

# **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND NARRATION: THE MODULES!**



<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 TERMINOLOGY.....	5
<b>2. SOCIAL PHOBIA / SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 DEFINITION.....	7
2.2 HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DISORDER.....	8
2.3 ONSET SIGNS, COURSE, PROGNOSIS.....	9
2.4 EPIDEMIOLOGICAL EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER.....	9
2.5 SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER AT VARIOUS STAGES OF LIFE.....	13
2.6 THE HIKIKOMORI PHENOMENON.....	14
<b>3. APPLIED RESEARCH: INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH .....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1 NETHERLANDS .....	16
3.2 SPAIN .....	22
3.3 POLAND.....	27
3.4 FRANCE/MARTINICA.....	31
3.5 ITALY.....	35
3.6 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS.....	38
<b>4. WORKING WITH CREATIVE METHODS.....</b>	<b>40</b>
4.1 INTRODUCING CREATIVE METHODS.....	40
4.2 LEARNING WITH CREATIVE METHODS .....	41
4.3 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND CREATIVITY STIMULATION.....	42
4.4 EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE METHODS.....	44
4.5 HOW CAN CREATIVE METHODS BE COMPLEMENTED AND COMBINED WITH OTHER METHODS.....	46
4.6 OTHER CREATIVE METHODS IN THE TREATMENT OF SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER.....	49
<b>5. THE POWER OF STORIES .....</b>	<b>51</b>
5.1 THE POWER OF NARRATIVE TRANSFER .....	51
5.2 THE STRUCTURE OF A STORY .....	52
5.3 DRAMATURGE OF YOUR OWN LIFE .....	58
5.4 THE ORIGIN AND VALUE OF MEMORY .....	59
5.5 THE JOURNEY AS A METAPHOR.....	62
<b>6. SUNG STORIES: set a text to music.....</b>	<b>64</b>
6.1 INTRODUCING SUNG STORIES.....	64
6.2 FOUR APPROACHES .....	65
6.3 IMPORTANT ASPECTS .....	67
6.4 HOW TO DEVELOP A LABORATORY EXPERIENCE.....	68

<b>7. THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED AND ITS CREATIVE PROCESS .....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>8. WORKING WITH DRAMA .....</b>	<b>72</b>
8.1 STAGES OF WORKING WITH DRAMA .....	72
8.2 DRAMA AND OTHER TECHNIQUES OF WORK .....	73
8.3 IS DRAMA EFFECTIVE? .....	74
8.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF DRAMA.....	74
<b>9. HOW TO SET UP A WORKSHOP AND HOW TO KEEP YOUTH ENGAGED .....</b>	<b>76</b>
9.1 TARGET GROUP.....	76
9.2 DESIGNING A WORKSHOP.....	76
Communication strategy for the visibility of actions and committing participants .....	82
Youth engagement.....	85
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>88</b>

## 1. Introduction

When referring to youth, the idea is for them to be comfortable in their own skin, develop self-confidence, and thrive socially as they grow-up. Unfortunately, some of them develop in the exact opposite direction being, for example, painfully self-conscious, afraid of rejection or embarrassment or uncomfortable in social settings. The anxiety they experience is known as Social Anxiety Disorder, a very intense condition and which can potentially interfere with every aspect of their life.

Social Anxiety Disorder is indeed the third most common mental health disorder after depression and substance abuse and surprisingly (even if not so much analysed in depth), is common among young people. Why? Negative experiences – at home due to family conflict or at school due to bullying, for example – have a damaging effect on the development of their core cognitive and emotional skills. In the WHO European Region, depression and anxiety disorders fall into the top 5 causes of overall disease burden. The consequences and the impact? Really high. Academic attainment is curtailed, with individuals at risk of leaving school early and obtaining poorer qualifications (Van Ameringen et al. 2003).

Which are the risk factors of Social Anxiety Disorder?

- Being female (Social Anxiety is more common in females than males)
- Having a close family member with social anxiety or another anxiety disorder
- Being shy, withdrawn, or hesitant to try new things
- Having any kind of noticeable physical or health issue
- Having experienced painful or traumatic experiences such as being bullied

As we can see, risk factors can be common to everyone. And if there was ever a time in history when social anxiety was a collective experience rather than a disorder only applicable to a specific group, it is the one we are currently living because of COVID-19. The pandemic has had a tremendous social impact on youth since the relationship with their Peers is crucial and lockdown has been an additional factor of vulnerability

To date there are still no knowledge and affirmations on what people will or could experience in the long-term. However, there are already assumptions made on the so-called “social and third pandemic” characterized by post-traumatic and depressive aspects. In view of these considerations, the **STOP! WORDs in PROGRESS** project aims to explore the possibilities to elaborate Educational Modules based on Social-Emotional Learning thus responding to the need of young people to work on Social Anxiety Disorder and Social Anxiety. More concretely, the methodology used will integrate **non-formal** education, **creativity** and **psychology** practices into Educational Modules developed through three creative stages: **social theatre, storytelling & sung stories**. The overall goal is to engage young people by making them work on five specific abilities:

1. Emotional Awareness (how to identify and recognize emotions)

2. Emotional self-regulation (knowing how to regulate and control one's emotions)
3. The ability to make responsible decisions
4. Relational skills (communicate, cooperate, negotiate, lend, and ask for help)
5. Social Awareness (empathy, respect for the others and appreciation of diversity)

The project aims at:

- enlarging the offer within EU of innovative training pathways in the field of youth
- enlarging dialogue and awareness on an EU level on youth issues and problematics and mental health disorders.
- enhancing the ability of youth workers and organizations to respond, through quality services, to young people's educational needs.
- enlarging dialogue and awareness in the EU on mental health and recognition of non-formal education.

4

We started this project by investigating how social anxiety manifests itself amongst youth in our current social panorama and its characteristics. In order to do so, we did in-depth desktop research while also interviewing several young people dealing with social anxiety disorder. In this research process, we also focused on how creative methods we suggest can be applied in working with groups of youth with social anxiety disorder. We therefore describe the benefit of working with creative methods in general and pay specific attention to the disciplines we would like to apply, namely storytelling, sung stories and (social) theatre. These chapters were developed by the partners in this project, which are all specialists in one of the fields covered. We believe that combining and sharing this expertise will lead to a further development of methods that can be used for the benefit of our target group.

The results of this investigation lie in front of you now. We have theoretically described the modules we will use as a foundation for the toolkit and the online platform we will develop in the next phases of the project.

STOP! Words in Progress is a project by Storytelling Centre from Amsterdam (Netherlands), NoGap from Orvieto (Italy), La Xixa Teatre from Barcelona (Spain), D'Antilles et D'Ailleurs (France/Martinique), and Makao from Warsaw (Poland). The project is made possible by the support of the EU within the framework of the Erasmus+ program.

## 1.1 TERMINOLOGY

Though we've done our best to avoid it, you'll probably stumble across some specific terminology in these following pages. Let us explain the most important and most used terms:

<b>Workshop</b>	A combination of exercises that contains a logic and learning path going from team building to finding common ground. The path design depends on the context in which the workshop is given. A workshop comprehends one session working with the group. It generally has a duration of around 2 hours but could range from 1 to 3 hours depending on the needs of your group. Sometimes people also use 'training' in order to refer to a workshop.
<b>Project</b>	When we refer to a project, we mean the entire block of workshops.
<b>Exercise</b>	A building block in a workshop that has a beginning and an end and usually covers one kind of action and one specific goal .
<b>Toolkit</b>	A collection of tools for a given stakeholder. A toolkit generally features description and detailed development of exercises and activities and guidelines about how to apply them including tips, recommendations and considerations based on practical experience
<b>Facilitator</b>	A facilitator is the person who plans, develops, and runs the sessions. This figure will bring material, stories, questions, games, and exercises for the group to take part in. We chose to use the term facilitator instead of trainer/coach, as we believe that this person should facilitate the youth in their development process. The facilitator should encourage them to discover themselves in relation to the other, using the tools provided within this toolkit. As a general rule, the facilitator should avoid being overly directive in the way of interacting and facilitating and give protagonism to participants according to their needs.
<b>Storyteller</b>	The storyteller is simply the person who shares stories. The facilitator may also be a professional storyteller who is paid to perform, but in this context both the facilitator and participants will become storytellers at different moments as they express fictional and real-life narratives.
<b>Person-Centred Practice</b>	Person Centred Practice describes a practice in which the needs, autonomy and wishes of the people participating are of central importance to the process and lead the direction of the work. It is associated with education and psychology. The concept is built

	<p>from the ideas of therapist Carl Rogers who believed that in order for psychological healing to occur certain conditions have to be present in the relationship between the therapist and the person in therapy, namely those of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence.</p>
<p><b>Strengths-Based Practice</b></p>	<p>The idea of a strengths-based approach was forwarded by North American social worker Bertha Reynolds in the 1990's. It promotes a focus on individuals' strengths rather than what they lack. A strengths-based practice considers the whole person, their life experience, resilience and abilities as well as their context within social and community networks.</p>

## 2. SOCIAL PHOBIA / SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

### 2.1 DEFINITION

Social phobia, also known as social anxiety disorder (SAD), has been included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5), within the anxiety disorder section.

Social phobia is an anxiety disorder characterized by sentiments of fear and anxiety in social situations (e.g., speaking in public, eating in public, etc.). In most cases, these social fears triggered by learned behaviours and negative social experiences such as (e.g.) having experienced humiliating public situations, being subjected to aggression, etc., as well as dysfunctional thoughts about oneself (e.g., I will not be able to say anything) and to others (e.g., I will be laughed at).

The main feature of social phobia is the intense fear or anxiety that the subject experiences in social situations in which a subject can be observed by other people.

The criteria for diagnosing social phobia according to the DSM-5 are:

- Marked fear or anxiety about one or more social situations in which the individual is exposed to possible scrutiny by others. Examples include social interactions (e.g., having a conversation, meeting unfamiliar people), being observed (e.g., eating or drinking), and performing in front of others (e.g., giving a speech).
- The individual fears that he or she will act in a way or show anxiety symptoms that will be negatively evaluated (i.e., will be humiliating or embarrassing; will lead to rejection or offend others).
- The social situations almost always provoke fear or anxiety.
- The fear or anxiety is out of proportion to the actual threat posed by the social situation and are persistent (typically lasting for 6 months or more) and causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
- The fear, anxiety, or avoidance is not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance or another medical condition.

The physical symptoms experienced are like those of anxiety and especially those of shame:

- Rapid heartbeat
- Blushing
- Excessive sweating
- Dry throat and mouth
- Muscle tension or twitches
- Trembling
- Stomach trouble



People with social anxiety commonly experience significant worry and distress in the following situations:

- Speaking in public
- Carry out activities under the gaze of others (e.g., reading in church or playing a musical instrument; eating with other people; signing a document in front of observers);
- Using public restrooms
- Meeting new people
- Express their opinion as a group.
- Take the floor on a meeting.

These are some of the situations (experienced and / or imagined) that trigger a series of fears, and the symptoms we have previously talked about. Subjects tend to engage in behaviours with the aim of minimizing or eliminating the discomfort experienced.

The concerns that people with social phobia experience relate to the fear that:

- their performance or actions will appear to others inadequate and / or ridiculous.
- their anxiety will be evident since they may sweat, blush, vomit due to tension, tremble or speak in a faint and uncertain voice and that everyone will notice and observe and judge them.
- they may lose the thread and no longer remember anything they had to say, or they will not be able to find the words to express themselves.
- they may appear as a weak-tempered person, excessively dependent on the judgment of others, willing to submit.
- the person is systematically committed to avoiding a bad impression (do not show signs of shame).

The behaviours most implemented, in a marked way, are:

- avoid situations, behaviours, places, contexts, people who can elicit the feared situations.
- groped to minimize and / or hide their discomfort and anxiety (protective behaviours), in order not to appear inadequate (however, often succeeding only partially or not at all).

## 2.2 HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DISORDER

People suffering from social anxiety disorder are excessively worried about doing something embarrassing or humiliating that will lead others to judge them negatively. The strategy they use to keep their anxiety at bay is to avoid doing or saying anything that could cause them humiliation. This excessive discomfort affects all areas of a person's life.

## 2.3 ONSET SIGNS, COURSE, PROGNOSIS

The average age of onset of social anxiety disorder is between 8 and 15 years in 75% of people. It can develop suddenly after having had a humiliating experience or it can be slow and gradual. Young subjects tend to manifest marked social anxiety but focused for certain situations, while, with advancing age, older people have lower levels of anxiety, but widespread in various contexts.

Those who suffer from social phobia experience very intense emotional reactions linked to some social contexts. High anticipatory anxiety, in the case of an imminent feared event in respect of which there is a fear of making a bad impression or strong anxiety and discomfort in the case that it is impossible to escape from the situation, creates lasting anxious symptoms and discomfort.

Moreover, those who suffer from social phobia tend to avoid places and situations to escape the anxiety symptoms, causing the increasing reduction of activities and situations, triggering a vicious circle that worsens both the phobic picture and the quality of life. The consequences can be reflected especially in the sphere of social life, but also in the workplace.

Generally, the fear associated with social phobia is that of being seen as weak, anxious, unbalanced, stupid, boring, or otherwise judged negatively.

For this reason, those suffering from social phobia may have difficulty establishing new intimate and more superficial relationships and difficulties in group situations. All of this can cause isolation and subsequent anger and secondary depression.

Social anxiety disorder has a persistent trend and tends to become chronic. In 60% of subjects, the disorder is not adequately treated and undergoes a course lasting more than a year.

The symptomatology can undergo partial remission if the events that activate it are no longer present but will tend to reappear when the trigger events recur.

## 2.4 EPIDEMIOLOGICAL EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

Social phobia is a widespread disorder among the population. According to some studies, the percentage of people who suffer from it ranges from 3% to 13%. Also, according to these studies, it seems that social anxiety characterizes women more than men.

The 2001 European epidemiological study ESEMeD was the first study on the prevalence of mental disorders in which six European countries (Italy, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, and Spain) took part. The study relates to the one-year prevalence and lifetime prevalence of major non-psychotic mental disorders, which include anxiety disorders (generalized anxiety, panic disorder, simple phobia, social phobia, agoraphobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder), affective disorders (major depression and dysthymia) and alcohol abuse or addiction.

In Italy, the study was promoted and coordinated by the National Institute of Health (ISS) as part of the National Mental Health Project. Interviews were conducted for a total of 4,712 subjects, carried out between 2001 and 2002. The Italian results showed that major depression, specific phobias, and dysthymia were the most common disorders, with prevalence rates during life respectively equal to 10.1%, 5.7% and 3.4%, followed by post-traumatic stress disorder, social phobia, and generalized anxiety disorder (found in about 2% of the interviewees).

In Spain, the study was promoted and coordinated by the National Institute of Statistics (INE). From the six countries studied by ESEMeD, the highest rates recorded were in Spain (78.6%). The latest European Health Survey conducted in the country in the middle of the pandemic (ESES, 2020), from July 2019 to July 2020, showed an increase in the percentage of the population experiencing feelings of being down or depressed, having trouble to sleep, and having little interest or joy in doing things.

In Netherlands, recent national figures on the number of children with an anxiety disorder are not available. The latest figures date from 1997 (for youth up to 18 years) and 2010 (for 18–24-year-olds). Population survey in South Holland in 2003 also provides figures on the prevalence of anxiety disorders in children up to 16 years of age. More than 10 percent of Dutch young people aged 13 to 17 had an anxiety disorder in the six months prior to the survey. This amounts to approximately 114,000 young people (Verhulst et al. 1997). In the category of 18 to 24 years, the percentage of anxiety disorders is 11.7 percent over the past year. The most common anxiety disorders within both age groups are social phobia and specific phobia. These disorders are more common in girls than boys. These data come from interview studies among young people (Verhulst et al., 1997) and young adults (De Graaf et al. 2010). In 2003 population studies in South Holland, parents reported anxious/depressive symptoms in 2.5% of children aged 2-3 years. In the age group 6 – 16 years, 3.2% of the children score on the anxiety/depressive scale (Tick, et al., 2007).

In France, with a population of 65 million, an estimated 12 million inhabitants (18%) currently suffer from one or more mental disorders (Missions et organisation de la santé mentale et de la psychiatrie, 2009). The prevalence of major depression in France over the last 12 months was around 8% in the 2000s and seems to have increased to 10% in the 2010s. Studies on national bases tend to underestimate this prevalence (<2%) retaining only the most severe depressions, hospitalized, and treated with antidepressants (Fond, G., Lançon, C., Auquier, P., & Boyer, L., 2019). The 12 month and lifetime prevalence rates observed were respectively 6.0 % for major depressive episodes, 1.6 % for dysthymia, 2.1 % for the generalised –anxiety disorders, 1.2 % for panic disorders, 0.6 % for agoraphobia, 2.2 % for post-traumatic stress disorder, 1.7 % for social phobia, 4.7 % for specific phobia, 0.5 % for alcohol abuse and 0.3 % for alcohol dependence.

In Poland, based on research from 2021:

- 25% of people suffering from depression (in 2017 it was about 4%)
- 36% of young people (18-30) suffering from depression
- 23% of teenagers general anxiety disorder and 42% of teenagers- all kinds of anxiety disorders (including social disorders)
- 17% of adolescents aged 16-18 declared considering suicide
- 3% of adolescents had suicidal trial

### How have these figures changed since the start of the pandemic?

It is since March 2020 that the whole world has been going through one of the most difficult and demanding phases in the history of humanity. All of us were used to reading the various pandemics of cholera, plague, and the Spanish flu in the history books, thinking they were something that had by now been consigned to history and very distant from us.

Unfortunately, all this, albeit with different clinical aspects, we have experienced directly, in the first person, with a whole series of consequences. One of these consequences is called "Cabin fever ". It is the most obvious side effect resulting from the lockdown for many, even among those who had never suffered before from psychological disorders, namely the fear of going out and leaving their home, the place that has made us for months feel safe, protected from any dangerous external agent. Symptoms include the presence of anxiety, fear and frustration, sleep disturbances, depression, and a marked tendency to irritation.

This syndrome tends to become chronic and is supported by the following fears:

- terror of the outside world
- fear of getting sick
- the fear of infecting loved ones
- the conviction of never finding the world we knew before.

However, it is paradoxical to think that these disorders mainly emerged in subjects who were psychically well. As previously mentioned, the attempted solutions to reduce anxiety symptoms that are implemented by people suffering from social phobia consist in actively avoiding situations, social relationships or facing them with intense fear and anxiety. Therefore, in the period of forced isolation, people who already suffered from these difficulties experienced quarantine with a decrease in symptoms. For this reason, if on the one hand the forced isolation has allowed them to live with greater serenity with respect to these problems, on the other hand it may have strengthened their inability to deal with social situations, enhancing phobias and insecurities, thus worsening the problem.

The current phase of health emergency has changed and is characterized both by coexistence with Covid-19 and by immunization and health prevention interventions through mass vaccination and at the same time provides for the need to go out to carry out work activities, with the protection and safety measures. This situation can generate stress, anxiety, depression, and difficulty in managing the "new normality" in people, while in people suffering from social

phobias it can cause severe anxiety or intense fear and in some cases this condition can lead to panic.

In Italy, a recent study (Talevi et al., 2021) reports that the CoViD-19 pandemic, still ongoing, is having a huge psychological impact on individuals. People experienced significant psychological distress during the early stage of the Covid-19 outbreak in terms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic symptoms. Globally, the findings are relatively consistent in terms of severity: most individuals suffered from mild to moderate complaints, while subjects reporting severe symptoms were a minority. On the contrary, the preliminary results of the research project are in line with Chinese studies. High rates of negative mental health outcomes, including symptoms of post-traumatic stress and anxiety, have been found in the general Italian population and in healthcare professionals three weeks after initiation of CoViD-19 blocking measures, associated with various factors of risk related to CoViD-19. Women and younger people were associated with a higher risk of mental health outcomes.

In Spain, a recent study (EESE, 2020) stated that, from the beginning of the pandemic, there was an increase of 3.3 % of the population in having little interest or joy in doing things, 2.8 % in feeling down or depressed, and 2 % in having trouble sleeping. However, there was a decrease of 5.1% in feeling tired and 1.7% in feeling bad about oneself. The changes in these indicators were more pronounced for women than men, also starting from higher pre-pandemic values.

In Netherlands, by 2020, nearly 4 percent of young people aged 12 to 18 say they have had depression for at least six months in the past year. Compared to 2014, this is more than twice as many young people who are struggling with depression. In 2014, this was 1.8 percent of 12 to 18-year-olds.

Depression is most common among young people aged 16 to 20 at over 7 percent. Compared to 2014, there has also been an increase in this age group. At that time, 6.5 percent said they had suffered from depression for at least six months. Although depression occurs least among 12- to 16-year-olds at 4 percent, this age group has seen the largest increase compared to 2014. In 2014, 0.7 percent of 12 to 16-year-olds reported experiencing depression. This data comes from the health survey (CBS, 2021). These figures are self-reported feelings of depression and not diagnosed depression. No Dutch figures are available on children with a diagnosed depressive disorder. Based on foreign research, it is estimated that approximately 1 percent of children under the age of five, 1.8 percent of children aged 6 to 12 and between 0.4 and 8.3 percent (depending on criteria and research method) of children over the age of 12 have a depressive disorder (Trimbos Institute, 2009).

The percentage of people suffering from social anxiety in France has increased significantly during the Covid pandemic. During the first wave of the pandemic the prevalence of anxiety was 26.7%, a rate twice as high as that observed in a previous survey

(13.5% in 2017). (Santé Publique France, Enquête CoviPrev). According to research conducted by Aziz Essadek and Thomas Rabeyron, during the Covid pandemic 43% of students in France suffered from depression (6.96% of severe level), 39.19% suffered from anxiety (20.7% of severe level) and 42.94% from distress (16, 09% of severe level). Female scores were significantly higher than those of males on measures of depression, anxiety, and distress. The research was conducted on a group of 8004 French students in the Eastern part of France, but the age (21.7 years), sex (67.47% women) and scholarship rate (40.8%) show that the 8,004 students who responded (13.36% of students) are representative of the overall university population in France.

In Poland, at the beginning of 2021, 37% of adolescents aged 18 had depressive symptoms, while as many as 17% declared a desire or intention to commit suicide. This highly disturbing result is confirmed by data from the Give Children Strength Foundation, according to which 9.2% of adolescents self-harmed (6% before the pandemic), and 2.9% of teens attempted suicide. Also, according to police statistics, 2020 was a record year for juvenile suicides, with 116 children taking their own lives. In a study by Babicki and Migas (Babicki, Mastalerz-Migas, 2020), 77% of respondents expressed fear of contracting COVID-19, 23% had high levels of anxiety, while 45% suffered from generalized anxiety. Another study by psychologists from the University of Lodz indicated that 53% had stress levels above 7 sten, which is high. A May 2020 study by the team of Dr. Margaret Gambin (Gambin et al., 2020) indicated that 36.6% of respondents between the ages of 18 and 34 were at pandemic risk for clinical severity of depressive symptoms. And in this case, this was more than double the pre-pandemic rate.

## 2.5 SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER AT VARIOUS STAGES OF LIFE

During childhood and adolescence, fluctuations in anxiety and fears are considered normal and manifest mainly as fear of strangers and separation anxiety in younger children, and in the form of performance anxiety in older children and adolescents. It is common for a child to be worried when facing a question or be reluctant to join a new class or group, just as a teenager may be hesitant in attending a party or asking for an appointment. These fears are mostly temporary and cause limited discomfort, in fact the anxiety subsides until it disappears as soon as the subject faces these experiences by becoming familiar with them.

**However, a child with social phobia is different from a simply shy child.**

The shy child does not take the initiative to play, but manages to be with others if supported by an adult or introduced by a friend; the child who suffers from social phobia, on the other hand, is not convinced by anything, is a child who finds it very difficult to adapt to changes and shows obvious signs of discomfort: recurrent psychosomatic symptoms such as headache or stomach ache, refusal to go out or go to school, reading in class, talking to adults, taking exams and questions or doing something in public, difficulty sleeping, tendency to isolate oneself by

masking social rejection with "solitary" interests such as video games. In fact, in children or adolescents suffering from social phobia, the intensity of normal and physiological worries, which generally lessen with growth, significantly interferes with daily functioning, negatively affecting development, maturation and the achievement of full mastery of self. Some forms of shyness are generally socially accepted and clinical observation therefore occurs only in cases where the disorder is such as to compromise school activity or interfere with everyday life.

We have seen how the key symptoms of social anxiety disorder are the fear of negative judgment, social isolation, strong anxiety about social situations, avoidance of situations that can cause anxiety and fear of confrontation. These characteristics are some of the characteristics that have led to questioning the link between social phobia and the Hikikomori phenomenon.

## 2.6 THE HIKIKOMORI PHENOMENON

The term Hikikomori describes a particular condition present mainly in Japan. It is particularly common among adolescents and involves a real social withdrawal characterized by a rejection of school, social and working life for a period of at least 6 months. Personal relationships are also absent, except for those with close relatives. The young Hikikomori demonstrate their discomfort in different ways: they lock themselves in the house all day, they go out only in the morning or in the evening (they are sure to meet few people) or they can wander around the city pretending to go to school or work.

In the East, this attitude does not cause serious concern, while in the West it does. This depends on the cultural differences of the countries. In Western countries, embarrassment is viewed with a negative look, exposing the person to judgments of relational incompetence. In the East, however, this emotion is viewed with great respect and demonstrates both social skills and great maturity. Moreover, in the West, self-exclusion is expressed in most cases with addiction to alcohol, drugs, and denial of basic needs (for example, food), in the East, young people instead choose the path of silence.

In both societies, social withdrawal can be favoured by the parenting style. An insecure attachment can in fact cause serious difficulties in relating to others. Criticism, unavailability, rejection, and an educational style that tends to encourage competition and humiliation can foster the belief that you are a person of little value. Many of the Hikikomori cases analysed were found to be episodes of defeat without a struggle. For example, abandoning a prepared exam or a sports team for fear of not being selected. In this way, episodes of social competition are avoided. They are thus faced with an image of themselves created by the opinions and desires of others, creating ideals born not of their own interests but of external opinion. The image created is therefore based on the idea of others and the difficulty in imposing one's goals. This contrast between the image of themselves and that created by others leads these subjects to a single option with no possibility of alternatives: social isolation. Just like in social phobia it

is clear how the involvement of families is very important. It is not only the origin but also causes the continuation of the phenomenon.

Within the Hikikomori phenomenon, the adolescent's sense of inadequacy collides with the culture in which he finds himself, causing fear, loneliness, and anguish. The subject is thus led to an extreme distrust of the reality around him. In this situation, not only the notions of time and space are altered (inversion of the day / night rhythm), but also the psychic discomfort experienced. In Hikikomori subjects, social withdrawal brings an initial feeling of relief for having escaped from the judgment of others. However, over time, depressive feelings also arise from the fear of not being able to get out of the situation in which they find themselves.

Especially during adolescence, due to future expectations, the pressures for social fulfilment are very high. The Hikikomori find themselves bridging this gap between social expectations and reality with feelings of helplessness and failure.

All these negative feelings can lead to further rejection not only towards teachers and peers, but also towards one's family. There will therefore be a tendency to push the feared situation even further away, thus leading to true isolation.



## 3. APPLIED RESEARCH: INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH

### 3.1 NETHERLANDS

#### Introduction

In this chapter, you will read more about our acquired results from our conducted interviews. The respondents were given the choice to remain anonymous. One respondent agreed and the other did not. Because of this, we decided to keep each respondent anonymous for the sake of form and neatness of the study. The respondents are therefore indicated with their initials.

Of the 4 interviewed respondents, all have social anxiety in a different way. The respondents are in the age range from 22 to 27 years old. The backgrounds of the respondents are very diverse and include Taiwanese (1), Surinamese (1), Dutch (1), Indonesian (1).

Respondent (1, L) had once been treated by the mental health services for his anxiety disorder. Social anxiety is something that this respondent still deals with daily. The respondent was very keen to promote this topic and to combat the stigmatisation of social anxiety.

Respondent (2, B) Had always suffered from social anxiety before the pandemic, but corona has only made it worse, so that to this day the respondent isolates himself and has difficulty making contacts outside of the home.

Respondent (3, F) is an introvert, so the respondent loves her own time, but still suffers from social anxiety in a social setting. The respondent is no longer bothered by this and has accepted it from herself. Nevertheless, she has difficulty contacting others and can hide her social anxiety well. Her body does react to her anxiety.

Respondent (4, S) never suffered from social anxiety before corona. The respondent had adapted to the new way of life and had isolated herself during the pandemic. Now that everything is starting to become 'normal' again, the respondent has difficulty adapting. She prefers to avoid places that are too busy, and she does not know how to start a conversation. She also has difficulty contacting new people.

#### Findings

Interviews have been divided into three sub-questions. Subsequently, these sub questions were divided into sub questions. These can be found in the appendix (Annex 1). Sub-question:

1. What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?
2. Is there enough talk about social anxiety?
3. How could you still get in touch with others?

The findings on these sub-questions that we obtained through the interviews will be explained below per sub-question.

Sub-question 1: What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

First, we asked the respondents what their social life was like before the pandemic and whether they had any social anxiety. Then we asked what it looked like during the pandemic and finally we asked what it looks like now. The reason we asked the respondents this question was because we wanted to know whether the pandemic had had any effect on the respondents' social anxiety and whether they were having less social contact as a result.

Respondent (1, L) already suffered from social anxiety before the pandemic. This was mainly because he had had anxiety disorder since childhood and had been treated for it by the mental health care services. Before the pandemic he had a lot of contact with people from his study programme. He had a regular group he hung out with and outside of school he has two best friends he talks to a lot on WhatsApp.

During the pandemic, his group of friends at school started to fall apart and he saw his classmates through a computer screen. He still spoke to 2 friends daily.

Now, socialising is better than it was during the lockdown, but the respondent noticed that it was more difficult than before. He had to get used to sitting in a classroom again and to physically chatting with fellow students.

Respondent (2, B) said that he had an active social life before the pandemic. He had started his career as an artist and therefore met new people regularly despite his social anxiety. He also went to events to meet new people to network.

During the pandemic with the lockdown, all that fell away. He thought he was OK with it because he is introverted by nature, but after the pandemic he found out that it did influence him.

It was a switch that he had to make to go from seeing people all the time to not seeing them at all. And he has become so used to it that nowadays he finds it difficult to leave the house. Meeting new people makes him very nervous. He cancels appointments and makes up excuses to stay at home and work from home. He also says that he used to see his social anxiety as a challenge when talking to people, but because of the pandemic his social anxiety has grown so much that he no longer dares to do so.

Respondent (3, F) was the only respondent who indicated that not much had changed. She said that she liked to enjoy her own time and keep herself busy with various hobbies at home. She did meet up with her regular group of friends a lot and did not go out much. They prefer to stay inside and play a lot of games. This happened before the pandemic, and it still seems to be the case. The respondent said that it was nice that she had the choice to do things outside the house again. She did not like it when there was no free choice during the pandemic and the lockdown. The respondent also often went to places where she met new people. She does not go up to people easily, but sometimes she does if someone is holding an open door. She was

lucky that people approached her, even though she did not think they looked like they were lucky. She can also easily hide her social anxiety in such situations.

Respondent (4, S) had no social anxiety at all before the pandemic, and her week was even fully booked with activities. Because of corona, she has developed social anxiety, and this is because she has adapted to the new lifestyle. She would no longer allow herself to look forward to activities, because the lockdown only brought disappointment. It became a routine for her to go straight home from work and because of the curfew, she no longer had time to do anything with friends after work. She continued to work on location, but her life outside of home and work had diminished considerably. As a result, she receives too many stimuli in crowded places, which makes it impossible for her to focus on conversations between herself and another person. Furthermore, she has adapted a new lifestyle to such an extent that she has now become very much on her own. So nowadays she still has the same routine of going home from work and not doing any activities after work or outside the house. She should plan an activity far in advance to prepare for it.

Sub-question 2: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

In the second sub-question, we wanted to find out whether social anxiety is discussed enough. For this we asked the questions whether they themselves notice that people around them suffer from social anxiety and whether this is discussed. We wanted to paint a picture of this by asking about it in various scenarios. Is this discussed at work? At school? Is it talked about in general? We were also curious about the experiences of the respondents in understanding social anxiety and whether this has improved.

Respondent (1, L) thinks that social anxiety is not talked about enough. He said that there was a stigma attached to it and that people had a certain opinion of it. The respondent said that he himself had had experiences of people telling him 'Just go and do it' and that he did not feel understood because of this. He indicated that social anxiety is so much more than fear in a social setting. He says that it even goes home with him when he is alone and there are thousands of thoughts running through his head. He also thinks that people don't know enough about it so they can't understand the disorder because they don't go through it themselves. People around him don't find it difficult to be in social settings, while his body reacts violently to it. He also notices this at school. For example, presentations must be given and that can be very stressful for someone with social anxiety. He indicates that this should be handled with more understanding and that students should be given time to prepare for it. It was also indicated that safety must be created within the classroom. He further indicates that at schools not enough time is spent on students who have social anxiety and little awareness of this. He indicates that it would help to talk about this subject and that he also likes it when there is awareness. He also talks about this sometimes with his close friends and the feeling of understanding brings him comfort.

Respondent (2, B) does not notice that there are people around him who have social anxiety. He thinks this is because nobody talks about it and hides it. Because of this he does not know whether there are people around him who suffer from it. He does think that it would help if it is talked about and understood. He talks about social anxiety with two friends who are close to him. It does help him to talk about it. The respondent said that it is difficult to talk about it if you do not know that the other person also suffers from social anxiety. Anxiety is something you feel inside and if you do not say or show that you have it, you cannot be helped. Nor did the respondent receive any information at school. He did think that this would help the problem a lot. So that young people in secondary schools would be less stressed if they did not have so many friends. He thought that young people felt a certain pressure to belong, because otherwise they would be bullied.

Respondent (3, F) believes that social anxiety used not to be talked about enough, but nowadays it is. She noticed that young people in secondary school were easily bullied if they were alone or did not have many friends. Nowadays she notices that there is more understanding towards social anxiety. She happens to know that all her friends have social anxiety, and they discuss it among themselves. Respondent (3, F) has got so used to it that she now makes jokes about it and is self-mocking. She sees it more as: introverted people and extroverted people. She also thinks it is good to talk about it at work, but it depends on the workplace. She would have no need for it at the workplace where she now works. Despite social anxiety being talked about more, she thinks there is not enough understanding of it. She says that others think you are exaggerating when you are afraid or do not dare to do something. She gave an example of this and that others would say she was exaggerating. The big picture of social anxiety is understood, but the little things are not. The respondent did not think that there was anything that could remedy the social anxiety. She challenges herself to put herself in social situations. As a result, she notices that she is much more advanced in dealing with social anxiety than she was years ago when she was younger. It would help to know from others that they also have social anxiety. But she quickly feels intimidated when an extrovert is present. She prefers to disappear into the background.

Respondent (4.S) thinks that social anxiety is not talked about enough. She also does not notice whether others suffer from social anxiety, because they might not talk about it either to hide it. She also does not talk about it with others and must think very hard before starting a conversation with someone. She does not feel the need to talk about this at work either, but she would think it would be a good idea if this was discussed at schools. This did not happen at her secondary school. Perhaps information would be provided, and young people would be prepared for presenting, because they are now so used to presenting from a computer screen. Furthermore, the respondent did not feel that there was enough understanding of socio-psychological anxiety.

Sub-question 3: How could you still get in touch with others?

We were curious as to what could help young people to get in touch with others despite their social anxiety and how this barrier could be lowered for them. We therefore asked the respondents whether it would be easier for them to contact others if they also knew that the others had social anxiety. We also told the participants about the STOP! Words in Progress project. Since we have a certain image of shaping the project, we are also curious about how the target group thinks about it.

Respondent (1, L) thinks that the project will help many young people who suffer from social anxiety. He thinks it would also help others if they knew about each other's social anxiety. He experiences this himself as well. He then finds it easier to contact others because there is a level of understanding. He would very much like to raise awareness about this subject and he thinks this project would be a good way of doing this. He sees his anxiety as his driving force, and it motivates him to raise awareness of this in others to counter ignorance.

Respondent (2, B) says that it would be an icebreaker to know about each other's social anxiety. He, too, indicates that there is a level of understanding that reduces tension. It is a way of opening yourself up to each other and of sharing honesty and experiences with each other. It is not something unknown to the other person, so that understanding is already present in each other's minds. He also indicated that the project we had started was a good way to raise awareness on the subject, because there seemed to be a lot of ignorance on the subject. The respondent thinks that young people who have social anxiety think they are depressed and confuse these two subjects. But by carrying out this project with the target group, they may be able to understand themselves better.

Respondent (3, F) indicates that she personally would not want to participate in the group or project because she has no need for new contact. She sees her anxiety as a personality trait. Still, it will help to contact others if the other person also has social anxiety. She also indicates that she would feel intimidated if extroverted people were present in the group and that she would rather disappear into the background. Nevertheless, she thought the project was a very good idea that could help others. But the respondent felt that she already knew how to deal with her social anxiety.

Respondent (4, S) also indicates that she finds it easier to contact others when she knows that others also suffer from social anxiety. She also indicates that it would help to have people in the group who are very outgoing, so that they can set an example to others and motivate them. In this way, young people with social anxiety have someone to look up to. If they all had the same thing, according to the respondent, everyone would remain stuck in their energy and would not leave their comfort zone. She also thinks that there are young people

who are very outgoing, but that they also have social anxiety. So that there are different types of social anxiety and the more differences you have in the group, the more you can learn from each other.

## Conclusion

### What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

Three of the respondents noticed a difference in social contacts because of the pandemic. They had much more contact with people before the pandemic and had less trouble contacting strangers. Even the contacts that were close to them have also diminished and circles of friends have become smaller. All four respondents got so used to the new way of life that it still influences them today.

Nowadays, the corona measures have been removed and yet they choose not to put themselves in social situations so quickly. This applies to strangers and friends. Respondent (3, F) does like being able to choose to meet up with friends outside or inside. It appears that respondents have stuck to this lifestyle because they feel comfortable in it now. To seek out social contact and to really go to crowded places gives too much stimulation and is experienced as overwhelming.

All four respondents experienced the same physical reactions such as: sweating, increased heart rate and trembling. These physical reactions do not only occur in social settings, but when the only thought is to make social contact. It shows that social anxiety does not only occur in social settings, but also outside of them. Social anxiety can happen at any time and can also be taken home.

### Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

The answer is different for everyone. Some experience it differently than others, but in general they agree that in the past not enough was said about the subject. Some people know that someone around them has social anxiety, but most of them cannot identify it. They think that it is well hidden and that is what they do. If it is not spoken about, you cannot know about someone else. Therefore, it is difficult to notice social anxiety in a person.

Nobody had ever heard of social anxiety in secondary school. Nowadays it is talked about more and more and that is why they knew this term. So, it is talked about more nowadays, but apparently not enough. The respondents felt that they were understood, but not completely. This is because only the big picture is clear, but the small things are overlooked or considered exaggerated. This shows that people do not understand well enough what social anxiety is and what it does to someone. The respondents indicated that awareness of social anxiety is especially important at schools, because there young people come into a new environment and learn to stand in front of a class and present. There are young people who can do this very easily, but there are also young people who find it extremely difficult. They just must do it, as it were. Now that young people can go back to school after two years of studying behind a screen, it is a completely different experience for them.

It also came up a few times that young people who do not have many friends at school are easily bullied. This makes them doubt themselves and they become stressed about belonging. That is why respondents felt it was important to raise awareness of social anxiety among young people, so that they would feel understood if they were more on their own. Respondents also felt that this could be done much better at schools and that more awareness should be given.

They also felt that it was not necessary to discuss this topic in the workplace. It depends on what kind of work someone does, but in the places where the respondents were currently working it was not necessary.

### How could you still get in touch with others?

Two respondents were not sure what could help them to get in touch with others, because they had become used to the new lifestyle. Another respondent felt no need to contact new people. Most of them indicated that they did need a little push to contact others. It also helps them to know that someone else has social anxiety. There appears to be a level of understanding, and this enables them to find common ground with each other. You soon make yourself vulnerable and share something personal that helps you understand what social anxiety is like. Respondent (4, S) says she likes to be in a group with more outgoing people, so that you have different kinds of energy in the group, and it might motivate the other person, because otherwise you all stay in the same place. Respondent (3, F) says she is put off by the presence of an outgoing person, because she feels intimidated. So, this would probably differ from person to person. Respondent (3, F) is introverted and does not feel the need for new contact.

Furthermore, respondents (1,2) see their social anxiety as a driving force and as a challenge to take their chances. It motivates them to do something about it.

The safety within the group is important. It was said that depth is needed to create safety within the group. If the group already knows that everyone has social anxiety, it will quickly reduce the pressure on one person.

Finally, the respondents think the project is a good idea to raise awareness on the subject. They also think that this could be used much more widely, for example in schools, to raise awareness among young people from secondary school age. They think that awareness in general could be much better in secondary schools and that it would be a good opportunity to know about this from an early age. The interview already gave them a good feeling, because they felt that they were being listened to. They generally do not feel understood. They would also like to use their voice to speak out and share their own experiences to be understood.

## 3.2 SPAIN

### Introduction

La Xixa Teatre conducted 3 interviews in order to better comprehend the youngsters' experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic. All three people interviewed had



suffered from social anxiety and they shared how they managed to deal with their situations. All three respondents are aged 23, born and raised in Spain, but one of them with Mexican and British origins.

Respondent (1, G) had been treated by mental health services for anxiety and other disorders she had before pandemic. Although she currently feels much better, she still has to deal with the daily presence of her anxiety disorder, especially avoiding crowded places. The respondent was very keen to talk about this topic and she shared the need to promote open dialogues about anxiety to reach as many different target groups as possible.

Respondent (2, D) has suffered from social anxiety since she was in early high school. After the pandemic she felt like she had unlearned how to manage social interactions and she started doing new activities or sports to reverse her social anxiety, so she quite forced herself to meet new people. Going to therapy made her realize what aspects of her personality she was scared to show and started to work to empower herself from that point on.

Respondent (3, R) had never experienced social anxiety before the pandemic. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, her social anxiety started to appear in parties or social situations that she used to really enjoy before pandemic but was no longer able to like. More specifically, she started to feel a bit of panic attacks when she had to catch the train at some point during her disorder phases. She had difficulty living a normal daily life (she had to catch the train almost every day). She points out the need for more social research about anxiety.

All 3 respondents share the fact that they did enjoy the pandemic and lockdown time, because they felt easier to make distance bigger between people without seeming weird and could spend more time by themselves or only with the ones, they had more confidence in. For this reason, all respondents shared that the first stage of the reopening of social activities was a challenging period for them, having to make a big effort to get used again to be with people, crowded places and socialize much more than expected. The respondents agreed that a turning point for them was to start talking to other people who also suffer from these disorders and realize it was much more common than they thought at the beginning. The three of them have been working on their difficulties with professional help, and agreed on the need for this, being also the first step to follow when you start talking about these disorders.

## Findings

The structure of the interview is divided into 3 sub-questions (each one with several sub questions). The 3 main sub-questions were:

1. What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?
2. Is there enough talk about social anxiety?
3. How could you still get in touch with others?

The findings for each respondent are explained below, sorted in the 3 mentioned sub-questions:



Sub-question 1: What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked how their social life was before, during and after the pandemic, and whether they had had social anxiety in each of these periods. Asking for each time specifically offered the possibility to evaluate whether the pandemic has been a key element for the development of their anxiety disorders.

Respondent (1, G) defines herself as a quite socially claustrophobic person before pandemic. She felt social anxiety in crowded situations, like clubs or bars, and didn't feel any anxiety when socializing in open spaces, such as the beach or in the forest.

During the pandemic, she got used to walking her dog alone and only hanging out with 2 of her friends twice, but in open spaces where nobody else could see them. The turning point for her was when the Government let inhabitants go out in between an hourly interval, because she started to see a lot of people in the street. She got physically blocked and her anxiety reappeared quickly. Nowadays, socializing is better for her, as she is able to meet people in places where she wasn't able to before. She is still going to psychological therapy, but with her possibilities and strategies much more under control now.

Respondent (2, D) already suffered from social anxiety before the pandemic. She has lived with this disorder since the beginning of High School, she says she even can't remember her life before having social anxiety. Her closest friends remain the same (now and before the pandemic). During the pandemic, she felt safer living with her friends and had a great time together, especially because she didn't feel the pressure of having to make the effort to relate to more people, and she felt she was doing fine. Now, socializing is better but at the beginning it was very difficult for her to get used to relating to new people and she felt an anxiety that she had never experienced before. She felt her socializing basis was totally forgotten, especially when interacting out in the street. Therapy has helped manage her anxiety disorder, above all in understanding her situation and learning strategies to deal with it.

Respondent (3, R) had a quite strong social life before the pandemic. She went out every weekend and hung out with different groups of friends. During the pandemic, she only stayed in contact with some friends, she tried to use social media, but did not get used to seeing people through a screen. Now, she locates her situation somewhere between before and during the pandemic. She is less social than before, but the relationships she has nowadays have a better quality. She thinks the pandemic changed her mind set in which activities she enjoys the most. Her social anxiety is related to very crowded situations, such as parties or train trips.

Sub-question 2: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

This sub-question aimed to know if respondents thought the subject is discussed enough in different areas (at school, at work, with family, friends...). We also

wanted to better comprehend the process respondents had passed through to raise awareness of their disorder better. All interviewees confirmed that there is not enough talk about social anxiety, but with certain nuances in their arguments.

Respondent (1, G) believes that social anxiety is not talked about enough even though she notices how there are more people around suffering from it. The pandemic made her start to talk more about the grounds of her disorder because she noticed the topic has been normalised quite a bit and she started to feel safe to do it, too. Before the pandemic she lived her situation as a secret and then she realized that she wasn't alone and that many people suffer from it, too. The respondent shared that, even though with each day there is more talk about social anxiety, there is still a taboo in schools and work, where many people don't understand what the disorder is at all. She thinks that a clearer message is needed in order to address different target groups and to make the ones who suffer from social anxiety feel more understood and maybe make the decision to ask for help. Respondent (2, D) also reported that there isn't enough talk about anxiety. She realized that social anxiety is also being ashamed of others finding that out. She links this social phobia to the big insecurities and the shame we all feel as teenagers. The respondent doesn't think it is talked about enough in high schools and doing it would give tools to all the teens who are experiencing anxiety. When it comes to the workplace, she thinks it is a very embarrassing topic to talk about, because the question may be "how can you be working and having social anxiety at the same time?". The respondent believes that change comes from talking about yourself, but through more awareness and good practices in schools and workplaces.

Respondent (3, R) isn't an exception: she also thinks there isn't enough talk about social anxiety. The interviewed reports there is still a taboo with all topics related to mental health. Even though now everyone seems to be talking about mental health, it's still a personal experience and not that many people open up about it. The respondent believes that maybe in schools it is a little more discussed than at work but still isn't enough. She shared the need for more investigation and research to be able to act and normalize.

Sub-question 3: How could you still get in touch with others?

This group of questions aimed to find out the strategies and tools developed by respondents to keep their social life as normal as possible. Questions were related to how the respondents managed to get in touch with others or what qualities they need to feel comfortable with others and better manage the challenges of anxiety. We also told participants about the STOP! Words in Progress project, so they can help with their thoughts in relation to the project.

Respondent (1, G) shares that the project is a great idea to get people to know better about social anxiety, especially for the ones who are already curious about it but don't get much information. This project will bring the opportunity for everyone to learn

about social anxiety. For people who are suffering from social anxiety she thinks it could be both bad and good experience, depending on the disorder point they are now. In any case, she thinks that creating a comfortable and safe space to talk about it is totally necessary to build projects like this.

Respondent (2, D) also thinks it is a great idea. She explains that she works with teenagers through theatre and used to have a student who suffered from social anxiety. They both discovered that it was only through theatre that he managed to laugh and have fun with his classmates. As an adult and youth trainer, you can also be ashamed to relate to teens and others, and theatre is a very useful tool to work on that. In her case, being with more people with social anxiety wouldn't help her, but she believes it is necessary for many to know about others experiencing the same as them to better understand anxiety.

Respondent (3, R) finds the project a good idea. The interviewed reports she could be a part of it, but in previous phases of her disorder she wouldn't. The respondent believes that feeling secure and trusting other people are a must to participate in this kind of projects.

## Conclusion

### What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

Two of the respondents said they already had a little social life before the pandemic and noticed a difference in social contacts after the pandemic, because they had more difficulties when getting used to seeing people. However, going through therapy helps them to reach their goals about having the social life they want. The third respondent totally changed her mind-set of spending time with friends, from going out every weekend and having lots of different groups of friends to only meeting a few friends occasionally and seeing them in open spaces such as the forest or doing relaxing activities. All the respondents confess to having felt comfortable and safe when it comes to social activities during the pandemic, because they didn't feel the pressure of having to make the effort to relate to more people. But, by the end of restrictions, social anxiety came again to all of them. Challenges consisted of coming back to get used to relating to others. Despite the general effort to be able to get in touch with others, participants 1 or 3, rather prefer to avoid crowded places and hanging with a lot of people, because they feel more comfortable with the lifestyle they start having during the pandemic. All respondents experienced very similar physical reactions, such as, increased heart rate and trembling, overthinking, body tension, and hard breathing. All of them agree that they live in constant fear that at any moment anxiety could strike them.

### Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

All of the respondents answered that there isn't enough talk but had different arguments in favour of this statement. They all agree that there is now much more talk about it than before the pandemic. The consequences of the lockdown have normalized

quite a bit the idea of people talking about mental health issues. The normalizing process of the topic facilitated respondents to start talking with others about their disorders, especially with young people.

Some respondents shared that they have never heard of social anxiety during their period in secondary school. Despite one of the respondents reporting, she was suffering from an early age of high school, she couldn't understand what she was passing through until she was 23. It appears that even everyday there is more talk about anxiety, there is still a taboo in schools and work, where many people don't understand what the disorder is at all. Some participants had concerns about sharing these topics at the workplace, because they feel that they can often get stigmatized and seen as a person who is no longer able to do his/her job.

It also came up that some solutions to extend the talk about social anxiety could pass through more desk research and thinking of a clearer message to address to different target groups to have a global better understanding of the phenomenon and strategies to help.

### How could you still get in touch with others?

For the group of respondents feeling secure and trusting, other participants are needed to manage a better interaction within the group, but also to social interaction in daily life to reduce the pressure and be able to create a trusting bond. Finally, the respondents think the project is a good idea to share personal stories from a common disorder such as social anxiety, and to raise awareness on the subject, especially for trainers which work with young people susceptible to developing social anxiety. However, some respondents share that for some people it may not work participating in the project depending on the disorder phases they are at the moment. Some respondents also find it a good idea to get to know more people who are suffering the same and probably could understand each situation better. Also, respondent (2, D) said that theatre is a very useful tool to work with insecurities and express us in a different way, so many people who suffer from social anxiety may discover an easy way to laugh and share with others.

## 3.3 POLAND

### Introduction

Makao conducted 2 interviews to better comprehend the experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic through youth. Both people interviewed had suffered from social anxiety and live in Warsaw.

Respondent (1, Z) attends secondary school and has been treated by mental health services for anxiety and she is still in psychotherapy. Although she currently feels a little bit better, she still has to deal with the daily presence of her anxiety disorder, especially avoiding public situations. Respondent (2, D) is 25 and he has suffered from social anxiety. During the pandemic he has become more aware of his deficits and consequences of doing things against them. He focuses

on virtual contacts, talks on zoom etc. because being with others in common space quickly makes him nervous and impatient. He felt, in social situations, a great tension, when he is with people he has not met for a long time, and he would like to impress them.

## Findings

The structure of the interview is divided into 3 sub-questions (each one with several sub questions):

What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

How could you still get in touch with others?

The findings for each respondent are explained below, sorted in the 3 mentioned sub-questions:

### Sub-question 1: What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked how their social life was before, during and after the pandemic, and whether they had had social anxiety in each of these periods. Asking for each time specifically offered the possibility to evaluate whether the pandemic has been a key element for the development of their anxiety disorders.

Respondent (1, Z) remembers that she was afraid because of being in a new school and focused on not being seen as shy and weird. At the same time, she describes herself as excited about making new acquaintances. Thinking back to the days of the pandemic, Respondent is worried to be seen as a freak, because, in March 2020, she felt a huge relief. She could stay at home, and it was ok. She also felt free to be herself and doing things in her own way. For her, the fear of virus could be managed easily, and she didn't miss social life, also because she lived with her little brother and sister. Nowadays, socializing is better than before for her. Many people from her school declared some kind of "social fear" after the pandemic. Some guys from her class claimed that they experienced depression episodes. She felt less like a freak, because she thinks that everyone can be seen as a little bit freak. She looks at people in a different way, even if she continues to avoid parties or something like that but, sometimes, she can talk with people and find the activity pleasant and safe. It isn't so obvious before the pandemic lockdown. Anyway, spending time with other people, is an experiment for her: for example, last week she went to the pub with some friends and she describes the night spent as "not bad time", but she experiences a strong tension, the same she felt every time she is forced to speak, or someone waits for her to answer. In these cases, she just wants to disappear.

Respondent (2, D) already suffered from social anxiety before the pandemic. His social life before the pandemic is described as really upsetting and he didn't fit anywhere. Now, thinking to his life, he says he was in a real depression, and he thinks that this disorder could be the cause of his social phobia. During the pandemic, he started to listen to

himself, realizing many aspects of his person, like his sexual preferences which he had avoided for years. He changed his therapist and focused on his thoughts and the way they influenced him. He started to write his thesis with a person, who is actually his partner. The pandemic period has been full of positive changes, and he didn't miss social life, because he didn't use to meet people, except for family members, and had deep conversations via internet with people who helped him a lot in discovering and understanding himself. Now, he cannot say that socialization is simple. Last year he started work in a publishing house as a corrector but doing it from home. He is still strongly afraid of being in public, forced to talk and touch other people. Crowded places make him totally panic. He tries to go out further at least twice a month, but he treats it as a challenge, not as a pleasure.

Sub-question 2: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

This sub-question aimed to know if respondents thought the subject is discussed enough in different areas (at school, at work, with family, friends...). We also wanted to better comprehend the process respondents had passed through to raise awareness of their disorder better. All interviewees confirmed that there is not enough talk about social anxiety, but with certain nuances in their arguments.

Respondent (1, Z) believes that social anxiety is not talked about enough, even though she believes there are more people around suffering from it, because during the pandemic we used to talk only by mobile or other devices. The pandemic made her start to talk more about the grounds of her disorder through Discord. The respondent shared that social anxiety is not very discussed in schools, even if, after the pandemic, in her school there are some workshops about the topic and the psychologist is working a lot about it. For her this work is very important to let people feel less alone and freaky and because it's much easier to cope the problem when people don't need to hide it. So, the pandemic has had some positive aspects for the girl, but she adds that some teachers believe students use the problem as an excuse, so there is no exhaustive comprehension of its meaning.

Respondent (2, D) reported that there isn't enough talk about anxiety, even if there are many available studies that support the idea of an increased social phobia after the pandemic. He has started to talk about his own disorder after the pandemic and, before that period, confessing his problem looked like as a terrifying experience. The respondent doesn't think it is talked about enough in primary schools, where we have learnt to judge each other. Many people think, for example, that people with social phobia should just try harder to stay in public.

Sub-question 3: How could you still get in touch with others?

This group of questions aimed to find out the strategies and tools developed by respondents to keep their social life as normal as possible. Questions were related to how the respondents managed to get in touch with others or what qualities they need to feel comfortable with others and better manage the challenges of anxiety. We also told participants about the STOP! Words in Progress project, so they can help with their thoughts in relation to the project.

Respondent (1, Z) shares that the project let her feel impressed and even moved. She believes that sharing stories about social phobia can be a great idea to get people to know more about the topic and, even if for her it would be a huge challenge, she would try to help herself and others. Actually, she is looking for adopting strategies to manage her difficulties, through psychotherapy for example or trying to set simple goals in social relationships and practicing (even if in some moments she just think to run away).

Respondent (2, D), at first, was scared of the idea of being on a stage, and he immediately thought “No never” but, at the same time, he recognizes the need he has to share his story, to listen to stories of people like his own. He thinks that, if good trust and security were created, the activity could become easier, even if he doesn’t know how to create a similar context because he rarely feels safe and trustful.

## Conclusion

### What is the respondent’s experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

The two respondents said they already had a little social life before the pandemic, and they didn’t miss social life during the pandemic. The girl has had some advantages, because she has felt to be not alone in having social phobia when the pandemic ended. However, she feels a great tension related to public situations which makes her sweat a lot, breathe with difficulty, and speak hardly. Now, she is doing psychotherapy and, even if sometimes it is frustrating, she is aware that the key is having patience for learning to speak with people and manage her anxiety. The second respondent, instead, totally changed his mind-set because he has had time to reflect about his own thoughts. So, even if the tension in social situations is almost the same, with a great body’s activation, he is more aware of his difficulties and of his goals. Both the respondents confess they haven’t had more difficulties in getting in touch with people than before the pandemic. The first respondent said she has felt comfortable and safe during the pandemic, because she was alone with her nearest people. The second respondent too doesn’t remember the pandemic period as a terrifying experience, but he said he has had time to focus on himself and he also had many deep conversations on the internet with people who have helped him with his anxiety. The participants, rather prefer to avoid crowded places and hanging with a lot of people, because they feel stressed and nervous with a strong body activation. All respondents experienced very similar physical reactions, such as difficult breath, muscular pain and tension etc.

### Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

Both the respondents answered that there isn't enough talk about social anxiety. The first respondent believes that after the pandemic there is a more normalizing approach to the mental illness, especially for social phobia and many people have started to talk about it. The second respondent, instead, has not found a major sensibilization about the theme, because in schools teachers are continuing to teach children to compare and judge each other. All the respondents have started to talk about their social phobia after the pandemic and they both have found that, when they have confessed their disorder, people have started to talk about their own one. For them, it's much easier to manage the anxiety when they don't have to hide it.

### How could you still get in touch with others?

The two respondents have different ideas of what can help people with social phobia. The first respondent believe that patience is the key to be more aware and to find the courage to practice, step by step, to get little personal goals each day. The second respondent proposes more tolerance for weakness and underlines the importance to recognize that in some moments people cannot speak, but they could use a written form of communication, because forcing them gives the opposite result. Finally, the respondents think the project is a good idea to share personal stories from a common disorder such as social anxiety, and to raise awareness on the subject. The first respondent is less worried, and she would try to perform on the stage even if she recognizes the great challenge for people who, like her, are suffering from social phobia. The second respondent underlines many times the importance to create a safe context to let people talk on the stage and he is very worried about the realization of a trustful space, but he also recognizes he needs to share his story and listen stories like his own.

## 3.4 FRANCE/MARTINICA

### Introduction

D'Antille et D'Ailleurs conducted 2 interviews to better comprehend the experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic through youth.

Respondent (1, A) is a 20-year-old girl. She has never been treated for social phobia but, before the pandemic, she used to spend much time alone. After the pandemic, she has noticed she needs much time for staying alone and, when she is in social situations for a long time, she feels a great tension. She doesn't talk about social anxiety with her friends or classmates, but she believes that sharing this kind of topic, can be very helpful.

Respondent (2, B) is a 25-year-old girl. She has never been treated for social phobia. She had a rich social life before the pandemic, and she sometimes forgets the pandemic has happened.



She uses to hang out with her friends and do many activities with them. She believes that talk about the disorder of social anxiety is very important and she has noticed an increased interest for the topic, which allows people to be free to not hide their difficulties. Regarding her personal experience, she has no difficulties in getting in touch with people, even if she prefers that others do the first step and start conversations.

## Findings

The structure of the interview is divided into 3 sub-questions (each one with several sub questions). The 3 main sub-questions were:

1. What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?
2. Is there enough talk about social anxiety?
3. How could you still get in touch with others?

The findings for each respondent are explained below, sorted in the 3 mentioned sub-questions:

### Sub-question 1: What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked how their social life was before, during and after the pandemic, and whether they had had social anxiety in each of these periods. Asking for each time specifically offered the possibility to evaluate whether the pandemic has been a key element for the development of their anxiety disorders.

Respondent (1, A) remembers that, before the pandemic, she used to see her friends at school or outside, when they went on outings. Anyway, she was alone most of the time.

Respondent spent the lockdown in her parents' house, she didn't see anyone except for her family members but, sometimes, she exchanged with friends via social networks.

Nowadays, socializing is a mix of before the pandemic and during the lockdown. She needs time to stay alone, more than before and she feels the need to disconnect from other people when she is in social situations for too long. When it happens, she also feels a great tension, with a strong desire of space and air.

Respondent (2, B) had a quite rich social life before the pandemic. She used to travel regularly, meet new people almost every day and do different activities with them like sightseeing, going to restaurants and bars, organizing karaoke nights etc.

During the pandemic, respondent (2, B) spent the first lockdown in her relatives' house with seven other family members, so she didn't really feel lonely. They used to play board games, cook together and do some gardening. However, she remembers this period as a huge challenge for her, even if she kept in touch with her friends via social networks, by texting and video calling.

Now, everything is getting back to normal for the respondent, because she can travel again, hang out with her friends, attend university in person and, sometimes, she feels like the pandemic has never happened.

Sub-question 2: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

This sub-question aimed to know if respondents thought the subject is discussed enough in different areas (at school, at work, with family, friends...). We also wanted to better comprehend the process respondents had passed through to raise awareness of their disorder better.

Respondent (1, A) believes that there is not enough talk about social anxiety and comprehension of the theme, even by those who suffer from it. She also thinks that the confinements and the pandemic have clearly increased the number of people suffering from social anxiety, even if it is not the only reason, but after that period, the world around psychological disorders is becoming more and more accessible and it has allowed people to talk easier with others about their own disorders.

Respondent (2, B) doesn't use to talk with her friends about social phobia and nobody has ever talked about it with her at school or at work. She said that she hasn't really noticed that more people are suffering from social anxiety than before the pandemic.

Sub-question 3: How could you still get in touch with others?

This group of questions aimed to find out the strategies and tools developed by respondents to keep their social life as normal as possible. Questions were related to how the respondents managed to get in touch with others or what qualities they need to feel comfortable with others and better manage the challenges of anxiety. We also told participants about the STOP! Words in Progress project, so they can help with their thoughts in relation to the project.

Respondent (1, A) shares that she has no precise strategies to get in touch with others, but she thinks that people, because of the roles of society, are not always interesting and an idea could be to create a context that would allow people to really be who they are. She proposes to mix groups of people who suffer from anxiety, or who have experienced it, and people who know how to overcome their anxiety easily. Thinking about the project, she believes that standing up on a stage could be very stressful for people with social phobia, but she has also said that people could easier open up if the context is safe.

Respondent (2, B) says she has not many difficulties in getting in touch with people, especially when they make the first step and start conversations. About the project, the respondent thinks that people struggling from social anxiety would find it difficult to get on the scene and to speak in front of people they don't know. It would probably be extremely stressful and some of them wouldn't feel comfortable doing it. On the other hand, maybe it

would help them to beat their anxiety and maybe after the session they would feel better knowing that they are not the only ones struggling with this issue.

## Conclusion

### What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

The two respondents are both girls and they are aged from 20 to 25. There are some differences in their answers.

The first Respondent, before the pandemic, used to meet and stay with people in some social situations, but she has always preferred the time spent alone. After the pandemic, her social life is changed. Nowadays she needs much time to be alone and, if she is surrounded by many people, she gets tense faster.

The second respondent had a rich social life before the pandemic and, even if the confinement has been a big challenge for her, she didn't feel alone because she was surrounded by her family. When the first lockdown ended, she has returned to her social life like the pandemic has never happened.

Both the respondents confess they haven't many difficulties in getting in touch with people than before the pandemic. The first respondent said she chooses to know a person when there is a good reason to do it and, when she has not that, she refuses to approach people. The second respondent, instead, says she usually meets people online or through her friends who introduce her to their friends, in fact she speaks with strangers only when they approach her and start the conversation.

### Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

Both the respondents agree about the importance to talk more about social anxiety disorder, because people who suffer for this kind of disorder would feel safer in sharing their stories. However, even in this question, there are some differences. The first respondent has not noticed an increased in social phobia in people after the pandemic and nobody has talked with her about the theme. The second respondent, instead, recognizes increased cases of social anxiety but, most of all, an increased interest for the topic.

### How could you still get in touch with others?

The two respondents have different ideas of what can help people with social phobia. The first respondent believes that if a person could know that many people are suffering for social anxiety, they would feel understood but, at the same time, it would be nice to create mixed groups to give people tools for managing the disorder. The second respondent proposes more tolerance, education, and sensibility about the theme.

Finally, both the respondents think the project could be very stressful for people who are struggling with social phobia. They also believe that, creating a safe context for the activity, the goal could be achieved and that sharing similar stories could be very helpful.

## 3.5 ITALY

### Introduction

As part of the STOP Words in Progress, NoGap conducted many interviews in order to better comprehend the experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic through youth.

Respondents can be divided into two main groups:

1. Three young women aged between 20 and 26 who are actually having a psychotherapy with Doctor Cheti della Fazia, who is a NoGap member, and they all have an anxious symptomatology before the pandemic and, during the pandemic, they all became more aware about their conditions and, most of all, they comprehended the importance of asking help to manage it.
2. A group of 17 youth, aged between 18 and 19, who all attend secondary school, and they are all classmates. They didn't suffer of social phobia before the pandemic and they have not had many problems when it ended, even if in some of them, it is possible to recognize diminished social abilities.

### Findings

The structure of the interview is divided into 3 main sub-question. Each main question has other sub-questions that NoGap has not used to encourage the free narration of each respondent's experience, without being too directive. Respondents have answered to the questions below:

1. What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?
2. Is there enough talk about social anxiety?
3. How could you still get in touch with others?

Findings are divided into students and patients, because the answers of each group are very similar through the members of the same category.

#### Sub-question 1: What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

At the beginning of the interview, participants were asked how their social life was before, during and after the pandemic, and whether they had had social anxiety in each of these periods.

Students before the pandemic had all positive social life, they often used to hang out with their friends and they didn't suffer from social anxiety. Only five respondents of this group (made by seventeen people) have reported few symptoms like the fear to be judged for their emotions and opinions and the fear to speak in public.

During the pandemic, students have spent much time with their families and for many of them it has been a pleasant experience: for example, one of the students with a quiet symptomatology has talked about it with her mum and she has helped her to become more secure. They all kept in touch with their friends using social networks or other devices, except for one respondent.

After the pandemic students have easily restored the social life, they had before and, many of them, have begun to hang out more often because they missed their friends, except for one guy who had never had social phobia and he has started to avoid parties and feels a great tension when his parents force him to hang out. One of the five respondents with symptomatology has felt more secure and free, while the other four have become quieter and more unsecure and they have begun to spend much time alone and to avoid social situations with many people.

Patients all had an anxious symptomatology before the pandemic with a strong difficulty to socialize with people.

During the pandemic, two of the three respondents, have perceived their symptomatology aggravated, but at the same time they have become more aware that something in their life must change and that they need to take back their life. The third respondent, instead, was quieter during this period because everyone was confined, and she didn't have to justify herself to others.

After the pandemic, all the patients have noticed several improvements in the awareness of their social anxiety. Although it is a positive aspect, they all have had several difficulties in their social life, for example going out, being surrounded by people was not so easy.

### Sub-question 2: Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

This sub-question aimed to know if respondents thought the subject is discussed enough in different areas (at school, at work, with family, friends...).

Students believe that there is not enough talk about social anxiety, because it is seen as a "taboo" in our society and some teachers don't care about it, for example some of them believe that student use it as an excuse.

Patients too all agree that there is not enough talk about the theme of social phobia. People have started to approach the topic only after the pandemic but, in many cases, they don't know or really comprehend this disorder. Anyway, people who suffer from social anxiety have begun to open up and ask for help.

Sub-question 3: How could you still get in touch with others?

This group of questions aimed to find out the strategies and tools developed by respondents to keep their social life as normal as possible. Questions were related to how the respondents managed to get in touch with others or what qualities they need to feel comfortable with others and better manage the challenges of anxiety. We also ask about the utility to talk about their own stories on a stage.

Not all the students have answered this question, except for three of them, the ones with the most important symptomatology of social anxiety. They all believe that if they knew that many people are suffering for social phobia it wouldn't be helpful for them. The proposes of this group of respondents include the organization of some studying group to give to the youth tools for managing the disorder, but also a more moderate usage of technological devices.

Thinking to the project, they say they wouldn't talk on a stage about their personal stories, but they recognize it could be useful to compare each other.

Patients have not answered at this question, but they all have chosen to start a psychotherapy to get skills and tools for managing their social phobia and they are finding several improvements.

## Conclusion

What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?

Patients:

All the girls already had anxious symptoms. The COVID pandemic has been a condition that has allowed greater awareness of one's condition of discomfort, but also an opportunity to ask for help. The Coronavirus pandemic has been a condition for feeling "equal" to others forced to close, isolate, and abolish social relationships.

Students:

Among the entire group of respondents (17 people), only 5 of them reported social anxiety before the pandemic. This small group, during the pandemic, has had time to reflect on their condition and some of them have asked for help.

For the bigger group (12 people) pandemic has been an opportunity to rediscover family values. Many students were destabilized by the absence of physical contact, and they have declared decreased levels of empathy after the pandemic. These respondents didn't have anxiety problems before the pandemic, so they have had mild repercussions during the pandemic, and they have restored the social life they had before easily.

In general, the pandemic affected aspects related to shyness, to the fear of judgment and to the socialization with new people.

### Is there enough talk about social anxiety?

Patients:

All three girls believe that this issue is not talked about enough, that there is ignorance on the subject and that it is not even talked about in the school environment.

Students:

All the respondents in this group believe there is not enough talk about social anxiety, because people are not interested in it and adults don't encourage social anxiety comprehension: for example, teachers often believe that students use social phobia as an excuse.

### How could you still get in touch with others?

Patients:

They felt the need to seek specialist help from a psychotherapist, because they couldn't find themselves tools for managing their disorder.

Students:

Only three students have answered this question. They all believe that if they knew that many people are suffering for social phobia it wouldn't be helpful for them. The proposes of this group of respondents include the organization of some studying group in order to give to the youth tools for managing the disorder, but also a more moderate usage of technological devices. They don't believe it was easy for them being on a stage and talk about their studies, even if they recognize the possible utility of the activity.

## 3.6 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The entire research includes 32 people from five different countries. Looking at the results of each national research the following general conclusions can be drawn:

1. Among the answers at the first question *"What is the respondent's experience of social anxiety before, during and after the pandemic?"* two groups can be identified.

The first group is made by those respondents who, before the pandemic, had a poor social life and they preferred to spend the time alone. When the pandemic started, many of them felt comfortable and safe because they felt free of other's judgement and they easily accepted confinement rules, without missing any social life. The pandemic, for a major part of these people, became an opportunity to reflect on their own condition and to become more aware of it, so they have begun to ask for help. The end of the pandemic has been a big challenge for some of them and they mostly report a great tension with strong physical symptoms of activation (sweating, increased heart rate, trembling, difficulty in breathing etc.), especially when they are surrounded by many people or imagine it. For these reasons, they have begun to avoid crowded place

and spend more time alone than before. On the other hand, some people have felt better than before.

The second group is made by those people who have never suffered from social anxiety. Before the pandemic they had a rich social life with a lot of friends. With the beginning of the pandemic, they missed the social life they had before but, many of them, have found pleasure in sharing activities and moments with their family. The confinement period has been difficult, but many of them have continued to talk with their friends using social networks or other technological devices. At the end of the pandemic, they easily restored the social life they had before, some use to hang out more than before, someone else is a little bit shyer.

2. Looking at the answers at the second question “Is there enough talk about social anxiety?” all the respondents agree that there is not enough talk about social phobia in our societies among several contexts. Many of them have noticed that, after the pandemic, there is more interest in the topic with a more normalizing approach to the mental illnesses in general, especially for social anxiety. Although respondents noticed small improvements, they recognize that social phobia is, until today, a taboo and people don’t know or comprehend what it really is. Only few respondents have heard about social anxiety in the secondary school, otherwise teachers often don’t believe students are ill. All the participants feel it is important to raise awareness of social anxiety among young people, so that they would feel understood.
3. The answers at the third question “How could you still get in touch with others?” are more heterogeneous than those above. People have different ideas of what can help them to get in touch with others. Some of the participants believe it can be helpful to know that other people are suffering from social anxiety to perceive to not be alone, others believe it is not useful because the need of having help would remain. They have different proposal, such as:
  - The creation of mixed groups made by people who suffer from social anxiety and people who don’t, in order to give to the previous one’s tools for managing the disorder;
  - Workshops, especially in the secondary schools, to raise awareness on the topic.
  - Creation of safe context where people with social anxiety can practice and find courage.

Regarding the idea of the project, all the respondents believe that talking about their own stories and listening to other’s stories can be very helpful, but many of them are scared of the idea to be on a stage and talk about themselves.



## 4. WORKING WITH CREATIVE METHODS

### 4.1 INTRODUCING CREATIVE METHODS

Generally, “creativity” can be defined as the ability to produce and detect ideas, opportunities and strategies that can be mobilised to find solutions, workarounds and apply alternatives to concrete situations or problems. On one side, it is perceived as inherent to human being in the form of “anthropological capacity” (Daskova, Poliakova, Vasilenko, Goltseva, Belyakova, Shevalie and Vasilenko,2020), but also as an acquirable skill (Alonso-Geta, 2019, p.8) that can potentially be developed by any human being through training and learning processes. That is, creativity can be stimulated, cultivated, and explored through a series of techniques, exercises and tools that constitute the creative methods. As creativity implies thinking outside of the box and searching for new perspectives and opportunities, the role of creative methods and processes is to accompany a person step-by-step in the building of a creative attitude and the capacity to employ creativity as to generate change and innovation. Attitude itself has cognitive, affective, and behavioural components (Alonso-Geta, 2019). In this sense, creative methods build a learning path addressing progressively these aspects as to gradually generate a creative attitude in a person:

1. On a cognitive level, the creative process stimulates the abandonment of preconceptions and beliefs that one has already acquired and significantly defines the way one thinks and acts. Therefore, challenging the beliefs and ideas is fundamental when using creativity, as it allows to operate on the level of the unknown thus cultivating new competences and skills to behave in this context
2. On an emotional level, a person needs to progressively become aware of the opportunity and added value to seek alternatives and build new processes, by highlighting the benefits and the real need to make a change in the specific context or situation.
3. On a behavioural level, an individual needs to detect and identify a specific positive outcome of the creative process, be it in the form of acknowledgment from others, positive self-assessment or the satisfaction of the result and the ability to complete the process.

Creative methods and processes are easily adapted and can be used in a variety of contexts, going from business environment and educational programmes to the field of psychology and mental health.

Taking all the above said into account, creative methods differ from any other work or educational method, as they simultaneously build new capacities and promote the act of change and transformation (be it on an individual or group level). Using creative methods allows one to work and “play” with a variety of perceptions and beliefs on concrete or fictional situations and enable the possibility to imagine, create and promote different outcomes and attitudes towards it. On an individual level, this fosters one’s personal capacities for problem-solving, analytical, and critical thinking and having a proactive attitude.

When brought to a social context and in relation with others, creative processes encourage empathy, improve dialogue and communication, stimulate conflict resolution and foster solidarity, teamwork, and collaboration. Therefore, depending on the specific field of interest and scope of work, creative methods can successfully be mobilised as to work to reduce and prevent the generation of prejudices, discriminative or even aggressive attitudes thanks to the capacity to analyse, deconstruct and transform preconceived ideas in the search of other alternatives.

## 4.2 LEARNING WITH CREATIVE METHODS

Both learning, and creativity are complex and dynamic phenomena that are in constant interaction. According to Goiovic (2014), the learning process has four fundamental factors:

- The diverse nature of the studied, considering the characteristics of the subject and the environment.
- The configuration of diverse and contradictory elements, needing to approach knowledge from different perspectives.
- The presence of the unforeseen.
- Learning incorporates the individual-society relationship, that is, it is both an individual and shared experience.

The model of learning through creative methods focuses on the process beyond the final result, thus allowing to make use of self-assessment tools that facilitate the development of metacognitive skills (Goicovic, 2020).

Taking this basis of the learning process into consideration, creative models allow to multiply the contents and information received as well as to closely observe the diversity of scenarios that allow to transversalise the learnings as to be used in a variety of contexts and situations. According to Capra (2008) a creative methodology is shaped by art, science, and fantasy: art fosters the development of skills, science the knowledge and fantasy the imagination, since it allows to make, analyse, self-evaluate, contrast, dialogue and create (Goicovic, 2020). In this sense, it can be deduced that different art and creative tools and techniques fundamentally stimulate personal development as they foster personal abilities and competencies that allow individuals to overcome situations in an autonomous and alternative way. Galvis (2007) proposes four basic components in the creative methodology: "methods, techniques, contents and resources" and he underlines that their goal is also to develop ideation processes, promote the application of divergent or creative thinking and create positive attitudes that allow to transform the environment with personal criteria.

It is thus intuited that, through creative methodologies, people are given the tools to have initiative and face different problems thanks to the descriptive and observational capacity that they can develop during the methodological process (Galvis, 2007), "allowing them to explore new paths, use information in another way and restructure their thinking patterns" (Bono, 1998). De la Torre (1997) "points out that by problematizing and stimulating

cognitive competences are put into play, by climatizing, social competences and by stimulating and estimating, affective competences, addressing in this way, creativity as a process in which the person is projected in the totality of its cognitive dimensions (knowing), affective (being) and effective (doing)" (Galvis, 2007).

As a result, creativity and independence seem to be interconnected, constantly stimulating, and enriching one another (Daskova et. al., 2020). Consequently, the fundamental role creative methods play when used as a basis of the learning process is to foster the achievement of the independent ability to think, act, observe and react in a creative way, all this constituting what is called "creative independence". Creative independence refers not only to the capacity to reflect in an autonomous rigorous way, but also to the ability to transfer the learning outcomes and experiences in a new, unknown, and different context or situation to make a change or resolve certain issues.

Finally, learning processes which are based or feature creative methods and processes prove to strengthen the generation of practical knowledge as they stimulate the transfer of expertise and information to be used, adapted and reviewed in different contexts to generate different outcomes. That way, learning processes combining creative tools and methods ensure that new competences gained are more easily transversal and transferable.

### 4.3 THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND CREATIVITY STIMULATION

#### Creativity vs. developmental psychology

Creative potential is an integral indicator in the personality structure and based on its research identifies eight main traits: creative thinking, curiosity, originality, imagination, intuition, emotionality and empathy, sense of humour and creative approach to the profession (Guilford, 1967).

Creativity can be seen as a natural human ability, available to humans from the earliest stages of life. We cannot link the development of creativity directly to the successive phases of human development, but rather, in addition to the individual characteristics, we can speak of life stages that favour an "explosion" of creativity and those in which it is extinguished.

Social context and the issue of social expectations have a fundamental role, and the individual gradually becomes aware of it while growing up. This may appear as a contradiction in a sense that society simultaneously imposes on one the pressure to develop personal potential, and at the same time orders that this creativity be kept within a certain, socially approved, framework. Every person (since childhood) is creative as creativity is inherent part of human behaviour shown through the desire to create. Unfortunately, this ability is very often drowned out, or individuals are told that they don't have it. Most of the adults enjoyed painting as children and contact with art (including theatre, music, dance) directly develops creativity. Being creative

gives the ability to deal better with problems and helps making connections and break down barriers.

### Why do we need creativity?

As a category of the creative process, some of the basic properties of creativity are:

- transitions of quantity into quality (development of spiritual values);
- shifts from the external to the internal world and from the internal to the external (inter-internal to external (interiorization and exteriorization));
- transitions from phenomenon to substance (verification of the result) (Wiszniakowa, 2016)

Creativity is an attitude that enables, on one hand, finding new aspects in what is familiar and close, and on the other, facing what is new and unfamiliar and, with the help of existing knowledge, to transform it into a new experience (Landau, 1969).

Encouraging creativity and stimulating innate inventiveness is particularly important in children up to the age of 5-6, as this period is the most decisive in determining whether we will have the desire to create in the future. Children learn to ask questions, look at the surrounding reality from different perspectives, create and implement their own innovations. Creating artwork is an opportunity to build self-confidence and self-esteem. By creating, the child develops original thinking, learns to take challenges and failures, as well as to be open to difference (Orr, 2021).

The basis of students' (aged 7-12) creativity is action or activity. It belongs to the group of psychophysical needs of the child. The comprehensive and harmonious development of the child requires own and multifaceted activity, especially one that stimulates creativity (Trempeła, 2020).

At the beginning of school education, the child - according to Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1936,1950) enters the period of operational thinking or more precisely, the so-called concrete operations (around 6-11 years of age) The operational stage, on the other hand, is associated with the achievement of the ability to solve logical problems by means of mental operations. Logic and concreteness are not allies of creativity, so this stage of development may contribute to the noticeable decline in originality.

### What's good for enhancing creativity?

In order to amplify creativity while working with children and adolescent, teachers and professionals should take into consideration:

- enabling participants to conduct broadly as well as narrowly experimental activities,
- helping understand that generating ideas is a process that requires space free from immediate criticism,
- providing opportunities to appreciate the importance of the various stages of the creative process and time,
- helping develop an awareness of the various circumstances under which creative ideas can emerge and an appreciation of the role of intuition,

- encouraging and stimulating participants to play freely with ideas and concepts, and to make conjectures about possible solutions to various problems,
- emphasizing the role of imagination, originality, curiosity, and questioning, strengthening those qualities that support youth's creativity (Zajac, 2022)

Creativity, however, is not exclusively the domain of young people. With the passage of time, the ability to create innovative ideas or solutions is not lost, although it is somewhat different. Most of us know creative activities are a great way to keep our brain active and alert, but they can do so much more. In fact, research shows creativity can have significant physical benefits. One of the long-term benefits of having a creative practice is its ability to prevent degenerative diseases like Alzheimer and Parkinson. Creative activities can also help lower blood pressure, alleviate anxiety, and increase levels of "happiness hormones" associated with a runner's high (Resort Lifestyle Communities, 2020).

#### 4.4 EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE METHODS

As previously mentioned, creativity is an inherent part of the human being and creative processes can easily be adopted in different areas in the form of social innovation, art creation, academic research, and social integration, among many others.

Before this panorama of different creative methods being available, this chapter highlights some examples of creative methods and tools that go in alliance with the perception of the personal and social value of creativity that allows generating efficient solutions to current personal and social challenges (Alfonso-Benlliure and Bellver Moreno, 2019) improving the individual's quality of life as well as personal and social improvement.

In the context of social education and intervention, art creation appears as a methodological tool that aims at improving people's life, foster social inclusion while stimulating social cohesion, culture of peace and dialogue (Alfonso-Benlliure and Bellver, 2019).

Art is a powerful means to foster dialogue and peace, as it is considered a universal language and a source for understanding other perspectives, beyond language, cultural and social differences. Art can directly nurture a peace process since it is able to provide a voice to marginalised or oppressed groups due to its transversality, often easy access, and production, whilst legitimising the process itself. It can create strong connections among participants through the shared (individual or collective) process. Moreover, it can serve individually to find creative alternatives to conflicts and issues that seem to have a single solution through the techniques of taking distance, review and reconsideration of the creative "product" or outcome. As for the creative aspect, art fuels and "cultivates" creativity in the way that it successfully allows gaining knowledge and abilities and stimulates the thinking and reflecting capacity and socio-emotional skills such as empathy, emotion management and awareness (Alfonso-Benlliure, 2000). Art also encourages people to communicate in an empathic manner (Pelato and Bellver, 2019), focusing on emotions, feelings, and experiences.

As a result of improving participants' abilities and skills, art and art creation appears to have a strong empowering potential which can be extremely useful while working with people with fewer opportunities and in situations of social exclusion and marginalisation.

### Art mediation

Art mediation is a tool to empower young people to express political and social opinions and, ultimately, a vehicle for social transformation. It was created with the aim of carrying out socio-educational interventions through artistic and cultural projects with people who are in a situation of social exclusion or vulnerability. That is, it employs the arts to foster social transformation and inclusion and community development (Moreno, 2016).

A fundamental aspect that characterizes Art Mediation as a creative method is the role of mediator and structure of the art mediation process. Art Mediation is a result of the combination of social education, art education and art therapy and aims with provisions of community art, community development and conflict resolution mediation. Concretely, art mediation uses art and art practices to stimulate creative thinking and perception on reality and different problems to foster social transformation. Art mediation appears as a suitable creative method to use in different social contexts as it successfully combines different disciplines and operates as a "bridge" between different social groups and their surroundings in a critical, transformative way. With this practice, necessarily carried out from neutrality, equidistance, and respect (Nató et al., 2006), the development of skills and personal growth of users is sought from empathy and empowerment, achieving self-knowledge, acceptance and human transformation (Paczkowski, 2020). Empowerment is defined as the "process that promotes and favours individuals, groups and communities with more power to achieve greater control of their lives" (Moreno, 2016). Through art mediation, people involved in projects can connect with themselves and express pain or discomfort through artistic practices and symbols and thus cope with the situations they live through empowerment and resilience development.

It is in the intersection between social and artistic education that allows art mediation to incite reflection on concepts such as:

- metaphorical expression: the expression of the "traumatic" situation in a metaphorical way allows the subject to move from the first person to the third person and gain distance from the experience
- the symbolic function: when an idea is represented artistically, we understand it better and are able to review and revise it from different perspectives
- Inter-disciplinarily: it favours integral development, connects knowledge and fosters critical and creative thinking

Alongside the development of resilience, art mediation is a strong tool to promote the empowerment of affected users and, therefore, to improve their self-care. An empowered person can recall what happened, and in this sense, art mediation allows affected people to connect with their past and initiate an introspective process through creation.

Rather than focusing on concrete results and specific tangible outcomes, Art Mediation aims at providing the conditions for a safe space for people to experiment and share, incentivizing in that way their creativity. While some guidelines can be given depending on the specific activity (workshop, training, etc.), no material and information is given regarding the content of the “product” and the facilitator’s responsibility limits to resolve doubts, accompany and motivate, but in no way suggest ideas, changes or verbalize any criticism regarding the content generated. Thus, the art mediation process gives the possibility to explore, adjust, think, and review in permanence stimulating the generation of ideas and solutions regardless of the specific final outcome desired or requested.

Art Mediation process can feature different art disciplines such as music, dance, theatre, circus, among others.

Amongst other techniques are storytelling, theatre of the oppressed, theatre and sung stories. All these techniques are described in depth in the following chapters.

## 4.5 HOW CAN CREATIVE METHODS BE COMPLEMENTED AND COMBINED WITH OTHER METHODS?

While creative methods can easily be used alone to stimulate creative thinking skills and independence, they can be interesting to explore and can appear very useful in combination with other non-creative per se methods.

As a result, the previously mentioned creative abilities and tools can be mobilised in addition to other methodologies that can add significant value to the desired outcome fostering creativity. That is, in regards to complex social realities where both internal and external factors operate, for instance lack of personal motivation and self-confidence, social stigma on a given behaviour and lack of support and network of organisations serving as bridges for dialogue, the combination of creative and non-creative methods into a holistic methodology can be useful as to work with different target groups improving both personal and group abilities to work on transforming the existing situations or conflicts. While creative methodologies can work, as the example below explains, on emotion management, introspection and the capacity to critically review traumatic or personally strong experience, creative tools foster the capacity to rigorously search for alternatives, solutions and strategies to improve similar or equally impacting situations. This chapter includes a short introduction of two of the possible methods used by the partners in the project, but many other non-creative methods can be put in practice in combination with creative methods depending on the scope of work, outcomes desired and characteristics of the target groups.

### Critical Incident Technique in combination with creative methods

One of these methodologies is the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). The basis of it is that each participant is invited to think and recover details of a specific situation where an action, attitude or behaviour has had an impact (regardless of it being positive or negative) to a specific result

or outcome (reaching a given goal or result, fulfilling a task, etc.) Concretely, CIT aims to "collect direct observations of human behaviour in a way that facilitates its potential utility in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles" (Flanagan, 1954). Therefore, this technique enables the understanding on how cultural frame of reference influences interaction and problems and it uses problematic experiences for learning and gaining tools to achieve solutions to these problems. Behaviours are analysed in the specific context of the incidents, which implies that they have a special meaning. This technique allows to express needs and expectations, to facilitate the solution of the practical problems raised (Balboa, 2008).

The fundamental methodological principles of the CIT are:

- Empowerment/development of intercultural skills.
- Reflection of the reciprocal nature of cultural differences and their role in generating conflicts.

This technique can be introduced within the Theatre of the Oppressed and Social Theatre, through the observation and representation of a problem we look for alternatives and answers to this difficulty.

Therefore, combining a concrete methodology such as CIT that seeks to work on solving concrete problems with one or more creative methods like Art Mediation or Storytelling can increase participants' capacity to search for unusual solutions and alternatives while carrying out an introspective process individually or in a group. In addition, using creative methods in combination with CIT can strengthen the capacity to identify and analyse the context, factors and beliefs that have operated in a given situation or experience and critically review available solutions or strategies for the future. In this sense, creative methods can enhance the transferability of knowledge and capacities gained that participant can interiorise and mobilise in similar complex situations in future.

### **Process Work or Process Oriented Psychology in combination with creative methods**

Process Work or Process Oriented Psychology (POP) (Amy Mindell, 2008; Arnold Mindell, 2002) is a method that integrates and uses contributions from various disciplines to facilitate the transformation and growth of individual and collective groups. This methodology is applied in different areas: community and organizational development, diversity and leadership training, individual psychotherapy and family relations, counselling, and group facilitation. Process Work focuses mainly on developing a state of consciousness by helping individuals and groups to realize how they perceive and live their experiences, learn to change their approach, and find the information which is not noticed or marginalizing and hence limits a person's ability to respond. Much of the information we need to transform ourselves and to grow challenges our ordinary consciousness. Without realizing it, we marginalize certain aspects of our daily experience: emotions, desires, dreams, intuitions, fantasies, moods, etc., because they come into conflict with our basic belief system or with the dominant culture to



which we belong. So, we do not give ourselves permission to hear or talk about experiences that are out of range of our ordinary consciousness and to receive signals and information from a non-ordinary reality. Process Work teaches us to connect with our deeper self and learn to be creative and flow amid extreme circumstances.

Process Work uses several tools such as Open Forums, Group Facilitation and Forum Oriented Processes.

Open Forums are democratic and structured meetings where everyone should feel represented. These events are facilitated following "deep" democracy, which means that it is a space to express the dreams and deepest feelings within a group since "... the conflict itself is the fastest way to create community..." They are public spaces that hold open discussions on community or social issues and provide an appropriate and safe framework for a community to know the diversity of ideas and feelings of the participants. Open Forums allow to:

- redistribute power and give importance to the mood of the groups
- talk about different unresolved or difficult to solve issues
- respond to the feelings of frustration generated due to mistrust or fear of the higher spheres of power
- challenge the hopelessness of achieving change
- rediscover the desire to train within and to experience the community

Group Facilitation is a set of technical tools and methodologies to create conditions for a successful development of processes that live in groups. Group Facilitation can contribute to:

- Improve the quality of group processes.
- Transform conflict into spaces for reflection and action.
- Reconsider the forms of organization in order to achieve group equality and ensure the fairness and balance of power.
- Encourage the participation and commitment of all people involved taking into account group diversity.

Process Work is an interesting and powerful tool that, in combination with creative methods, can both strengthen one's resilience, creativity and capacity to connect with the unconscious in a way that can be useful and explored in different areas of life.

Concretely, creative methods such as storytelling, art mediation or Theatre of the Oppressed's creative process can stimulate the detection, exploration and experimentation with one's desires, fantasies, moods in a conscient way and potentially mobilise them in a variety of contexts and situations. Process Work allows one to review one's behaviour critically and systematically in relation to different social conventions and expectations and consciously build an introspective path that enables receiving stimulation by external non-ordinary experiences and therefore liberates the creative potential.

## 4.6 OTHER CREATIVE METHODS IN THE TREATMENT OF SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

Excessive stress and anxiety have been shown to compromise physical and mental health (Morey et al., 2015). Furthermore, prolonged exposure to stress during childhood and adolescence can lead to permanent morphological changes in brain development, with the potential to negatively affect social behaviours and increase risk for the development of future psychopathology (Giedd, 2004). Recent clinical research has focused on the development of interventions to help these people.

There are many studies about elements of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)—such as graded exposure, regulation strategies or cognitive restructuring—to diminish symptoms of social anxiety. Still, the results of these interventions are variable, and though many include social competency components, interventions aimed at increasing social competence have not been thoroughly explored in relation to anxiety. For this reason, new studies have been focused on “creative methods and its benefits.

In the previous chapters we already focused on different techniques from the realm of performing arts. Find below two other possible approaches.

### Painting

The power of painting activities among people with SAD is shown in many studies; one of the most important research projects in this field is the one of Drexel University of Philadelphia (College of Nursing and Health Professions).

This study shows that painting can treat typical symptoms of anxiety, but also the most extreme ones, such as heart beating, nausea, and dizziness. Almost 75% of the participants have referred to an increased mood tone and less anxiety symptoms. This result does not depend on the beauty of the object/paper painted, but by the process itself. In particular, the actions of taking the brush, putting it into the water and moving it on the paper, but also the choice of the colours, have a positive impact on patients.

### Writing

In psychotherapy there are two main writing forms: the diary and the sporadic writing.

The diary consists in a sort of “life script”, a mirror, through which the patient can see its typical way of acting or responding to different life events and, in many cases, the strategies adopted are responsible for its deficits or symptoms.

Sporadic writing is very useful in anxiety disorder because it allows to build a thought, a reflection about those situations in which, otherwise, the person could have experienced a loss of control. By giving a written form to emotions, one can remain anchored to the present moment, better managing the anguish felt.

In both cases, whether within a daily diary or occasional forms of writing, thanks to narration, things and events can acquire meaning and find their place in the world. The person in the narrative process develops and refines awareness and self-knowledge, progressively recognizes the dysfunctional scripts that one implements recursively, elaborates events and places them in their evolutionary line, reformulates the sense of self by integrating the complexity of experiences, filling the fractures, and gradually clarifying the overall scene of its relationships, of the representations of itself, of its emotions.



## 5. THE POWER OF STORIES

We have been telling stories for a very long time. Humanity uses stories to pass on information: valuable information that helps us shape our lives, wisdom that enables us to give meaning or knowledge that helps us survive.

Stories have guided us through history. Religious stories, historical stories, folk tales, urban legends and even individual family stories all left a mark on us. We need them to keep the direction and meaning to our existence. That is why it is important to keep sharing stories. It is our *raison d'être*. Or, as Christien Brinkgreve writes in her book *Vertel!* on the power of stories:

*'People make stories, and stories make people: they determine the fabric of our lives and our identity.'*<sup>1</sup>

### 5.1 THE POWER OF NARRATIVE TRANSFER

Why do we need stories to convey information? After all, wouldn't it be more efficient to summarise everything in bullet points? Though this might be sufficient as a reminder, not much of the information will remain. Research has shown that most people only remember 10 to 15% of a presentation they listened to after a week. This percentage could be many times higher with a good story.

Besides research, we base this on an activity we often use in our workshops. We ask people to retell the story of Little Red Riding Hood. At first, not everyone is prepared to share the fairy tale, as they feel they don't remember it, but when someone starts the story, the whole group will help to bring the story to a successful conclusion. Everyone remembers at least fifty percent of the story. Moreover, the message of the story – the information that is transferred – is still fresh in their memory. Even after years, the information shared through the story of Little Red Riding Hood is still present in the memories of people.

A story sticks better than many other ways of conveying information. This is not only true for presentations at conferences or in classrooms, but also for stories in healthcare or information shared at birthday parties.

We explain how this can happen using two concepts: coding and resonance.

#### *Coding*

Coding simply means that a context has been created of known information and images in which new information is placed. The listener can link the new information to things they already know. This way, the information is stored in two different ways: as content and as part of a narrative. The information is, as it were, doubly encoded and is therefore much better remembered.

<sup>1</sup> Brinkgreve, C., *Vertel (Tell)*, on the power of stories, p. 151

### Resonance

In its physical meaning, resonance occurs when a vibrating object causes another object to vibrate in the same rhythm. This vibration can be much stronger than one would expect based on the impulse<sup>2</sup>. A good story works the same. The energy of a story resonates in the mind of the listener.

To understand this, it is important to understand that the story is only actually formed in the mind of the listener. The storyteller, by uttering words, only offers images that the listener translates into their own images.

For example, when a storyteller shares a personal story of a holiday experience they've had, the listener will form images in their head that are probably different from this person's experience – they were not there, after all – but they relate what they receive to images that they do know. The moment that happens it links feelings and emotions to those images. And while the exact memories of the storyteller and the listener are often far apart, those feelings often match. And at that moment, a feeling of connection and therefore understanding will be formed.

That is what we call resonance in this context and where the magic of sharing happens.

Personal stories resonate, but so do fictional stories. We feel the fear of Little Red Riding Hood when she meets the wolf or the relief when the Huntsman frees her.

## 5.2 THE STRUCTURE OF A STORY

Many books on storytelling begin with Joseph Campbell and his famous work *The Hero with the Thousand Faces*, introducing the hero's journey, which he published in 1949. A lot of narrative coaching is based on his work. However, he was by no means the first to write about story structures.

In ancient Greece, Aristotle said that stories must form a whole, with a beginning, a middle and an ending. In this, the beginning is that which has nothing preceding it, but is always followed by other events. The ending is the exact opposite: it is preceded by something, but nothing ever comes after it. The middle is that which has something come before it and is followed by something else.

These parts are connected in such a way that changing or removing one automatically leads to a change in the other.

This may seem logical, but that is entirely the point. A good story needs a logical structure.

Aristotle introduces two more concepts that relate to the turnaround, namely the entanglement and the denouement.

*To be precise: the part from the beginning of the play<sup>3</sup> to the cover is the entanglement and the rest, i.e., the part from the beginning of the cover to the end of the play, the denouement.<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle relates his theory here to tragedy and therefore uses 'piece' instead of narration. As far as we are concerned, and for the purpose of explaining a narrative structure, these terms are in this case interchangeable

<sup>4</sup> Poetics p72

Schematically, this dramatic construction can be represented as a mountain:

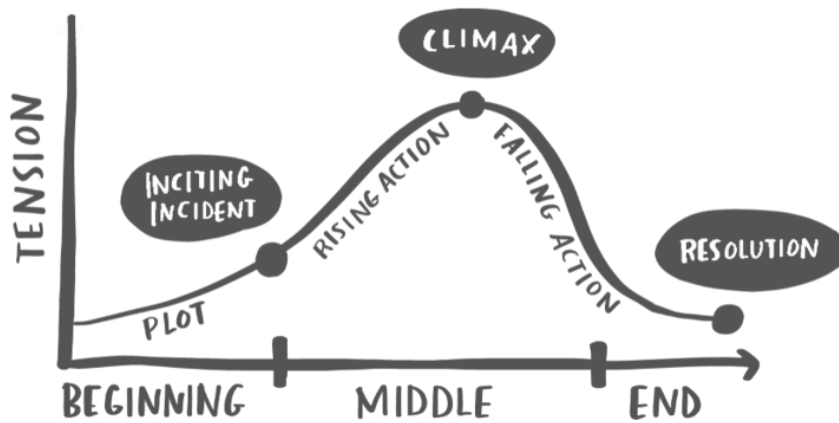


Figure 1 Dramatic construction of a mountain, by Aristotle

### Campbell's circle

Campbell introduced the concept of 'the hero's journey' in 1949. He argued that every story is a journey. More precisely, a hero's journey, by which he means a protagonist or main character. They go through a number of stages through which they gain wisdom and spiritual power.

Campbell distinguishes no fewer than seventeen stages that can be summarised in three:

- Separation or departure
- Trials and initiation considerations
- Return and reintegration into society

This can be represented schematically in a circle as in Figure 2.

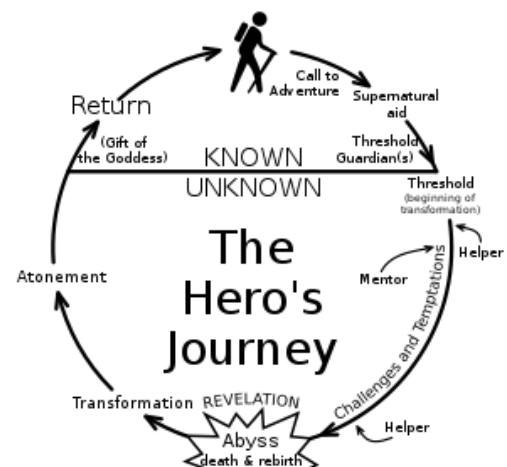


Figure 2 Campbell's Hero's Journey

In the *separation or departure phase* of the story, the hero is in the ordinary world and receives a call to go on an adventure. But in Campbell's work, the hero is hesitant to heed the call, until a supernatural aid helps them on their way and the hero crosses the threshold from the known to the unknown world.

The *trials and initiation phase* begins when the hero enters the 'special world', where he encounters challenges and tasks that they must solve alone or with the support of helpers.

In the end, the hero must overcome the greatest obstacle in their adventure and is rewarded with the ultimate gift. With this reward, the hero must return to their old world. Here, the *return phase* begins. Finally, the hero crosses the threshold between the two worlds again and re-

enters the ordinary world. Here, the true purpose of the gift is revealed, and the hero can use it to benefit his fellow men. This is what Campbell calls reintegration into society.

What is important is that the hero himself has been transformed by his journey: he has gained wisdom and spiritual power. This is also the basis of using stories in your own life for the purpose of personal growth. The hero's journey is a perfect metaphor. Every phase of life, however long or short, can be seen as a journey with a beginning and an ending and a change that has occurred. The hero has become wiser. Working with stories leads to awareness on the part of the narrator and recognition on the part of the listener.

**The serpentine line**

We simplified Campbell's complex journey of the hero into a structure of 'only' five elements, which we visualize in a serpentine line.

We assume that every story is a mental and often physical journey. Every story has a **beginning** and an **end**. The difference between the two is that the hero in the end situation is wiser and richer than in the beginning situation.

The **beginning**, which can start with the clichéd 'once upon a time', is also there to provide clarity to the listener, who, unlike the narrator, usually starts the journey blank. This means giving information about the hero, the situation, other people involved and so on. This does not always have to be in detail; it is mainly about the information the listener needs to be able to engage his imagination properly and follow the story.

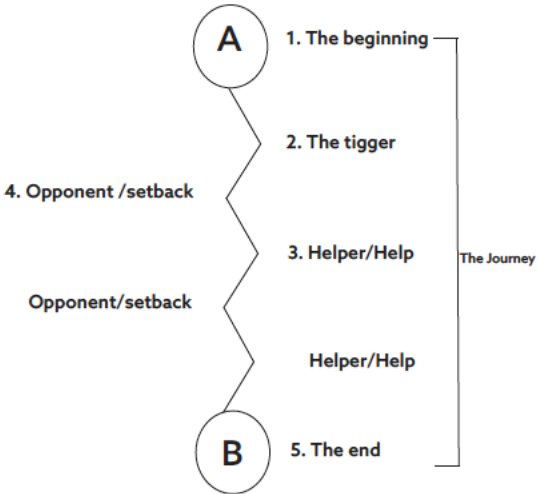


Figure 3 The Serpentine Line

The **end**, too, requires a description that is such that the listener clearly sees the lesson the hero has learned and the wisdom he has gained, in short, the message of the story. This does not mean that every story closes with the winged phrase: 'the moral of this story is....'. Rather, the famous show, don't tell applies here.

In between there is first the moment we refer to as the **trigger** or the **call**, the reason to go on the journey. This can be a question of an event. You can also use the phrase "One day". This clearly indicates a change in the starting situation.

The call is followed by the **sequence of events**. This is important for the transformation because lessons are drawn from all those events that together lead to the moral of the story. You can divide these events into two categories, namely those caused by **adversaries** and **setbacks** and those initiated by **helpers** and **assistance**. By adversaries and helpers, we mean people and by setbacks and help we mean things and phenomena. For example, a large impenetrable forest

can be quite a setback if you are a hero fleeing from an evil witch, as is regularly the case in the Russian Baba Yaga cycle<sup>5</sup>.

It is important to realise that these forces are not always external. You are sometimes your own greatest helper or adversary because inner character traits influence the course of the journey. A hero's perseverance can help them to reach the end of the journey, while their temper might stand in their way. This is true in personal stories as well as in fictional stories.

These forces are not only the catalysts of a story, enabling the narrator and the listener to give meaning to all its narrative elements. They also simply make a story exciting. Imagine that there is no help or opposition in a story. Is there still a story?

*Little Red Riding Hood is playing at home. At one point her mother comes in and asks her to bring a basket of biscuits to her sick grandmother. But she adds: "Stay on the path. Little Red Riding Hood does so and a few moments later she is at grandma's house. She delivers the basket, gives grandma a big hug and returns home.*

Apart from the fact that it does not make any listener, child, or adult, truly happy, it lacks an essential element: the transformation. Little Red Riding Hood is just as naive when she returns as she was when she started.

Here, something of the power of stories emerges very clearly. But there is more.

### The Personal, the Emotional and the Universal

Besides structure, every good story touches three domains: the Personal, the Emotional and the Universal.

We stumbled upon this years ago, when we came into contact with a simple but effective exercise: the Name Game. We have been using it ever since to start a workshop or training. We will describe the exercise first to explain the importance of the domains.

Pairs of workshop participants talk to each other based on three questions:

- Where did you get your name?
- Are you happy with your name?
- What is the deeper meaning of your name?

This exercise leads both to the animated sharing of stories and to the introduction of the three domains that must be represented in a story people want to listen to.

*Where did you get your name?*

<sup>5</sup> Baba Yaga is a mythical figure who appears in hundreds, if not thousands, of folk tales, especially in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The stories are at least 200 years old. Baba Yaga is a spirit or demon, who usually takes the form of an evil old woman, a witch so to speak.



This question opens the Personal Domain, that of the personal environment. It provides the context on which the narrator tells their story. It gives personal information that is unique for this person and tells the listener something about the context in which they exist. In the Name Game, this is the unique characteristic of their name and how they got it. Something that makes this person who they are.

Are you happy with your name?

This second question touches the Emotional domain. Here, information is loaded with emotion. Sharing emotions leads to empathy. Listeners can relate to the emotions the narrator relays. Maybe they, too, are happy with their name or some other aspect of themselves and they can relate to feeling this way. Common ground is found, something listener and narrator share.

What is the deeper meaning of your name?

With this question, we open the Universal domain: the information that is not shared with just the narrator and the listener, but that which is universal. This can include the universal myths, histories and meaning related to the name. This is the domain in which insights, knowledge and wisdom are transferred.

One domain can't do without the other. In the transfer of information, the three domains are between the narrator and the listener, or rather: the narrator has to pass through the three domains to reach the listener.

As narrator and listener are involved together in the process of story sharing, the listener, too, has to go through the three domains to reach the narrator. The narrator delivers information by means of transferring images and using a narrative structure, which in the listener's imagination is transformed into a story. On that basis, the listener reacts and sends information to the narrator, who in turn translates this into their story. This may lead them to change or maintain the way they transfer information.

This whole process can schematically be shown as seen in Figure 4. What this model makes clear, is that the narrator and the listener are part of one shared universe. If this is not the case, resonance is not possible. This does not mean that narrator and listener need to be in the same physical space, but in our experience, even interactive digital connections, such as Zoom, do not come close to interacting with one another. This does not disqualify other forms of (Digital) Storytelling. However, as we hope to achieve personal growth by sharing stories in this project, our focus will be on forms of storytelling with direct interaction.

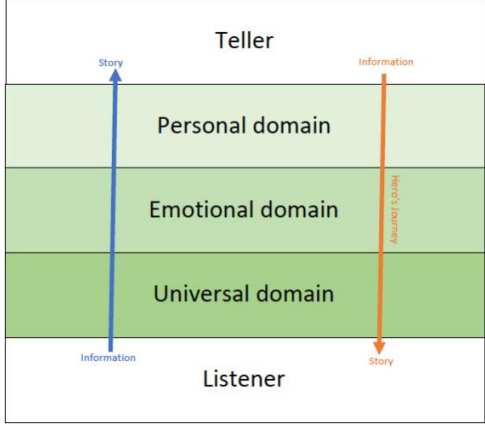


Figure 4 The three domains with interaction

## Translating the Hero's Journey into the Three Domains

The three domains and the hero's journey are not separate. They keep pace, each on its own plane in sharing a story. The hero's journey is the backbone of a story, to help make a story powerful and logical. The three domains provide the body. It is the meat on the bones or the packaging of the message. We are reminded of a short, old Jewish allegory about the naked truth that finds no shelter until it is enveloped by the story:

*Truth, naked and cold, was chased away at every door in the village. Her nakedness frightened the people.*

*When Parable found her, she was huddled in a corner, shivering and hungry. Parable, feeling sorry for her, picked her up and took her home. There she dressed Truth with Story, warmed her, and sent her out again. Dressed in Story, Truth knocked again at the doors of the village and was warmly welcomed into the houses of the people. They invited her to join them at their tables and warm herself by the fire.*

If we put this in the context of what we were talking about earlier, it is the universal value that proclaimed the naked truth, but did not reach the listeners. Only when you add the personal and the emotional domain, interaction, and the will to listen emerges.

All these elements are reflected in the hero's journey. The Personal domain is addressed in the beginning phase of the journey, where the context is provided in which the rest of the journey occurs. The Emotional domain exists throughout the journey, in the emotions felt when we meet helpers and adversaries and how we deal with them. The Universal domain is found in the meaning or lesson found at the end of the journey.

When you stick to the journey as a structure to shape your story and keep in mind the importance of the presence of the three domains in your story, experience shows that you will easily come to the creation of a story. Your own story or a fictitious metaphorical story; it does not really matter.

## Foundation for working with youth in vulnerable positions/suffering from social anxiety disorder: reminiscence and mental resilience

Our working method assumes that everyone can extract meaning from their own life and thereby increase the grip in life. This makes it easier to deal with unpredictability.

Living is learning to deal constructively with change and uncertainty, things we have no influence over. The use of stories to give meaning, to facilitate in that handling of change, is called engaging in the dramaturgy of life. This is opposite of taking full charge.

### 5.3 DRAMATURGE OF YOUR OWN LIFE

A dramaturge is someone who analyses and explains the meaning of a (creative) construction. Sometimes he or she also contributes content, usually textually<sup>6</sup>, to the creation of that structure.

Dramaturgy originates from the discipline that studies and describes theatre. From the classics, it is mainly based on the writings of Aristotle. There are links with literature and other arts, and recently the word has also been used in other fields, such as science and marketing communications.

#### Past, present, and future

It is a misconception that as a dramaturge, you only study and analyse the stories of the past. The future is also a story. In fact, everything is a story except the moment we write this, and by the time we get to the next sentence, that moment has already become a story again. We are made up of stories and our lives are made up of them. The Irish philosopher Richard Kearney, for example, writes about this:

*Storytelling is as fundamental to people as food. Even more fundamental, because food keeps us alive, but stories give value to our lives. They make us human beings what we are.'*

We are convinced that mental wellbeing and resilience benefit from constantly replenishing the collection of stories. These do not always have to be big, exciting, and adventurous stories. There is also value in small, seemingly insignificant stories. Just as it does not have to be all about positive stories. Even, and perhaps especially, stories about setbacks add lustre.

We base this, among other things, on our work with different minority groups. For example, we work with men in social isolation. They all have a migrant background and are usually over fifty. They share several characteristics: they have little social safety network because they left family behind in their country of origin. They may have built a family here but lost that environment due to divorce. They have all had blows from life, physical and mental, which has often led to psychological problems such as depression and feelings of loneliness. It is shared that the future is seen as one big black hole, to be looked forward to only with fear. Same counts for groups belonging to other minorities, amongst which sexual diverse groups, certainly in environments or countries where the opportunities for being yourself are under pressure. The fact that you are constantly oppressed may lead to a loss of stories, as many memories might be challenging. The fear that was build up in the past leads to fear for the future. Why would things get better if they prove to be quite difficult right now?

It is clear what is going on here mentally, but can we also look at it narratively? We already indicated that for these people, the future is not a story. When you start working with them,

<sup>6</sup> The term dramaturge is also used for playwright.

you find out that the past is hardly a story either. It has become a notion that events have happened, but there are no narrative links, so all meaning seems to be lost. All that remains is the present, which has become very empty due to the absence of the past and the future. Because of the absence of that charge, the story of the present has also been virtually erased and- as far as they know- no one wants to listen to it. The before mentioned Christien Brinkgreve describes this very powerfully in her book *Vertel, over de kracht van verhalen* (Tell us, about the power of stories). The value of stories can be even more fundamental: they can keep people from being erased. It is the ultimate destruction if you can no longer talk about what you have experienced, because people do not believe it, or are not interested. The story of some people under pressure hardly exists anymore. And so, they themselves hardly exist anymore. We can also simply refer to that situation as the survival mode. And that's how some people enter our programs.

Fortunately, often they leave our programs feeling very different. They leave as people who are allowed to be and who want to be active members of society again, as far as they are able. Their story is back. How do we do it? Without underestimating our work, the basis of what we do is extremely simple. Using what mankind has been doing for 135,000 years, we allow this group to rediscover their story. We start by retrieving the past, working on memories through various exercises and methods. At first, the emphasis is on the beautiful memories, but soon there is also room for the less positive events, the setbacks and resistance experienced. At a certain point, we bring these memories in the present. What do these memories mean for 'being' at this moment? What has dealing with these setbacks taught you? What has the help of others brought you? As we will describe further below, the *hero's journey* is a powerful tool in this process, because it maps and might give a very clear meaning to (part of) each person's life course.

We noticed that when the trust in the present- by following this method- has increased again, there is also room for dreams. Or the stories of the future. It is interesting to note that these dreams often initially remain modest and are mainly short term. As time goes by and the foundation is further strengthened, those dreams also become bigger.

Past, present, and future are brought back into line, as it were, providing a basis for taking action, small or large. If that story is subsequently listened to, it quickly gains in meaning and the narrator builds up mental resilience<sup>7</sup>. The narrator is allowed to exist again and thus has the future back.

## 5.4 THE ORIGIN AND VALUE OF MEMORY

The word remembering refers to a re-experience. The moment you remember a story from your past, you relive that moment. In line with what we described above about past, present and

<sup>7</sup> In narrative therapy, this is also called the definitional ceremony. Such ceremonies are rituals that acknowledge and enhance people's lives (White, p 135). Michael White writes extensively about this in his book *Narrative Therapy in Practice*.

future, remembering is the process of bringing the past into the present. The nice thing is that you can make your own choice in which memories you give place in the collection with which you pave the path to the future. The English word remembering offers an immediate insight based on a thought that has been developed within Narrative Therapy. Let us explain how you can deal with *re-membering*.

It is based on the idea that identity stems from an association of life rather than from a core itself. This association has the most important figures and identities of a person's past, present, and future as members (White, 1998)<sup>8</sup>. We decide for ourselves who can become members of this association. In other words: which memories we take with us. This is called *re-membering*, a valuable corruption of *remembering*, which- if you reflect on it for a moment- can lead to countless new insights and perspectives. It contributes to the development of a polyphonic sense of identity- which is diametrically opposed to the single story we deal with in the next paragraph- and lays the foundation for giving meaning to one's own existence and creating coherence by ordering life. By *re-membering* we can give life a form that extends to the past and the future (Myerhoff, 2019)<sup>9</sup>.

Someone is, in a way, the administrator of their own association. You determine which memory comes through the selection based on suitability: containing more than only an anecdotal meaning and value. Certain memories will not make it to the finish line because they may be precious but also insignificant. They may rest in the past. Others get a place in the construction that forms your identity and deserve to be better portrayed. We also refer to this as the narrative identity.

### The danger of a single story

In line with this basic idea of deciding yourself what is part of your identity and what's not and the influence of narratives on that process, it is important to talk about one key aspect that might endanger someone's wellbeing in the short and – mainly- the long run. We are referring to the so-called single story. With single story we mean putting the full focus on just one story. In applied storytelling, we are mainly using the term 'single story' when talking about defining identity from just one identity story. This is sometimes the case with minority groups. Because part of their identity is under pressure- or they feel that their identity is under pressure- they reduce themselves to this part. We encounter this, for example, in LGBTQI+ groups, especially in countries and cultures where sexual diversity is less accepted and appreciated. Though it can apply to all people in vulnerable positions. This group is in danger of becoming a file. Their identity is reduced to the problem/s and/or one event they are struggling with. All other identities and character traits are subordinate to this. When we deal with youth with social

<sup>8</sup> White, M., *Narrative Therapy in Practice*, p. 109

<sup>9</sup> Myerhoff, B. Life history amongst the Elderly, Performance Visibility and remembering. In Ruby, j. (red.) A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive perspective in Anthropology, Philadelphia 182, P111

anxiety disorder, we are also dealing with youth in a vulnerable position and the single story lurks.

The single story is closely linked to and can easily lead to victimization. The moment you reduce yourself to one identity or file and start behaving accordingly, you can quickly disconnect with others. If you then connect with others who limit themselves just as much, an in-group will soon emerge that only opposes the out-group. Especially, if that in-group belongs to a minority group, a feeling of misunderstanding may arise. Then victimhood is lurking. Nothing good generally comes from being a victim, but good things can however come from a position of strength.

Here, we see how important it is to make people aware of the potential danger of the single story and how easy it often is to use stories, to address and express other layers of a person's identity. This allows you to contribute to strengthening others and their personal growth with stories.

Attending a good storytelling workshop can lead directly to self-awareness of this phenomenon we call the 'single story'. When we tell our stories out loud, we also get the chance to hear our stories with our own ears. Obvious right? However, when these stories remain in our heads, we only perceive them with our mind's ear. The mind can then play its dirty tricks on us and sends our inner narrative on a feedback loop, telling and repeating the old habits which we happen to feel comfortable with. We cannot grow.

### **Mental reserve**

When you start working with stories from the past, finding the truth is not the goal. It is about personal experience. This principle applies to all memories and the meaning they carry. They are added to the present from the past and can thus feed the stories for the future. In this way you build up a mental reserve.

But what if there are hardly any memories in the past to retrieve? From working with various groups in 'vulnerable' positions, we know that the past – and especially the recent past – often does not bring back such beautiful memories for these people. Neither the past nor the future has any value to them. They are in survival mode, particularly because the parts of the brain where the outlook is created, the imagination is generated and with which we can think of solutions, no longer receives signals and thus becomes inactive.

When we work with storytelling, we bring back the stories from the past. We do this by naming the meaning of those memories and translating them into the present situation of the narrator. The narrators start to realise how they have been shaped by those stories and how they can learn from them for the present.

### **Traumas**

It is important to reflect briefly on trauma. This is a complex subject and belongs first and foremost to the field of psychiatrists and psychologists and not to storytelling coaches like us.

Yet working with stories is connected to trauma and it is good to put it in the context of the above. Sharing stories honestly and actively exploring memories

can also touch and revive traumas. Perhaps the sharing of stories can subsequently also contribute to processing or giving the trauma a place, but that is really the work of specialists. What is clear is that trauma makes a journey to the past impossible for some. Memories linked to it can be too painful, which can even lead to an entire personal history being contaminated, either because it is reduced to the traumatic event(s) and other memories are suppressed, or because any confrontation with the past is avoided. In these cases, forced storytelling is counterproductive and can even be harmful.

If you are open to working with your own story, then this can provide a personal strengthening that enables you at a certain point- preferably under professional guidance- to work with that trauma.

### 5.5 THE JOURNEY AS A METAPHOR

To gain insight and give meaning to your memories, it is important to map them in some kind of structured way. The hero's journey, as introduced before, is an excellent tool for this, as it makes logical connections clear and supports an analysis on that basis. In order not to make it too complex, the simplified version is a good start for recording one's own memories as journeys. To do that properly, you only need to describe the five elements of the journey and add their meaning.

It helps to visually follow the structure of a journey as shown in the example in Figure 5.

You can answer specific questions for each section. These questions are a guidance (but not obligatory) and focus mainly on the imagination of the situation. They are aimed at recalling images, but not at interpreting and analysing them immediately. That only happens when the whole is overseen.

The moment you answer (part of) these questions, a clear picture emerges of the journey you have made within the memory. By just observing it at first, the logic and thus the meaning of the different elements of that journey usually becomes clear. The next step is to use this observation to carry out an analysis, by asking yourself questions beginning with 'What did ... mean to me?'

For example: what did the setback of losing a good friendship mean to me? Or: what did the perseverance I showed at that moment mean for the course of the journey at that moment? These are observations that can usually be extended to other moments in the past. After all, a

schematic representation of the journey

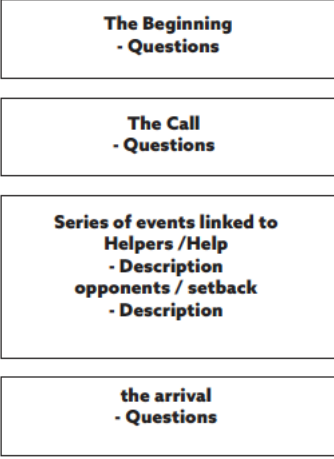


Figure 5 Schematic representation of the journey

memory never stands on its own. The perseverance you observe in one memory is probably a strength that has saved you more often and therefore a quality to build on.

The key concept in this analysis is transformation. Every (good) story is about change, internal and external. It is important, when mapping memories, to interpret the change. This can be done by asking questions such as: what have I learned from the event in the memory? What insight have I gained and how has this affected me?

This is the basis for working with the youth in the Stop Words in Progress project.



## 6. SUNG STORIES: set a text to music

### WHY SUNG STORIES AND SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER?

Social Anxiety Disorder is a disorder characterized by an intense and persistent fear of facing situations in which one is exposed to the presence and judgment of others for fear of appearing incapable or ridiculous and of acting inappropriately. The pathological core of social phobia is represented by a marked sensitivity towards the judgment of others; the social phobic fears of being observed and of becoming the object of ridicule by others, or that his own actions may expose him to negative evaluations.

Many artistic-creative activities allow experiencing personal and intimate aspects, otherwise difficult to know.

Through the creation of sung stories, the role-play is encouraged to promote integration and develop effective communication.

The context of the stage allows to try new cognitive and behavioural reactions, experiencing another self in feared situations, which can be faced through the creative process and the use of unusual communication channels such as the use of the voice as a tool, rhythm, and body mobility: in this way communication is facilitated at all levels, overcoming emotional blocks, experimenting non-verbal communication.

The creative process authorizes the expression of one's identity, making it a de facto therapeutic mechanism. Music is a very common passion among young people, and it is therefore easy to bring them into a state of greater concentration and concreteness. Furthermore, the vibration of sound, as music therapy teaches, can reactivate the "feeling" and the connection with emotions. Finally, the mechanism of improvisation often highlights talents and propensities that can turn out to be very rewarding expressive channels in the future.

Therefore, the sung story methodology is particularly useful for those with social anxiety problems, relationship difficulties, discomfort in expressing their opinion or public speaking.

### 6.1 INTRODUCING SUNG STORIES

Text and music are two entities that can blissfully survive even in their solitude, but the process that leads them to intersect to become a single and coherent channel of expression can add an almost deeper character to these media. "Text" is used here as a simple reference to words or phrases and is not connected in any way to singing or to a specific harmony, even if recitation or simple reading can obviously activate pseudo-melodic mechanisms. But what is the connection of pure text with music? For example, two musical instruments have obvious references to lean on, some of which are even scientific as frequencies and waves.

A text on the other hand, ideally separated from the sound, where does it meet the music? From a logical point of view the two essences do not seem to have any point in common; yet a

kind of magic interaction seems to take place on several occasions. It is a real alchemical process. The connection we perceive, often the result of purely unconscious processes, seems to pass through synaesthetic bridges or cultural / experiential associations (a drum roll under a text such as "Ladies and gentlemen" for example), but fundamentally it escapes a clear and objective definition. The resonance between text and sound is in fact realized in bubbles of creativity and mechanisms that belong more to the metaphysical sphere than to the rational one. We are in the ambit of those spheres, as fascinating as they are inscrutable of art.

Tuning words to music as we could tune a viola to a piano makes the content more evident, expressive, and receptive. The composition and music procedures, however, can also be decrypted and structured using techniques that can facilitate the interaction.

As mentioned, reading a text will never be completely free from melodic, rhythmic or timbral nuances, but we would like to work, as well as on purely musical bases, also on instinctual and subjective associations coming from the words themselves. One of the best tools for opening this door is the improvisation process. Improvisation manifests itself in a personal and authentic activity and expresses us directly and without filters. In a nutshell, it is a state of mind in which we empower ourselves and value the potential we represent. Improvising, in addition to being a wonderful gift to our identity and uniqueness, immerses us in a stimulating creative process full of surprises. We, the text, and the music become "one" making the three elements resonate in a coherence that inevitably becomes a powerful channel towards others.

A text can be sung, read, or recited and with different methods integrated with music.

The approaches can also mix with each other, depending on the attitude of the performer, his abilities, and the expressive goal to be achieved.

## 6.2 FOUR APPROACHES

### 1. The song

Creating a song is one of the best known and most popular ways to link a text to a music.

However, we can also say the opposite, that is to link a piece of music to a text, or even make them come together.

The classic verse / refrain structure is the most common but not the only one. The complexity of a song can push itself to a certain refinement, such as in progressive music or jazz, until it becomes something more distant like the opera. Traditional song, song writing, pop music and rap are some of the classic forms that can be referred to when setting a text to music. Those with a predominantly rhythmic character (hip hop, rap) have a greater chance of accommodating less organized sequences of words.

Here, in addition to exploring different genres, the focus is on the process through which we build the piece. The structure of the text on which the music will then be crafted with the choice of expressive criteria linked to the sentiment to be expressed is key.

*To whom does the precedence go, to the text or the music? What is a priority? Who fits?*

To ensure that text and music meet it is key to find a satisfactory synchronous.

If the text doesn't have a typical structure, it could have to undergo many changes to be able to adapt, but it is still an interesting work that stimulates the ability to synthesize and structure the text in poetic forms. A text already formatted obviously facilitates the realization. Then, you look for a sound, a genre, suitable instruments, and you compose the song looking for an atmosphere, a melody and a rhythm that resonates with the message you want to convey. It is really fun to play with rhythmic backgrounds, the greater ease of inserting words quickly gives a satisfying sense of the composition in progress. It is interesting, passing through improvisation, try to write and play lyrics and music together. It can be done individually (same person playing and singing) or in a group. Here the two lines go together, and even if the process of getting involved is challenging, we often arrive at a harmony, full of creative ideas.

Having established the type of creative process that we intend to follow (starting from a text already formatted or without structure), we can create indicative paths on the various realization possibilities. The path we will choose will be among those experimented in the workshops made together, drawing on musical composition techniques that we will practice first in a generic way and then in the specific case of the song we want to make.

## 2. The reading

A text read on a musical background.

Here is the search for atmosphere, a musical setting that can accommodate the acting without overpowering or disturbing it. There may be interrelationships (breaths of the text with emphasis of music for example) but basically, they are two independent lines united by an aesthetic sense. Choosing which music to use can strengthen communication and make listening more emotional. The reading mode is excellent for accommodating an acting performance.

It is a technique therefore to enrich, to make a full and evocative story that otherwise would be rawer with the voice alone.

In this context, the expressive possibilities are closely linked to the environment, coordinating the narration through music. Specifically, during the labs, we will work on the perception of the atmosphere created by the story itself to find the music and the sounds that realize an expressive consistency.

## 3. Storytellers and ballads

This is a traditional technique with a more cultural than musical character. It has a very catchy impact and almost always expressed in rhymes. The text is a captivating play on words on repetitive music that has the task of embellishing, emphasizing and sometimes enhancing the contents. It is difficult to adapt a prose to this type of composition. Therefore, it is better to write it specifically. The genre lends itself very well to satirical, ironic, protest, sad or even very romantic texts. This structure often sustains itself well, even on its own, without real instrumental music. Clapping hands, snapping fingers, up to the

most modern body-percussion are some of the sound supports that can enrich the story sung in this form.

#### 4. Free structures

Music, to accompany a text, can also distance itself from the structures described above to free itself melodically and rhythmically in a flow that follows the story as if it were itself a story. This approach obviously requires a lot of synchronicity work but has a very high ability to adapt to the text. It also welcomes opera singing and the “musical” style approach, allowing its extension and freedom of expression. The music then follows the story, the text is free, and the music will take its shape. A bit like a reading but with more connection, more relationship. The play of volumes, the pauses, the underlining’s, the accents, the rhythmic changes do not recognize themselves in a pre-established genre, but all aim to expand the sensory panorama step by step following the story. The free structures can accommodate dialogues, monologues, recitations of various kinds. Theatrical approaches find here a good basis for enriching the acting with sensations.

The possibilities just described can be mixed on several levels. The nuances are as infinite as those of a story. In the case of diversified works, it is possible to vary the approach according to the different texts. In any case, it is convenient to have a basic coherence to create a concept that acts as a common thread.

## 6.3 IMPORTANT ASPECTS

### The value of silence

Silences are not all the same. What differentiates them is the listener's state of mind, mainly influenced by what he has heard before and what he expects later. Therefore, silence, continuously resonating with something else, brings with it a background that plays an essential role in the communication technique.

The creativity process in this case can be guided alternating text with music or sounds and silence. Silences must be valued and used with the awareness of their power. In this game, the text without music may take the form of suspension, tension, rest, or ending depending on the kind of music and vocal expression that was immediately before it.

Music can play with silence, like the lyrics themselves. Words and sounds can overlap, alternate, to silence both with effects that sometimes seem to give even more voice to the message. There is no such thing as total silence; the nuances can be so subtle that barely noticeable sounds can be perceived as silence. Every sound carries with it a part of silence that should be considered as an expressive tool. Pauses and silences shape the story as much as the music. Indeed, silence itself is music.

### Vocal timbre

Probably the most personal, subjective, unique character.



It will be the objective to find a connection not only between the text and the music but also with the timbre.

When the author does not necessarily have the right timbre to read his text, the roles can be interchanged. Music can call timbres, but it is also possible to search for the right music for that timbre.

### The vocal technique

The literature is full of techniques aimed at improving the use of the voice. Singing, acting, theatre and body / voice approaches are studies that help vocal and communicative emission. Greater mastery allows you to manage more expressive modes, perfect pronunciation and enhance the volume where necessary. Deepening the technical aspect makes the voice more stable, less influential, and more centred on what you want to express.

Vocal development is assisted by the physical perception of oneself, of the motion of the body. The techniques that can help this development are also the proprioception techniques that allow you to face not only the creative phase but also the performance on stage.

### Writing texts

Music, as mentioned, can adapt, but sometimes, as in the case of the song, the lyrics must be re-written to fit into a more rigid structure. It is an interesting process but if the story is already written in the musical form for which it is intended, the result will be more immediate. Therefore, composing with the awareness of the story music development can be one of the ways.

Rhymes, stanzas, refrains, poems, underlining words, phrases with an intrinsic rhythm, repetitions, are just some ideas that can open doors to facilitating musical interconnection.

## 6.4 HOW TO DEVELOP A LABORATORY EXPERIENCE

The path can be varied and must inevitably adapt to the personalities of the target groups, their abilities and the moment that comes from the laboratory experience.

We list some aspects that do not necessarily have to follow a chronological order, but which represent tools to which attention should be paid to the need.

Since the target group is not made up of professionals, it will be our responsibility to find a balance between technique and spontaneity, between effort and flow. An excessively didactic study cannot give evident results in such a short time and risks contaminating the authentic and emotional expression of the target. Structural work must be balanced with creative work, always seeking objectives within reach without excessive stress.

There will be paths focusing both on individuals and on groups.

The improvisation exercise can be particularly formative, to draw on authentic expressions as already mentioned and make the exhibition a true artistic experience.

- Voice training (control, expression, acting)
- Exploration of the available music system (instruments, skills, etc.)
- Focus on the concept you want to keep
- Writing texts. With or without referring to a musical solution
- Musical composition simultaneously (improvisation) or after the production of the story
- Adaptation of the music and / or text
- Test the reproducibility of the result achieved (for the show. With the use of audio and video shooting techniques that can highlight the most delicate points on which to draw attention when reproducing the creative process).

## 7. THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED AND ITS CREATIVE PROCESS

As previously mentioned, theatre can be used as one of the art tools and techniques for art mediation in the form of social or community theatre. More specifically, the methodology of Theatre of the Oppressed reunites several techniques and methods (such as games, exercises, and theatrical tools) that actively stimulate creativity and can be used in a variety of contexts and within a wide range of target audiences. Theatre of the Oppressed is a methodology developed by Augusto Boal in the 1970s with the aim to use theatre as a tool to critically observe and analyse situations of oppression and collectively research and elaborate strategies and alternatives to transform this reality. As this publication includes a chapter focusing exclusively on Social Theatre, the focus here is put on the creative process carried out thanks to Theatre of the Oppressed in its different forms and phases.

Creativity in different forms is stimulated through Theatre of the Oppressed, putting emphasis on some key aspects and processes that stimulate creativity in different forms such as: the process of construction and creation of the play, the group dynamics created and promoted and the group accompaniment by the joker or Kuringa.

On one hand, the way Theatre of the Oppressed builds the creation of a play features a series of techniques and main aspects that can be identified as triggering one's creativity.

Often the choice of theme for a Theatre of the Oppressed passes through a series of activities marked by some fundamental elements that successfully stimulate people to become more creative.

Firstly, the identification of subject is usually a collective process that goes through a group dynamic of mutually sharing stories to each other, inviting people to employ their skills in storytelling. This also helps to actively work on self-awareness, emotion recognition and representation through personal experiences, which not only stimulates the creative process, but also has a positive effect on one's well-being (Alfonso-Benlliure, 2019).

Secondly, participants are invited to work on co-creating one single story out of all the inputs received in the group. This aspect is fundamental as it simultaneously works with active listening, brainstorming, problem identification and redefinition. The last two ones constitute what Alfonso-Benlliure (2000) calls creative thinking skills and allows the transferability and usefulness of knowledge beyond the current situation and context. In relation to this, the creative process of Theatre of the Oppressed goes beyond the process of creating a play, but also during its presentation and engagement with the audience through Forum Theatre. This technique allows the spect-actors<sup>10</sup> to engage in a process of problem identification and

---

<sup>10</sup> A term used in Theatre of the Oppressed to highlight the role of the audience as not a mere observer, but active participant able to replace an actor at any moment and try a solution to the proposed problematic as to search for a different outcome.

redefinition, as the debate and dialogue facilitated by the Joker or Kuringa invites to apply analytical skills to 1) identify the issue, 2) detect a necessity related to it and 3) think critically on how it can be changed or solved, searching for new ideas and receiving different outputs from the rest of the participants.

In addition, the necessity to negotiate and discuss different ideas, often challenging the individual beliefs and the status quo is what De Bono (1972) calls “provocative operation” and increases the capacity to think out of the box and be able to perceive different perspectives.

Finally, to enable a co-constructive creative process to elaborate a creative “product” (in the case of Theatre of Oppressed this being a short play or scene). Previous work on group creation, cohesion and dynamics is fundamental and progressively works with creative techniques and tools to stimulate participants. Theatre of the Oppressed techniques and exercises can perfectly be connected to the idea of learning and experimenting through playing due to their nature and even Augusto Boal (2002) himself refers to them as “games”. Playing allows to significantly relax the cognitive centres of decision-making (Alfonso-Benlliure, 2000) and leaves spaces for experimenting, investigating, exploring where creativity emerges. Game-based teaching and work enables the capacity to improve the use of the imaginary and unusual and unlock what De Bono identifies as lateral or “wild” thinking, allowing to connect to the absurd, illogical, and unexpected. In the context of Theatre of the Oppressed, this is constantly stimulated using improvisation, de-mecanisation techniques, among many other tools.



## 8. WORKING WITH DRAMA

Applied drama is an interactive method of working with a group, which is based on playing roles. During playing roles, participants learn to use new strategies without having to bear the real consequences of these behaviours (Gudro-Homicka, 2015).

Using theatrical techniques, i.e. improvisation, body work, music creation, role-building, Forum Theatre, we stimulate participants of drama classes to fully engage at all stages of work with the issue: defining it, looking for solutions, drawing conclusions.

Attendees are involved in the creation of drama workshops by choosing issues which are interesting for them. These can be issues related to disability, addiction, violence, or the fear of being ridiculed. Drama can be applied in such areas of youth work as:

- cyberbullying,
- psychoeducation,
- career counselling,
- development of creativity,
- discrimination.

### 8.1 STAGES OF WORKING WITH DRAMA

At the beginning, by proposing various exercises, i.e. funny improvisations, work with narration, monuments, games and activities, participants look for appealing areas of work. Thanks to this, group resistance to actively participate in classes are minimized.

When the problem is determined, there is a phase of deepening it. The techniques of, for example, a hot seat or the Image Theatre are used then. *Hot seating* is a **drama strategy in which a character or characters, played by the facilitator or participant, are interviewed by the rest of the group**. It invites other participants to recount a specific event, explore motivation and multiple perspectives/experiences related to a theme, topic, event, or idea within a story. In *Image Theatre*, on the other hand, participants rapidly sculpt their own or each other's' bodies to express attitudes and emotions. These images are then placed together and 'dynamised' or brought to life. The method is often used to explore internal or external oppression, unconscious thoughts and feelings.

Both these techniques increase the insight into a given situation.

This phase is followed by the generation of solutions. By participating in techniques such as Forum Theatre, boxing ring, working with role cards (described further below), workshop participants assume roles and look for solutions.

As stated in the previous chapter, *Forum Theatre* engages the audience as part of the performance, making them spect-actors.

*Boxing ring* is a method that allows you to work with difficult communication situations. In front of the participant there is an opponent, a person with whom he cannot get along, played by another person from the group. Behind the participant stand the other people and provide support and guidance in between rounds. They build a sense of security when conducting a difficult conversation.

*Role cards*: in this technique while working with the group, the leader distributes role cards to the participants, who are usually divided into twos. From the cards they learn details about the characters they are playing. They learn their names, age, occupation, relationship with the other character and the situation in which they currently find themselves. The role cards depict the conflict that will become the topic of improvisation in a moment. Two people who start a conversation together do not know what the other side's view of the situation is. At the signal of the leader, all two improvise at the same moment. They then share their thoughts with each other.

After being involved in these techniques, participants leave the role and sum up their workshop experience, thanks to which they can apply the acquired skills in their daily lives.

## 8.2 DRAMA AND OTHER TECHNIQUES OF WORK

The key to applied drama is the world of fiction. This differs it from psychodrama. In the second technique, participants took scenes from their real life and re-played for searching new meaning of painful memories. So, they don't create fiction.

In drama, we move in an imaginary world, but still in some way similar to the world we know. Therefore, it is crucial to find a universe such that participants are willing to engage in the problem, but without exposing their personal problems. When we work, for example, with the issue of peer violence, we can offer children to play the role of animals, e.g. a forest kindergarten where a malicious fox lives, and invite young people to play the roles of the participants of the camp, during which an argument takes place. So, the mechanics of the concern stays the same, we have a group that knows and spends a lot of time together, but the context is changed (forest, camp). Thanks to this, children and adolescents are willing to get involved in solving the difficulty, because they know it very well, but there is also an element of pretending here, which increases the level of safety.

Moreover, in applied drama we actively look for a happy solution. Even if it was quite symbolic. One of the techniques of image theatre is to show the problem, looking for a solution and an ideal solution in three steps (monuments created by participants with their bodies, one by one in silence). This is the way to prepare the participants of the classes to search for ways to reach an agreement. At the same time, it primes their thinking about the issue, showing that a solution is possible.

What also in some way differentiates applied drama from theatre is the full commitment of the audience. During our classes, a participant can become an actor at any time. And conversely. Moreover, in the theatre, it is important to professionalize your acting skills. During drama workshops, they are not required at all. We do not judge whether a given situation is presented "realistically". What is significant, drama is used for personal growth by learning and experiencing different strategies of action.

### 8.3 IS DRAMA EFFECTIVE?

International research of the DICE project (Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competences, 2010) conducted on a sample of 4,500 people in 12 different countries, showed that participation in drama workshops improves self-esteem, participants accept national minorities and groups at risk of social exclusion to a greater extent, are more enterprising, flexible, and creative, and teachers rate their activity higher. A legitimate question is how does drama work?

### 8.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF DRAMA

The drama is based on people's natural inclination to impersonate other characters, camouflage, pretend, imagine, and create. You don't have to be an actor, but a human, to enjoy the benefits of drama.

Children are a perfect example of this. When we observe the free play of five-year-olds, we can clearly see that they can and like to play themed games. This means that children take on specific roles, e.g. pirates, students, superheroes, and together they pretend to be in this situation (they save the world, learn in school etc.). It is a natural skill for every human being. Play is a life simulation, and the lack of such skill in a child is a cause for concern and looking for the reasons for the lack of such play skills (Ahmand and others, 2016).

The basis of this behaviour can be explained by the activity of the mirror neurons system in our brain. By simply observing an activity, the human brain reacts as if it were performing the activity itself (Rizzolatti and others, 2006). Watching a person smile, the same structures responsible for our facial expressions are activated in our brain. Therefore, we involuntarily smile back. Therefore, it is enough for us to be spectators to engage in someone else's behaviour.

We know this not only from research into the functioning of the brain. The Bandura's experiment (1962) showed that children who watched an actor on TV beat a doll copied his behaviour after watching a video. As humans, we have the ability to learn by observation. There is also an element of observation of other people's actions in drama. However, during the drama workshops, participants are not only observers, but also actors.

How powerful it is to "step" in the role was shown, among others, Zimbardo's experiment (Meyer, 2007). Study participants were randomly assigned groups of guards or prisoners. Then

he created a place for them- a prison- where they were simply meant to be. It turned out that the experiment had to be stopped because there was violence between the two groups.

People behave according to the role they give themselves or others give them. The Zimbardo experiment can be debated, but there are a dozen of social psychology researches that document this statement very well (Meyer, 2007).

Augusto Boal, creator of the Theatre Forum method, stated, "It doesn't matter that the action is fictional, it matters that it is an action." This is true. Our brain does not see much of the difference between what is true and what is not true, it always works the same. This is the key to the effectiveness of the drama.

## 9. HOW TO SET UP A WORKSHOP AND HOW TO KEEP YOUTH ENGAGED

In this chapter we will shine a light on how to set up a workshop and how to keep participants engaged. We will look at the target groups we want to reach, their learning needs and the ways of designing the perfect workshop for these groups.

### 9.1 TARGET GROUP

To deliver an effective workshop, it is very important to have a good notion of the target group you're working with. That's why we pay attention to the target group we would like to reach with the program.

The target group of the methods we will develop and the workshops we will deliver in the framework of this project, is youth with social anxiety disorder. Specifics on this disorder can be found in the chapter on this subject. Here we need to notice that the age group of the target group will influence the design of the workshops and methods. We can divide the total group in an 18 minus and an 18 plus group, though we have to realize that there are many individual differences. Nevertheless, literature on the development of the brain of youth and young adults distinguishes a clear new development phase around the age of 18 years. The focus moves from the group to the individual development. Additionally, this is also the average age youth start working or begin following higher education. In some countries, this is also the moment that young people leave their parental house and commences living on their own. For sure it is the age of official adulthood: people may fully participate in social and political life after reaching 18 years.

In our project we will mostly focus on youth older than 18 years old, mostly studying or having their first jobs. However, we will not exclude the younger generation, as we believe that many dynamics are more or less the same. We only might adjust the applied methods slightly to serve this younger group in an effective way as well.

#### What is the need of the target group (and a reason to join a workshop)?

Nobody wants to suffer from any disorder. Though, you have it or not. The only thing you can do when you suffer from it, is to learn how to deal with it. Applying storytelling techniques can support someone in finding ways to deal with it. In the previous chapters we identified as much as possible the need of the target group. From the interviews we learned that, not surprisingly, everybody confronted with social anxiety disorder is looking for ways to live with it in the most acceptable way.

### 9.2 DESIGNING A WORKSHOP

Develop and determine learning objectives



Step one in designing a workshop is to develop and determine the learning objectives.

A learning objective states what the learner should be able to do by the time they've finished the training. Indeed, without a solid learning objective, you're simply pushing content in front of learners and letting them figure out the significance by themselves. Develop learning objective is a crucial element of the program's success.

More than just define objective, you need to define a clear one: This is the first and most important stage of creating a good learning objective. If you skip this part don't be surprised to end up without measurable results.

When you're defining your objective, it needs to be **SMART**: **Specific** (measure what it is supposed to measure), **Measurable** (allows to know when the objective is concretely achieved), **Achievable** (objective to be achieved must be accepted by the stakeholders), **Realistic** (concrete enough to be achievable) and **Time-Bound** (have a deadline).

The specific learning objective of this program is to give youth the tools to apply emotional self-regulation, to enable them to take responsible decisions in social interaction

### Choose your methodology

Youth workers from one training course to the other can opt for a large variety of methods. In practice, one that chooses a methodology that fits with the context, objectives, and the participants, contributes to creating a positive and strong learning environment. Every person has their own framework based on their individual constructions, for this reason, it implies to step out of our own frame of reference by having openness toward others. This also means that every method that can be used has to be adapted to the context and the trained group.

Before all, we should ask ourselves what the intentions of the activities are focusing on, the needs and the demands, and then reflecting on the necessary conditions to allow participation from the participants. There are different types of participatory processes whether it is a team meeting or an informal meeting, a working group, and so on. In any of these situations, to better organize the animations, we can think about the profile of the participants, if they know each other, clarify the objectives and inform them. To allow participation, there are participatory education methods. In other words, participatory activities allow participants to be agents of the ongoing activity in a setting that encourages free expressions, sharing of knowledge and point of views by intending to benefit the collective. Support for popular education activities encourages the sharing of a collectively produced pedagogy and seeks to empower the group through collective intelligence.

### Create a workshop action plan: How to set up a workshop?

A clear and logical build up is the best recipe for a successful workshop, leading to the results you are aiming for. To give you some guidance, we describe several aspects (see the scheme below) that can help you build a strong structure in which the exercises you have in mind fit and help you reach the goals you have set. In the following paragraphs all parts of this set-up scheme will be explained step by step.



Be aware that you can never fully plan a workshop beforehand, as the dynamics in the group are an important aspect to consider. You can only feel this dynamic as soon as you start the workshop. So always keep in mind that you must consider quite some flexibility, and that you must be prepared to modify the program on the spot. That's why the lines in the scheme are dotted, not fully dividing the different fields but instead allowing a flexible framework within which to plan and execute.

### The Different Types of Exercises

The design of a workshop exists of a series of activities and exercises. These can be categorized as follows:

1. Ice Breakers: Exercises to 'break the ice', getting to know one another better
2. Energisers: Exercises that can be used to change the energy in the group.
3. Confidence Exercises: To build confidence and, more importantly, mutual trust in a group, as well as trust between the group and the Facilitator
4. Making Connection/Collaborative Exercises: That encourage collaboration, often physical exercises
5. Creativity Triggering Exercises: That stimulate the creative thinking and process of the participants, also to bring them into the narrative mood
6. Self Awareness Exercises: Aimed at getting to know yourself better, including becoming aware of how your own views relate to the views of others
7. Memory Activating Exercises: That touch the Personal and Emotional Domain, allowing participants to meet each other on an emotional level, finding Common Ground and making real connection. Some exercises in this category are not about memories, but about dreams and plans
8. Evaluation Exercises: To close the workshop. Useful to find out how the participants experience the workshop and to emphasize the need to use what they have learned in the (near) future

Each workshop should be a mix of these types of exercises. Our suggestion would be to start with Icebreakers and end with the exercises aimed at creating Personal Development or Common Ground by activating memories, followed by Evaluation Exercises. However, this is not a mandatory order and sometimes it is even better to mix the categories a little. For example, if you feel that the energy in the group is a bit low, at any stage, you can (and maybe should) use an energizer.

Always study an exercise carefully and decide for yourself whether this exercise is indeed the right one for the group and for you, at this specific phase of the workshop, considering the ultimate goal.

It is important to end all exercises with a short reflection involving all the participants. Use the principle of asking them, 'thoughts, feelings and/or comments?', as not every participant will use the same idiom to reflect and to express.

### **Different phases**

We distinguish five different phases in the workshop. Regardless of the time available, all five phases must be present in the design of your workshop, though you can decide to shorten or extend them.

The five phases are:

1. Team building
2. Triggering creativity
3. Triggering awareness
4. Finding common ground
5. Closing

### Team building

We must always highlight the importance of team building. When you fail to build a strong team, the rest of your workshop can become nothing short of an agony, particularly when your goal lies beyond simply sharing some 'nice stories'. That's why we strongly advise to spend sufficient time on team building exercises, particularly when you work with groups for which mutual trust is not taken for granted.

It may seem that this takes away precious time for actually working on the stories. But in reality, you'll be gaining time because working with a strong team significantly expedites the 'creative' step in story building. The next steps become immediately faster with a group that is mutually trusting.

Roughly, we make the following distinction in the team building exercises and activities:

- Creating a safe environment
- Exercises focusing on collaboration
- Exercises focusing on building trust

### Creating a safe environment

Creating a safe space is necessary to deliver a good workshop with the outcomes you aim for. You create a safe environment by doing some exercises with the entire group. First and foremost, it's key to make a series of inner-group agreements in order to build and consolidate mutual trust. In this sense, three agreements are fundamental:

1. The agreement that all which is said within the walls of the training space will stay there unless permission to share it with someone outside the training space is explicitly and directly requested.
2. The agreement that personal stories belong to whomever shares them. No one is allowed to share a story without explicit permission from the



source. This also counts for participants sharing the stories of other participants during the training. Even in that situation he or she must ask for permission. You must also request permission for the stories you will share during the training.

- 3. Everybody is equal, including you. Some people might have a specific role, but that does not mean they are more important than others. The group agrees to respect and obey the responsibilities that come with each role.

You might even add some other agreements. You can develop them with the help of the group. It is good to write them down, for example on a sheet or a white board, so that everybody is constantly reminded.

On this note, you should remember trust is in the roots of the training. This means that you should also be willing to share something personal and must be prepared to show some vulnerability as well.

Exercises to build trust and to encourage collaboration

When a safe environment is created you can continue with building trust in a group. Some exercises directly focus on trust, but exercises that encourage collaboration also serve well to build mutual trust.

We stress the importance of preparing this step with dedication. You need to have a well-structured plan that fits the group you will work with and the final objective envisioned for that specific group. It's highly important to know the exercises very well and to be aware of what you can establish through them. In order to do this successfully, it's necessary to dedicate sufficient practice to them and constantly monitor their foreseen and unforeseen effects.

These exercises will familiarize you, as a facilitator, with the group and its dynamics. They evidence who's who in the group and surface underlying trust issues. Based on your resulting observations you can adjust your initial program. For example: when you notice there's little trust within the group, you could add some more trust games.

Triggering creativity

Many people are not aware of their creative talents and when you ask someone to think creative all of a sudden, he/she can even block. As we need creative thinking to get out of the box and explore common grounds, you need to trigger creativity before you go deeper by using pictures and stories to connect participants on a deeper level.

As some people might be slightly afraid or intimidated by creativity (as opposed to others who love to be creative and to show their creative selves), it is advisable not to present the exercises in terms of 'creativity triggering'. Present them as playful and sometimes fun exercises, letting participants discover for themselves that being creative and thinking creatively is far easier than they thought.

We included different levels of exercises to trigger creativity. Depending on the group, we advise building up the level of creative thinking in two or three consecutive



steps, using two or three exercises. You can start with merely describing short happenings and building up towards connecting memories, feelings and emotions to pictures. With more advanced or outgoing groups, you can probably start immediately with memories, feelings and emotions. With less advanced groups and participants who are not familiar with each other, we advise to start with just describing, easing participants into the habit of speaking up, without immediately sharing personal thoughts or emotions. This helps create the safe space you need to start sharing memories and discovering common ground.

### Triggering awareness

that youth get stuck in a single story. Their story of the struggle with social anxiety disorder and probable other issues as well becomes their truth. Often they forget that there are more stories that can be told and more viewpoints that can be taken.

For this reason, it's important to create awareness around the fact that your point of view is not necessarily *everyone's* point of view. So, as to avoid starting a discussion about the value of different points of view immediately, we propose several exercises to introduce this awareness in a playful way, not focusing on the different backgrounds themselves, but on the pictures instead.

It's important to assess these exercises adequately, elevating the outcomes to a more universal understanding of different narratives and the importance of listening to and appreciating other stories in order to find your own story. Mirroring is the basic element in this process

In this phase awareness of how stories work will also be created. By introducing the three level and the three pillars, as introduced in the chapter on storytelling, the participants get to know the power of oral storytelling.

### Finding common ground

Finding your own story and a common story is the core of the workshop. When participants are able to find this, they start to empathize with themselves and each other. We already pointed out the importance of empathy in this process.

We suggest several exercises to enable the participants to find this own and common story. Most of these exercises are rather time consuming. They will, however, have a significant impact on the group, as they deal with personal stories, memories, dreams, feelings and emotions. In order to do these exercises, it's necessary to build a strong foundation in the first three phases in your workshop. When you don't feel secure about the strength of the group and the level of trust, refrain from doing these exercises, it might lead to discussions splitting the group instead of finding common ground.

### Closing and evaluation

Later in this chapter we will reflect on the importance of a good closing and evaluation.

The phases follow each other logically. However, following the structure of the phases is not mandatory. Sometimes switching between phases, mainly phase 2 and 3, may be beneficial for the level of the workshop.

### Communication strategy for the visibility of actions and committing participants

A workshop without participants is no workshop. Often it is easier to initiate and to design a workshop than to reach (the right) participants. That's why we would like to share some insights in communicating a workshop and in recruiting people.

#### Recruitment

When you are not working with an established group of youth, recruitment might be a challenge. First, youth are not always immediately enthusiastic to share stories. Storytelling might be considered old-fashioned or boring at first. However, our experience tells us that most youth really enjoy such a workshop a lot in the end. They only need some support to cross the threshold.

A trick to convince participants to join, is to stress the benefits they can have when being able to express themselves in a strong way and to be able to tell their story properly. This contributes in a positive way to job search activities or in building a social network. And be aware that this is not even a lie: we noticed that youth really benefitted from storytelling workshops in presenting themselves. In this project you might even underline what knowing and sharing your own story can contribute to one's own mental wellbeing. Really stress what is in it for them. But also make clear that it is great fun to engage with stories.

There are of course other ways to engage youth. Incentives, like a free meal or even some educational benefits (study-points) might encourage young people to join. Testimonials of previous participants will also contribute to the willingness to participate, certainly if these people belong to the same 'group' (age, cultural background, gender) as the youth you are targeting.

#### Practical arrangements

Recruiting youth is not easy, certainly when you are not aware of the latest way of communication of youth. Because these ways of communication are changing with the speed of light nowadays, we will refrain from giving concrete and specific advice. A certain communication channel might already be outdated before you 'll read this. However, it is very important to use the channels that are current at that moment. It is sensible to engage a young person in your communication team to advise you or even to do the communication him/her/themselves.

Take the above-mentioned underlining of the benefits of joining a storytelling workshop for youth into account in all your texts. Refrain from using too much texts as well. An attractive picture or set of pictures will have way more effect. Take care that the pictures you use also

comply with the target group you aim to reach. Youth are attracted by young people in a picture. And be aware that the pictures show the diversity you would like to promote.

### **Role of the facilitator**

The role of the facilitator is far more engaging than simply the time of the animation itself. It implies thinking and considering a wide range of aspects, including pedagogical and logistics aspects. Firstly, we have to clearly define the agenda of the animation. It can be done collectively or be peer-reviewed. Then, we have to identify the participants that could be involved in the activities and contact them sufficiently in advance in order to check their availability and share with participants the program to allow them to prepare or be prepared. Afterwards, we should also prepare the context in which the activities would take place according to the objectives, need of an access to the internet, room capacity, needed materials, logistics, etc. Also, we have to think of the adequate duration of the animation. Ideally, an animation should not exceed more than 2 hours, considering that after that the level of concentration decreases as the brain gets tired. Thinking of the duration also implies managing time, including breaks and allocating speaking time equally. As a facilitator, providing a safe environment in which individual and collective dynamics are considered helps to create a good cohesion within the group. Therefore, each person should be heard and valued in their own context where mutual respect needs to be integrated. Knowing about intercultural interactions is necessary in order to promote inclusion for all and to valorise new narratives, enabling exchanges of views. Moreover, facilitation conversation also means facilitating working into small groups as it can help to overcome insecurities in regards to speaking in public and to gain self-confidence.

### **Capitalizing on training tools/modules**

A facilitator is brought to explore a lot of different tools. All of these can be reused, repeated, disseminated, shared, and much more. Facilitators can valorise their experiences by capitalizing, in other terms, it means to convert an experience into a learning that is shared to a group. In this process, all the information guiding to the framework of the animation, the audience for which it is intended, tips and advice, etc should be indicated. This mutual learning dynamic within an organization or a network of structures contribute to having a common vision. In this sense, every person has something to bring to the group, there aren't the people who know and the learners.

Capitalizing helps to innovate, to appropriate collectively and to broaden the sight of an experience.

Indeed, capitalizing also means to use the results of an evaluation made from an animation in order to value the work of facilitators and take a step back to question the process and methodologies that were used. In capitalization, we think about what worked well and what process allowed to achieve this. It is important to select the tools that work well and evaluate what can be improved for a better result and to have good practices to share. Capitalizing

experiences is also about focusing on what hasn't succeeded and understanding why.

### Evaluate and revise training/workshop

Given the aim of the workshop, it is important to close it in a proper way, in order to make the results sustainable.

We suggest you evaluate the workshop in a structured way with your participants, giving them space to express how they experienced it and what they got out of it. Try to involve the (near) future in this evaluation as well. What will the participants do to continue building mutual understanding between the different backgrounds or communities they represent? How can they become ambassadors of mutual dialogue and which challenges do they expect to face in fostering this mutual dialogue?

With some (more advantaged) groups you can even inform if they already have concrete plans to work with storytelling and picture talk in their own communities. Be aware that (practical) after care might be requested. Certain groups may require help with fund raising and/or project management. Determine if you or someone in your surroundings can provide this kind of after care and decide if you are willing to do this extra work before you start giving the workshop. Sometimes you can approach third parties specialized in supporting youth in fulfilling their plans. Many cities have such organizations.

Finish your workshop with a celebration. If you hand out certificates of attendance, make this into a little ceremony. Serve some drinks and snacks to mark the end of the workshop.

If the groups are in favour of it, collect telephone numbers or Facebook accounts and create a WhatsApp – or Messenger group, enabling the participants to stay in touch.

Of course, an evaluation also gives you insight in how your workshop was received and appreciated. This might be a reason to change (parts of) your workshop in the future. However, often you sense immediately if activities and exercises work effectively. Always consider that specific groups and group dynamics might influence this effectiveness. Some activities work with one group and are less effective with, or less appreciated by another. It requires experience in using the activities and exercises to set up the right workshop for every specific group. And to accept sometimes that the effect is slightly different. Also be aware of the purpose of an exercise you are doing. Some will be necessary in the logical order of a workshop, or to sort a certain effect with the participants, who may not like every exercise/activity to the same level. Avoid focusing only on activities the participants like a lot. Your learning goal and workshop design to reach that, is as important. As long as you don't lose participants on the way.

### Working with groups

Although Storytelling and Social theatre methods can also be applied in one-to-one situations, we prefer to work with groups. The advantage is that you immediately have Storytellers and audience (attentive and critical listeners) in the same room together. A good way to exploit this potential is to ask the participants to work in smaller groups and help each other in collecting and creating stories. This influences the dynamics of a project in a



positive way because the participants can immediately check whether ideas work, talk about them and test how they can bring something forward in the best way. In addition, it is easier to show any uncertainty in a small group than immediately in front of a larger audience. It helps participants to work on their self-confidence.

It is also advisable to involve the whole group in giving feedback. It trains people to be critical in a constructive way and it makes it clear that by working together, the quality of the stories improves and can even grow to an unexpectedly high level. Moreover, by critically listening to the stories of others and giving feedback, participants can't help but look critically at their own story as well, compared to the story they have to judge. In this way they discover the strengths and weaknesses in their own story.

Finally, the participants in a project have a greater resemblance to the audience with whom some ultimately want to share their story than the facilitator. Co-participants are usually the best reviewers of a story and the best advisors to make it better. The main task of the Facilitator is to guide and supervise this process in a constructive way.

Although different Facilitators will think differently about the ideal group size, it is agreed that working with applied storytelling, sung stories and social theatre is not suitable for working with too large groups. The attention that has to be given to participants, the focus on telling and listening and the concentration that is required from the Facilitators leads to the conclusion that groups of six to twelve participants are ideal. With fewer participants it is difficult to get optimal group dynamics and with more participants the trainer loses the opportunity to pay sufficient attention to all participants.

## Youth engagement

### What is youth engagement?

« To participate and to be an active citizen is to have the right, the means, the place, the support to participate in decisions, to influence them and to engage in actions and activities in order to contribute to the construction of a better society. » *Europe, Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, Council of Europe, 2003; Preamble, p. 7* Basically, youth engagement is the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, with a focus outside of him or herself in any kind of activity (cultural field, political field, volunteer field, sport field,...)

### Why is youth engagement important?

Youth engagement is important because it serves to highlight the contribution that young people make to society and to help them face the challenges they encounter. Indeed, through their commitment, young people become actors of a society of which they will be the adults of tomorrow.

Moreover, it allows them to acquire skills and knowledge in one or more areas that interest them. In addition, they develop soft skills related to life skills that will be useful for their future personal and professional development.

### What are the benefits of youth engagement?

Youth engagement is a lever of the construction of living together. It contributes to integrating young people into society. It must come from a personal will and be a voluntary act. That participation can take different forms and meet both the needs of individuals and of the collective. At an individual level, according to the pyramid of Maslow, youth try to seek 3 fundamental needs which are: fulfilment, self-esteem and belonging. Indeed, it contributes to gaining acknowledgement and reinforcing their image positively. Being engaged within any spheres of society can help to improve quality of life, gain social competencies, facilitate expression, and integrate themselves into society.

All the skills developed in the context of volunteer work or other types of engagement can be transferred and valued. Engagement offers a wide range of socialization spheres outside of school and family settings by participating in public and political life. Youth bring perspectives that can have an impact on political agendas. They can contribute to everyday life in a positive and meaningful way through their participation in social and civic life. Considering youth engagement is also about establishing trust between youth, the rest of the population and the public authorities, by representing young people and caring for diversity.

### How to promote youth engagement: identify ways to encourage youth engagement and participation

Above, we already stressed the importance of underlining the benefits of following a workshop in order to encourage youth and to keep them engaged. Of course, a workshop must meet, or even exceed their expectations in order not to lose them halfway. So, take care that the promises you make while offering a workshop to the target group are feasible and realistic. Your story needs to be clear, transparent, and sincere in order to keep youth engaged.

Experience learns that once you have youth engaged in sharing stories, they are eager to keep being engaged. Many participants of workshops in the past are still following workshops or are engaged in other projects, sometimes even as facilitator.

Practically, it is also important to make the workshop as accessible as possible. Think twice about the times you offer a workshop and the place you organize it. The latter should be a place where youth feel comfortable and save, otherwise they will simple not show up. Also keep in mind that a workshop needs to be easily reachable, for example by public transport

### What are barriers for youth to engage?

We have seen the potential of youth engagement, let's note that it also presents obstacles and some sort of boundaries. For instance, civic and political participation is embodied by people who have faith in the political system or who intend to make their voice

heard or who believe their actions can be considered by some representative institutions. Nevertheless, today's youth can feel distrust toward these institutions / political parties for various reasons such as lack of representativeness or a lack of understanding of the system. Indeed, young people sometimes don't know how to get involved and don't necessarily receive advice or recommendations from someone who could explain how to contribute or be an engaged citizen. Having an adult or a mentor that could give tips and inform young people can be a key to solve this barrier to engagement. It is important to show youth what are the existing opportunities that are offered to them to build skills. Moreover, we can note that every commitment involves constraints and can have consequences in terms of energy, availability and free time. But, according to the conditions and the motivation of the person, the benefits can be greater than the constraints. Equally, we can mention that youth engagement does not erase inequalities between people in terms of social and cultural capital. Reality depicts that people do not get involved equally according to the social and cultural category.

### **What pedagogical methods can you use to favour youth commitment?**

In order to encourage the commitment of young people, it is necessary to move away from the role of transmitting knowledge specific to formal education and turn to other support tools.

The lack of motivation of young people is an obstacle to their engagement. It therefore seems necessary to work with young people on their main sources of motivation, which are "the desire to improve things" and "feeling useful". The types of triggers mentioned by the young people can be classified into two main categories: external triggers (events, films, meetings) and internal triggers (their values, feeling useful, etc.)

Indeed, to motivate young people to get involved, it is essential to explain to them why their involvement is important, what it implies and especially what it brings. To do so, we can favour non-formal education methods. Non-formal education is based on sharing, voluntary commitment and active participation, i.e. an active and inclusive learning practice that invites participants to dialogue together in order to build a step-by-step response in a collective manner. This form of education is powerful because it allows participants to learn, feel, experience and evolve at their own pace. It is done through role-playing, collaboration, simulation, reflection exercises, and above all, it takes on its full meaning during debriefing moments when the participants are led to share and exchange on what they have experienced.

### **The value of different forms of commitment**

Of course, there are different forms of commitment, and it is important not to focus on a particular one. Certainly, in the case of youth with social anxiety disorder it is important that they commit anyway. So, commitment with for example their family of fellow students is as important as other commitments, like becoming active in the social, political or humanitarian arena. Never focus on the latter forms of participation only, but value all kinds of commitment, as little as they might be.



## Bibliography

Ahmad, Saghir, Hussain A, Batool, Ayesha, Sittar, Khadija, Malik, Misbah (2016). *Play and Cognitive Development: Formal Operational Perspective of Piaget's Theory*. Journal of Education and Practice, v7 n28 p72-79

Alfonso- Benlliure, V. (2000). Un análisis de la interacción entre los componentes cognitivo y afectivo-personal de la creatividad. Tesis doctoral. Universitat de València.

Balboa, A.C. (2008). *El incidente crítico como técnica para recolectar datos*. En Hernández Salazar, Patricia. Métodos cualitativos para estudiar a los usuarios de la información (61-111). Cuadernos de Investigación. Centro Universitario de Investigaciones Bibliotecológicas.

Bandura, A. (1962). *Social Learning through Imitation*. University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, NE.

Cohen-Emerique, M. (1999). Análisis de incidentes críticos: un modelo para la comunicación intercultural. *Revista Antípodes*, (145), 465–480.

Daskova, Yu.V., Poliakova, Ia.V., Vasilenko, S.A., Goltseva, O.S., Belyakova, T.E., Shevalie, K.N., & Vasilenko, E.V. (2020). Development of Creative Independence of Design Students in Course of Higher Education. *Propósitos y Representaciones*, 8 (SPE2), e637. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20511/pyr2020.v8nSPE2.637>

De Bono, E. (1998). *El Pensamiento Lateral: Manual de Creatividad*. España: Paidós Plural.  
*Europe, Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, Council of Europe, 2003; Preamble, p. 7*

Flanagan, J.C. (1954). The Critical Incident Technique. *Psychological Bulletin*, 51.

Fond, G., Lançon, C., Auquier, P., & Boyer, L. (2019). Prévalence de la dépression majeure en France en population générale et en populations spécifiques de 2000 à 2018: une revue systématique de la littérature. *La Presse Médicale*, 48(4), 365-375.

Galvis, R.V.(2007). El proceso creativo y la formación del docente. *Laurus*, 13(23),82-98.

Goicovic, G. (2020). Educar a través de procesos creativos. *Trilogía (Santiago)*, 32(43). 10-21.

Guro-Homicka, M. (2015). *Jak rozwijać aktywność twórczą dzieci i młodzieży. Drama w nauczaniu, wychodzeniu i biblioterapii*.

Kto rzuca kostką? Badania DICE  
<http://www.dramanetwork.eu/file/Kto%20rzuca%20kostka1.pdf>

Meyer, D. G. (2007). *Exploring Social Psychology*.

Mindell, Amy. (2008). Bringing Deep Democracy to Life: An Awareness Paradigm for Deepening Political Dialogue, Personal Relationships, and Community Interactions. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 6(3), 212–225.

Moreno González, A. (2016). *La mediación artística: arte para la transformación social, la inclusión social y el trabajo comunitario*. Barcelona: Ediciones Octaedro, S.L.

Nató, A., Rodríguez, M. y Carbajal, L. (2006). *Mediación Comunitaria. Conflictos en el escenario social urbano*. EU : Editorial Universidad.

Rizzolatti, G., Fogassi, L., Gallese, V. (2006). Mirrors in the Mind. *Scientific American*. [http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/english/\\_files/pdf/Mirrors\\_in\\_the\\_Mind.pdf](http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/english/_files/pdf/Mirrors_in_the_Mind.pdf)

Witerska K. (2016). *Teatr Forum. Drama edukacyjna. Profilaktyka*.

**Table of Figures**

Figure 1 Dramatic construction of a mountain, by Aristotle ..... 53  
 Figure 2 Campbell's Hero's Journey ..... 53  
 Figure 3 The Serpentine Line ..... 54  
 Figure 4 The three domains with interaction..... 56  
 Figure 5 Schematic representation of the journey..... 62