplishments.

The way forward: Guide the process thoughtfully. Create space for reflection, structured farewells, and honoring the work and bonds formed together.

Tool - Crossing the Bridge



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Purpose: Activity designed to support young people during the *journey / transition phase* of group processes and youth experiences. This exercise is especially useful at the end of a youth exchange or training course, before returning home, during transitions, uncertainty, or change, when integrating learning and emotional experiences, when supporting identity shifts, endings, and new beginnings. The activity also equips youth workers with embodied tools for helping young people: process change, regulate emotions, integrate experiences, strengthen inner resources and move from dependency on the group toward internalized support.

Group size: 10-35 people

Space & Materials: Large open room or outdoor space, rope, tape, scarves, or natural objects to create symbolic “bridges” and “pathways”, music (optional), paper/cards and markers (optional)

Core Concept:

Transitions are not only cognitive; they are deeply physical and emotional experiences. Young people often face uncertainty, emotional vulnerability, identity shifts, and the tension of excitement mixed with sadness. Somatic movement helps regulate the nervous system, supports emotional processing beyond words, and transforms abstract experiences into embodied memory. In this way, the body becomes an anchor, a container, and a bridge between “before” and “after”.

Tool - Crossing the Bridge

Create a symbolic “bridge” or pathway in the room using rope, scarves, tape, or natural objects. Participants cross the bridge one by one slowly. Before crossing: they pause and reflect silently: “What do I leave behind?” / “What do I take with me?”

As participants cross, the rest of the group offers a supportive nonverbal presence through grounding gestures, synchronized breathing, gentle rhythmic movement, and symbolic expressions of support. At the end of the bridge, each participant chooses an embodied gesture that represents “how I want to continue my journey,” and the group mirrors that gesture back to them.

Purpose:

- creates closure and continuity
- reinforces belonging while encouraging autonomy
- provides embodied witnessing and support



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