

EMPOWERING MENTAL HEALTH GROUP AT INSTITUTE  
OF PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH,  
KOLKATA, INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

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### **Empowering mental health group at Institute of Psychological and Educational Research, Kolkata, India**

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The subject of this study is on the empowering mental health group that was arranged for 12 girls living in an open shelter at the Institute of Psychological and Educational Research (IPER) in Kolkata, India. The group met seven times during the autumn 2017. The emphasis of the group was on supporting the mental health of the participants, creating self-awareness, practicing recognizing, and expressing emotions and having fun together. To measure the impact of the group, concrete objectives were set: participants challenging themselves and learning about themselves.

The therapeutic art and play were the used methods for the activities in the meetings. The activities included painting, drawing, dancing and using body other ways. To support the planning of the activities, the psychotherapist Liisa Halonen's concept and my own experiences were utilized.

The evaluation of the group was done mainly by observing the participants, but also by discussing with the participants. Even though the group actualized differently than planned, and many participants were young, resulting a big age gap between them, all the participants enjoyed the group and achieved the objectives, thus the group met its purpose.

Key words: mental health, empowerment, group, arts therapies, India, children, adolescents

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Vartiala, Lauri

### **Voimauttava mielenterveysryhmä Institute of Psychological and Educational Research -organisaatiossa, Kolkatassa, Intiassa**

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Opinnäytetyön aiheena on Institute of Psychological and Educational Research (IPER) -nimisessä 3. sektorin organisaatiossa pidetty mielenterveysteemainen voimauttava ryhmä Kolkatassa, Intiassa. Ryhmä suunniteltiin ja toteutettiin 12 IPER:ssä asuvalle tytölle, joiden ikä vaihteli noin 11 ja 19 välillä. Ryhmä tapasi seitsemän kertaa syksyllä 2017. Ryhmän tavoitteena oli tukea osallistujien mielenterveyttä, kasvattaa tietoisuutta itsestään, harjoitella tunnistamaan ja ilmaisemaan tunteita sekä pitää hauskaa yhdessä. Ryhmän vaikuttavuuden mittaamisen parantamiseksi luotiin ryhmälle kaksi konkreettisempaa tavoitetta: itsensä haastaminen ja itsestään uuden oppiminen, jotka kaikkien osallistujien oli tarkoitus saavuttaa ainakin kerran ryhmän aikana.

Ryhmän aktiviteeteissa käytettiin paljon taidelähtöisiä menetelmiä sekä leikkiä. Aktiviteetit sisälsivät muun muassa maalaamista, piirtämistä, tanssimista ja kehon käyttämistä muilla tavoin. Ideoita ja tukea aktiviteetteihin psykoterapeutti Liisa Haloselta, Satoa ryhmästä -ohjekirjasta ja omista kokemuksistani neljästä eri mielenterveysryhmästä.

Ryhmän vaikuttavuuden ja edistymisen arviointi tapahtui pääasiassa havainnoimalla, mutta myös keskusteluilla ryhmäläisten kanssa sekä aktiviteetilla, jossa asetetaan jänalle. Vaikka ryhmä toteutuikin hyvin erilaisena kuin oli alun perin ajateltu ja suunniteltu, ja vaikka osallistujien ikähaarukka oli suuri ja kielitaito monella heikko, osallistujat nauttivat ryhmästä ja saavuttivat asetetut tavoitteet.

Asiasanat: mielenterveys, voimautuminen, ryhmä, taidelähtöiset menetelmät, Intia, lapset, nuoret

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In India, homelessness, substance abuse, child labor, trafficking, prostitution, feticide, infanticide, child marriages and sexual, emotional and physical violence may concern even 40 % of the nation's children (Singh, Parsekar & Nair 2014, 431; Bhattacharya & Bhattacharya 2015, 51, 56–57). Especially child sexual abuse is a big problem in the country. Approximately every second child in India is estimated to have been experienced sexual violence in some form. Still, because of a variety of reasons such as social stigma to the victim, the topic stays taboo. (Singh et al. 2014, 432; Behere 2017, 145.)

Particularly women and girls in India are in danger of being discriminated against, due to many cultural, social and religious customs, like dowry system, which has led to girl children being unwanted and even killed by their parents. Also, almost half of the Indian women are married when they are still under 18 years old. Child marriage threatens the girls' education and exposes them to violence and sexual abuse. (Bhattacharya & Bhattacharya 2015, 56–64). Child abuse in any form has consequences in adulthood; the connection to the mental health problems and health risk behaviors is clear (Chartier, Walker & Naimark 2009, 849–850).

Institute of Psychological and Educational Research (IPER) is a non-governmental and non-profit organization in Kolkata, India. IPER works with underprivileged communities and groups and tries to improve equality in the area. Among other services, IPER runs an open shelter for 25 girls who are at risk of neglect or abuse. The girls living in the shelter are provided housing, nutrition, education, health care, counselling and many other services. (Institute of Psychological and Educational Research a.)

The focus of this thesis is on an empowering mental health group I planned, assembled and actualized for some of the girls living in the open shelter at IPER. The number of the participants in the group was 12 and their age varied approximately between 11 and 19 years. The purpose of the group was to support the participants' mental health, help them recognize and express their emotions, create self-awareness, build participants'

trust in themselves and have fun together. I set two more practical objectives that I hoped the participants would achieve: challenging themselves and learning something new about themselves. I wanted every participant, at least once during the group, to step willingly out of their comfort zone, to do, say or act in an embarrassing or uncomfortable situation so that they would take the challenge and overcome the situation. I also hoped everyone to learn at least one new thing about themselves, their emotions, reactions, limits or finding out that something scary wasn't actually so scary.

In the activities, I used arts, creative physical activities and play as methods. In planning and implementing the activities, I utilized and modified ideas from different sources, such as: Empowerment Coaching Workbook (Finnish Central Association for Mental Health, 48–60), psychotherapist Liisa Halonen (2017), Satoa ryhmästä guidebook (Martin, Heiska, Syvälahti & Hoikkala 2012, 68–120) and my own experiences in four different mental health groups between years 2012 and 2015. I created the activities based on the ideas from the sources or from the activities I had participated myself. Some of the ideas I used as they were and some I modified to serve better the target group and the purpose of the group.

The group met seven times, in total 23 hours, between 27 October 2017 and 19 November 2017. The participation activity varied between 5 and 12 participants. In addition to the group itself, the process generated an instruction booklet (see APPENDIX 1) about the group and the activities held in it. The booklet was given to IPER for later use.

## 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Threats to mental health of children and adolescents in Indian context

According to Singh et al. (2014, 431), as many as 40 % of children in India are in risk of being exposed to homelessness, substance abuse, child labor, trafficking and crime (Singh et al. 2014, 431). That is a notable issue, even globally, because approximately 42 % of India's population are children and they also form 19 % of world's children (Singh et al. 2014, 431; Behere 2017, 145).

Sonali Bhattacharya and Shubhasheesh Bhattacharya (2015) analyze in their article the reasons for the hardships of children in India. They mention, among other things, poverty, child trafficking, prostitution, feticide and infanticide, child marriages and sexual, emotional and physical violence. They found that Indian families living in debt caused by poverty, are forced to sell their children as labor force. There are 12,5 million children in Indian labor market, 10 % of them working in hazardous industries. Many of them are working long days in unhygienic conditions. Due to being in labor market, the children remain uneducated and undernourished with poor health. They are also exposed to physical and sexual violence. (Bhattacharya & Bhattacharya 2015, 51–52.)

Poverty in family also causes social discrimination, which then may lead to migration and trafficking. Often the trafficked girls end up into prostitution, where they get only a little or none health care and may become infected with AIDS and other diseases. (Bhattacharya & Bhattacharya 2015, 51, 56.) As girls are often victims of prostitution in India, they are also vulnerable to feticide and infanticide. This is due to girls lower social and economic status compared to boys. Women are in many ways discriminated in India. Some of the reasons for that are exogamy that makes the family to severe ties to the married daughter, women's lower status in family and a belief in Hinduism, according to which, the salvation can be achieved by the funeral pyre set by sons. Also, because generally women do not inherit property from parents, and because the dowry system marks the girls as an encumbrance economically, they become unwanted. (Bhattacharya & Bhattacharya 2015, 51, 56–57.)



Child marriage is also common in India. According to Bhattacharya and Bhattacharya (2015, 62), 46 % of women in India are married before they turn 18. Child marriage decreases the girls' possibilities to attend school and complete their education. They also suffer from violence and sexual abuse perpetrated by their husbands or in-laws. Some girls are married young because the dowry rates for child brides are lower, but also because some believe that the girls will be more compliant if they are married young. Child marriage is also arranged to protect the girl's virginity before the marriage. The importance of virginity also often leads to leaving the rapes unreported. (Bhattacharya & Bhattacharya 2015, 51, 62–64.)

India has the most child sexual abuse cases in the world (Singh et al. 2014, 431). There has been several studies suggesting that every second child in India has been exposed to some form of sexual abuse, and every fifth child has been a victim for severe forms of it. (Behere 2017, 145.) The topic is a taboo in India, which makes it more difficult to change. There are many reasons to be silent about the topic. Singh, Parsekar and Nair (2014, 432) introduce some of them, mentioning: denial of the victim from the community, social stigma to the victim, indignity, weak communication between children and parents and distrust toward the government bodies. The health care professionals and teachers also often lack the competence to handle child sexual abuse cases, and they might not have been trained for that at all (Singh et al. 2014, 432). In addition, the sex education in India is generally not quality enough (Behere 2017, 145).

## 2.2 Consequences of childhood neglect and abuse

Also, Mariette Chartier, John Walker and Barbara Naimark (2009) examined the correlation between physical and sexual abuse in childhood and mental health problems and health risk behaviors in adulthood. The problems and risk behaviors they examined in adults were: smoking, alcohol problems, low exercise, obesity, more than 1 sexual partner and mental health problems. They found a connection between adult health and abuse in childhood. TABLE 1 compares the health risk behavior between abused and not abused people and shows that risk for the behavior as adult was significantly higher among both sexually and physically abused in almost every sector except low exercise, and obesity among physically abused. For example, both sexually and physically

abused reported over two times more likely mental health problems than the ones who had not been abuse. (Chartier et al. 2009, 849–850.)

TABLE 1. Relationship of Childhood Physical and Sexual Abuse With Adult Health Risk Behaviors and Mental Health Problems: Ontario Health Survey Mental Health Supplement, 1990–1991 (Chartier et al. 2009, 850).

	Without Abuse, Weighted No. (%)	With Abuse, Weighted No. (%)	OR (95% CI)
Relationship between childhood physical abuse and			
Smoking	1267 (26.2)	582 (34.0)	1.42* (1.19, 1.71)
Alcohol problems	607 (10.2)	410 (19.3)	1.87* (1.52, 2.31)
Low exercise	3263 (70.0)	1163 (70.6)	1.04 (0.86, 1.26)
Obesity	567 (12.5)	245 (15.0)	1.18 (0.92, 1.51)
More than 1 sexual partner	324 (7.4)	148 (9.4)	1.49* (1.06, 2.09)
Mental health problems	1360 (22.7)	735 (34.7)	2.04* (1.73, 2.41)
Relationship between childhood sexual abuse and			
Smoking	1638 (27.8)	217 (35.7)	1.52* (1.16, 1.99)
Alcohol problems	890 (12.1)	117 (16.2)	2.44* (1.74, 3.44)
Low exercise	3965 (69.7)	431 (73.3)	0.99 (0.74, 1.33)
Obesity	687 (12.3)	106 (18.2)	1.61* (1.14, 2.27)
More than 1 sexual partner	411 (7.6)	64 (11.5)	2.34* (1.44, 3.80)
Mental health problems	1768 (24.1)	323 (44.4)	2.26* (1.78, 2.87)
Note. OR=odds ratio; CI=confidence interval. The ORs are for the relationship between childhood abuse and health risk behaviors or mental health problems. Covariates included age, gender, low education, and marital status. *P ≤ 0.05.			

Roger Fallot and Maxine Harris’ article (2002) supports the results of Chartier, Walker and Naimark’s (2009) examination concerning how physical and sexual violence may disrupt the life of the victim. Fallot and Harris suggest that traumas are linked to reduced capacity in modulating emotions, which may appear as anxiety, fear, hyperarousal or anger issues (Fallot & Harris 2002, 478). In addition, emotional numbing, dissociation, depression, decreased self-esteem, shame and guilt are some reported symptoms or consequences of traumatic experiences. Physical and sexual abuse also increases the risk of re-victimization and is more likely to cause substance disorder compared to people who have not been exposed to abuse. (Fallot & Harris 2002, 479–480.)

Many studies also suggest that the people who have suffered from multiple types of maltreatment report more often psychological or mental health problems than the ones who have been exposed to only one type of maltreatment. On the other hand, the different types of maltreatment, for example emotional and physical abuse, are often linked together and occur in same families or environments. (Mills et al. 2013, 4–5, 10.)

### 3 METHODS AND KEY CONCEPTS

#### 3.1 Empowerment

World Health Organization (2015, 2) mentions in The European Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020 Empowerment as one of three values and visions beside Fairness and Safety and effectiveness. It is written in the plan that all people who have issues with mental health, have a right to be autonomous and have opportunity to be responsible for the decisions affecting their lives (World Health Organization 2015, 2). Empowerment concerns both the individuals and populations and it is a process that helps individuals and groups to have better understanding of their lives and to take control over it (Baumann 2010, 1).

Neeru Aggarwal (2016, 1–2) discusses the individual level of empowerment in her article Empowering People with Mental Illness within Health Services and defines it as person's belief about how much they have influence and control over their own lives and how capable they are to utilize that influence. As the skills and qualities person needs to possess to enable the empowerment, she mentions mental capacity, self-esteem and the confidence to communicate one's views and wishes (Aggarwal 2016, 1). In addition to similar definitions of empowerment as Aggarwal, Baumann divides empowerment to four dimensions:

1. self-reliance
2. participation in decisions
3. dignity and respect
4. belonging and contributing to a wider community. (Baumann 2010, 1)

In the empowerment process, Aggarwal (2016, 1–2) emphasizes the importance of respecting the person, being non-judgemental and trying not to make the person inadequate in order to create a good relationship with them. She points out that a good relationship then enables the maintenance of self-esteem and creation of a trusty atmosphere to the person to reveal their emotions or feelings. It is important to establish an environment for the person to feel that expressing their emotions or feelings is accepted. It is also necessary to give the person an opportunity to influence the service provided to them and feel that their opinion matters and are respected. This helps with

creating an empowering environment and diminishing the person's powerlessness. (Aggarwal 2016, 1–2.)

Also, World Health Organization (Baumann 2010) defines some conditions and qualities that are important when achieving the goals of empowerment. One of them is Hope and respect; hope lets people believe in improvement and change in the future. The professionals working with persons with mental health problems should serve as deliverers of hope instead of judging the patients hopeless. The professionals also need to be respectful in terms of autonomy and dignity of people with mental health issues. (Baumann 2010, 4–5.)

Other important qualities according to World Health Organization (Baumann 2010) are: “understanding that people have rights”, “learning skills that the individual defines as important”, “moving from secrecy to transparency” and “feeling connected – not feeling alone”. Understanding that human rights concern equally everyone can improve self-confidence. Getting an opportunity to learn new things you think are important and worth aiming at, instead of someone else telling you what to learn, can bring surprising results. (Baumann 2010, 5–6.) It can also help taking ownership of one's own life.

Moving from secrecy to transparency means being open about being a user of mental health services and understanding them as learning experiences. Having to hide these parts of one's life can be burdensome and decrease self-esteem. Not feeling alone plays a big part in empowerment. Empowerment cannot happen to person alone and is related to sharing experiences and connecting with others. (Baumann 2010, 5) This also supports the idea of usefulness of peer group in pursuit of empowerment.

### 3.2 Peer Group

Working in group has many advantages compared to individual discussion or work. The participants have a chance to share experiences with peers who possibly have similar stories; the peers will probably understand someone's life situation and experiences. It is also relieving to realize that there are other people who share the same experiences or emotions. The group also allows the participants to practice communicational skills and

social behavior in limited and safe environment. (Martin, Heiska, Syvälahti, & Hoikkala 2012, 13–14.)

Martin et al. (2012, 15) say that according to their experience, the optimal size of a group for one instructor is between six and eight participants. They also mention that if the size of the group exceeds 12 participants, it cannot anymore be called a small group, and the intensity of working in it will be different. The duration of a group may vary from one meeting to months depending on how much work is needed to reach the objectives set. Though the group duration can be almost anything, it is good to be aware that there might not occur any deep interaction between the participants in very short-term groups. (Martin et al. 2012, 15.)

When working in a group, the emotional safety will become an essential factor in helping the participants to share their personal life with the group. The more personal and sensitive discussions are supposed to be had in the group, the more important will the feeling of safety become. (Martin et al. 2012, 15; Halonen 2017.)

Confidentiality and setting basic rules for the group play a huge role in creating a safe environment. What it means is that what is said or done in the group, will also stay there. Participants are allowed to describe their own process and doings outside the group, but not a word about other people in the group. In the rules, it is good to mention that when somebody is talking, others should respect their turn and listen. (Phoenix Society 2010; Halonen 2017.)

The rules can also contain supportive advices like everyone can decide how much they share about their life and experiences. It is also ok not to share at all if sharing does not feel good. (Harmony Place; Halonen 2017) On the other hand participants can be encouraged to challenge themselves a little and try to reach out of their comfort zone. Saying sensitive or delicate things aloud might be very relieving experience and it is also good to be practiced as a skill. (Martin et al. 2012, 29.)

As noted before, building trust and confidentiality are very essential for any deeper sharing to happen in the group. In addition to laying out the rules, can trust and safety be increased by familiarizing participants with each other, sharing the goals and

objectives of the group and doing together something that will release possible tension or suspension. (Harmony Place; Martin et al. 2012, 50–52; Halonen 2017.)

Playing funny games together, is a good way to relax participants and release tension (Halonen 2017) but also for tuning into the group in the beginning of every meeting. It is very important to spend enough time in warming up and tuning in for the group before actual working process (Martin et al. 2012, 22). The same method may though be used also as the main tools in the group. Doing art, drawing, dancing, painting and playing are excellent methods to be used in strengthening mental health groups where participant may have difficult backgrounds and hard to express themselves (Halonen 2017).

### 3.3 Arts therapies and arts as therapeutic method

Karkou and Sanderson (2006, 1) divide the field of arts therapies to four different professions: art therapy, music therapy, dramatherapy and dance movement therapy. Even though, they are all classified under arts therapies, they all have their own history, training, professional organizations and separate theoretical and methodological preferences (Karkou & Sanderson 2006, 1). Arts therapies are said to be effective with multiple kinds of mental health issues. Karkou & Sanderson (2006, 23) mention for example autism, Asperger's syndrome, ADHD, people who harm themselves, trauma survivors and those who have been exposed to sexual, physical or emotional abuse. Many studies also suggest that arts therapies can help with clients with low self-esteem or anxiety (Karkou & Sanderson 2006, 23).

Although, art can be used therapeutically by anyone, only specially trained professionals can call themselves arts therapists. The therapists are registered in professional associations and the professional field is regulated by the Health Professionals Council. As anyone can use arts as therapeutic method, there is no guarantee for the quality or secure methods. Therefore, the training of arts therapies can protect the clients against possible harm and prevent unintentional abuse. In arts therapies, the main focus is not always on the end product but on the process and the interaction between the therapists and the client. (Karkou & Sanderson 2006, 30–32.)

Art is also used in many forms of psychotherapy. For example, a psychoanalyst can use arts with the client to examine unconscious material. Instead, in humanistic psychotherapies, self-expression and creativity are emphasized, as in arts therapies. The connection between arts therapies and psychotherapy also works vice versa; two of the main branches of psychotherapy have had a significant role in arts therapies becoming real. (Karkou & Sanderson 2006, 34–35.)

The arts therapies can be used for a variety of purposes. Karkou and Sanderson (2006, 68) list the aims of arts therapies that Liebmann (1981) introduces. The personal purposes the list contains are, for example: creativity and spontaneity, confidence-building, increased personal autonomy and motivation, freedom to make decisions, expressing emotions, feelings and conflicts and developing self-awareness. As social purposes Karkou and Sanderson mention: awareness, recognitions and appreciation of others, involvement in group activities, communication, sharing of problems, social support and trust and examination of group issues. (Karkou and Sanderson 2006, 68.)

Also, Jenny Secker, Helen Spandler, Sue Hacking, Lyn Kent and Jo Shenton (2007, 14) found out that arts participation was strongly connected to empowerment of the participants. They also mention former studies that showed empowerment in forms of enhanced self-esteem, confidence and personal growth.

### 3.4 Evaluation and feedback

The achievement of the goals of the group and feedback about the activities and the group was gathered with three different methods. The first method was group discussion. The participants were planned to be asked feedback or evaluation after every activity. The purpose was to find out, how well the activities serve the purpose of the group. Sometimes the participants were split into pairs or small groups in which they could first discuss the topic, and then share their ideas with the whole group. Also, more general discussions were held concerning the activities or current feelings of the participants.

Another, more physical, method for gathering feedback and evaluating the activities was called Feedback line (Martin et al. 2012, 77–79). In the Feedback line, a question or



a thesis is asked from the participants. Then they are instructed to place themselves in the room based on their opinion concerning the question. One end of the room, or a marked line, is defined to represent one opinion to the questions, and the other end of the room is the opposite to the first opinion. For example, if the question is “How do you feel now?”, one end of the room could mean “very good” and the other end “very bad”. After the participants have found their places on the line, their positions and opinion is discussed. The discussion can be open, or the participants can be separately asked, why did they choose that place in particular. (Martin et al. 2012, 77–79.)

The results of the empowering mental health group’s feedback lines are converted into 11-point scale (from 0 to 10) for the report. The scale was suitable for the feedback line’s purposes, 11 measuring points being enough for adequate accuracy. 11-point scale also guarantees a value in the middle of the scale, which was introduced in the group to clarify the instructions.

The third method used in doing evaluation and gathering feedback was observation of the participants, their behavior, reactions and roles they take in the group. The method has been used a lot in social sciences (Salmon 2015, 36) and, according to Walshe et al. (2012, 1049), observational methods are useful for learning about people’s behavior and actions, what they do and what kind of roles they take. The group’s observations were recorded in field notes during the activities. Field notes were used instead of video recording to minimize the feeling of intrusiveness and maximize the participants perception of security and trust (Walshe, Ewing and Griffiths 2012, 1052).

## 4 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS

### 4.1 IPER and girls

Institute of Psychological and Educational Research (IPER) is a non-profit organization in Kolkata, India. IPER was founded in 1971 and has been collaborating with Diak since the early 1990's. The first students from Diak went to IPER on 1992. (Institute of Psychological and Educational Research b; Institute of Psychological and Educational Research c; Meretmaa 2012, 26.) Since IPER's foundation, it has been working with underprivileged communities and groups trying to improve equality in the area. IPER's target groups include child labor, street children and women and children who are abused or victims of violence. (Institute of Psychological and Educational Research b.)

IPER offers many different services and is part of various projects concerning education, child protection and women's empowerment. The focus is on "education, nutrition, vocational training and recreation" (Meretmaa 2012, 26). Among other things, they arrange pre-school and basic education for underprivileged children and education and training for women from the neighborhood (Mallik 2017; Meretmaa 2012, 26).

IPER also runs an open shelter for 25 girls who are at risk of neglect or abuse and need protection. The shelter provides housing, nutrition, education, health care, counselling and many other services for the girls staying there. (Institute of Psychological and Educational Research a.) The age of the girls living in the open shelter vary a lot, the oldest being on the edge of legal adulthood. Even though, the funding for the open shelter is aimed for the underage, the older girls are not thrown out but supported and guided toward more independent life. (Mallik 2017.)

The background and the living conditions of the girls varied a lot before they came to the open shelter. Many of them had encountered or were at risk of violence, neglect, exploitation, child labor, lack of nutrition, living on the street or abuse in different forms. (Institute of Psychological and Educational Research a; Institute of Psychological and Educational Research 2017; Mallik 2017.)

## 4.2 From an idea to a plan

The Director of IPER, Dr. Bijli Mallik, introduced the idea of assembling a mental health themed group for some of the girls living in the organization's open shelter as my thesis. After discussing about the needs for the group we came to a conclusion that, because I am not a therapist and time is limited, an empowering group would be possible to arrange. The general goals for the group were: recognizing and expressing own emotions, generating self-awareness, building participants' trust in themselves and having fun together.

As the goals of the group were hard to measure, they were split into two concrete and more personal objectives. First goal was challenging yourself, meaning, doing or saying something that feels either scary, embarrassing or other way unpleasant. It is stepping out of one's comfort zone to uncertain and finding out that it was ok. It can also mean accepting the imperfections and learning to let go of the internal critic within us. This was the main theme of the whole group and basically all the activities were about personal challenge. More concrete objective concerning the goal was an expectation that every participant would at least once encounter a challenging moment and take it.

The second more personal goal was learning something new about yourself. This was little bit more difficult goal to measure than the first one. The concrete objective was that all the participants would learn at least one new thing about themselves. This could mean learning about your emotions or reactions, personal limits, listening your body or finding out that you were scared about doing or saying something in front of others but it proved to be a false fear.

The size of the group was first decided to be between 6 and 8 participants as Martin et al. (2012, 15) suggested. A bigger group was suspected to cause difficulties for one instructor, also because of a possible language barrier that might turn out to be a hindrance. An even number of participants was also preferred, for the group included many pair work activities.

The members of the group were selected based on their English skills, age and will to join the group. Participants, who understood at least some English but preferably spoke it reasonably well, were the priority target group because the instructions and the discussions were held in English. At least some of the participants were known to speak good English, so they could translate the instructions to others who might not have understood everything.

Because of the language skills and the wanted level of maturity, the older girls from the shelter were preferred for the group. There were only a couple of 15+ year-old girls living in the open shelter among the 25 girls in total, so also some of the former IPER students and shelter residents were considered for the group. Though, they were known to be busy with their studies. Because of the lack of possible older participants, some of the younger ones were also discussed. The youngest participants were supposed to be approximately 12 years old being an exception in the group as they spoke rather good English and were comparably mature in their age group.

In addition to age and language skills, an important part of the selecting of the members was volunteering. Every participant had to be willing to join the group voluntarily and commit to the schedule. Volunteering guarantees a better motivation for joining the activities and challenging oneself.

Before planning the actual activities, Dr. Mallik gave me the schedule for the meetings based on our discussion and the time available. The schedule contained nine meetings, four of them lasting two hours and five lasting three hours being in total 23 hours.

The original plan and schedule for the group is seen in TABLE 2. The table shows the meetings and the order of different activities planned for the group. For more information about the activities, see APPENDIX 1. The meetings were designed to have a same basic structure to create safe and secure circumstances for the participants (Martin et al. 2012, 15; Halonen 2017). Every meeting was supposed to include all four following parts: Warm-up, art activity, physical activity and feedback.

TABLE 2. The original schedule for the group

Date & time	Program
Friday 27 Oct 2017 3–5 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to the group</li> <li>• Rules and the group process</li> <li>• Feelings and expectations about the group</li> <li>• Warm-up: Form a Line, Follow the Leader</li> <li>• Art: Circulating Portrait</li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul>
Sunday 29 Oct 2017 10 am–1 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm-up: Emotion cards (current feeling)</li> <li>• Warm-up: Follow the Leader</li> <li>• Art: Collective Painting</li> <li>• Physical: Leading the Blind</li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul>
Friday 3 Nov 2017 3–5 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm-up: Emotion cards (current feeling)</li> <li>• Warm-up: Follow the Leader</li> <li>• Art: Mess with a Friend</li> <li>• Physical: Own Space</li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul>
Saturday 4 Nov 2017 10 am–1 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm-up: Emotion cards (current feeling)</li> <li>• Warm-up: Follow the Leader</li> <li>• Art: Collage</li> <li>• Physical: Arm Wrestling</li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul>
Sunday 5 Nov 2017 10 am–1 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm-up: Emotion cards (on a half way)</li> <li>• Warm-up: Follow the Leader</li> <li>• Art: Family Picnic</li> <li>• Physical: Voice Barrage</li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul>
Friday 10 Nov 2017 3–5 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm-up: Emotion cards (current feeling)</li> <li>• Warm-up: Follow the Leader</li> <li>• Art: Circle of Emotions</li> <li>• Physical: Car Wash</li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul>
Sunday 12 Nov 2017 10 am–1 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm-up: Emotion cards (current feeling)</li> <li>• Warm-up: Follow the Leader</li> <li>• Art: Multiple Portraits</li> <li>• Physical: Free Style</li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul>
Friday 17 Nov 2017 3–5 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm-up: Emotion cards (group finishing next time)</li> <li>• Warm-up: Follow the Leader</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Art: Draw a Friend</li> <li>• Physical: Emotional Walk</li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul>
Sunday 19 Nov 2017 10 am–1 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm-up: Emotion cards (group finishing)</li> <li>• Warm-up: Follow the Leader</li> <li>• Art: Emotional Painting</li> <li>• Feedback about the whole group</li> </ul>

The activities were planned to support the purpose of the group: to help participants recognize and express their emotions, to generate self-awareness in them, to build participants' trust in themselves and finally, to have fun together. The emphasis of the activities was on arts and physical, more precisely drawing, painting, dancing and playing. Art, creative activities and playing can be used to express emotions, help in visualization, practice being in group, improve spontaneity, decrease tension and help in practice of goofing and doing funny things (Finnish Central Association for Mental Health, 48; Martin et al. 2012, 82; Halonen 2017). They can also help letting go of excessive self-control (Halonen 2017).

### 4.3 The group process

Even though, the size of the group was decided to be between 6 and 8 participants, the size turned out to be 12 people, because so many girls had wanted to join the group. Also, the age difference of the participants was bigger than planned. From the 12 participants 8 were under 14 years old. The bigger group size and younger average age led to some changes in the plan, meaning less discussions and more activities in the meetings.

The TABLE 3 outlines briefly how the group actually proceeded and what activities were done in which meetings. The table shows that some of the originally planned meetings were cancelled—mostly due to the lack of good communication—and the contents of the meetings were largely changed and rearranged in the process (see TABLE 2). In the end, the group met seven times between 27 October 2017 and 19 November 2017. Also, the number of participants varied quite much between the meetings. The participation activity, excluding the two cancelled meetings, varied from 5 to 12 out of the 12 members who joined the group. The reasons for the variation were

mainly the lack of communication, the lack of engagement and the suspension of some participants from the group.

TABLE 3. The schedule and the process of the actual group

<b>Date &amp; time</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Program</b>
Friday 27 Oct 2017 3–5 pm	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to the group</li> <li>• Rules and the group process</li> <li>• Expectations about the group</li> <li>• Warm-up: Form a Line</li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul>
Sunday 29 Oct 2017 10 am–1 pm	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm-up: Form a Line</li> <li>• Art: Collective Painting</li> <li>• Small group               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Physical: Own Space</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Friday 3 Nov 2017 3–5 pm	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CANCELLED: No participants showed up due to a lack of communication</li> </ul>
Saturday 4 Nov 2017 9 am–1 pm	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm-up: Meditation</li> <li>• Art: Mess with a Friend</li> <li>• Physical: Leading the Blind</li> <li>• Feedback</li> <li>• Small group               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Talking about first activities</li> <li>○ Physical: Arm Wrestling</li> <li>○ Feedback</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Sunday 5 Nov 2017 10 am–1 pm	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CANCELLED: Because of a holiday</li> </ul>
Friday 10 Nov 2017 3–5 pm	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm-up: Follow the Leader</li> <li>• Art: Circulating Portrait</li> <li>• Physical: Car Wash</li> <li>• Small group               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Feedback about Circulating portrait</li> <li>○ Feedback about Car Wash</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul>
Sunday 12 Nov 2017 10 am–1 pm	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm-up: Follow the Leader</li> <li>• Art: Multiple Portraits</li> <li>• Physical: Free Style</li> <li>• Small group               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Art: Circle of Emotions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul>
Friday 17 Nov 2017	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Warm-up: Follow the Leader</li> </ul>

3–5 pm		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Art: Collage (My dream future)</li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul>
Sunday 19 Nov 2017 10 am–1 pm	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Art: Emotional Painting</li> <li>• Physical: Voice Barrage</li> <li>• Small group             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Feedback and discussion about collage</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Feedback about the whole group</li> </ul>



## 5 RESULTS

### 5.1 First meeting – Friday 27<sup>th</sup> October

At 3 pm, when the group was supposed to begin, there was not a single participant present at the place where the meeting was held. After 5 minutes of waiting I decided to look for the group and found out that most of the participants didn't even know that the group was supposed to begin, nor they knew what the group was about. I explained the idea of the group and after having a conversation about the it, all the participants still wanted to be part of it. Although, I had a feeling that some people were attending mostly because the foreign visitor was the one to instruct the group.

The first planned part of the meeting was a discussion about the rules of the group. I introduced 3 rules: confidentiality (no discussion or thing said should leak outside the group), respect for each other (committing to group and being in time, listening others and allowing different opinions) and right to self-determination (everyone can decide how much they share). I also encouraged the participants to be open to challenge themselves and promised to be available after the meetings if needed to ensure a safer environment. (Phoenix Society 2010; Martin et al. 2012, 29.)

After the rules were internalized, I gave the participants a task to write down 3 expectations for the group. Even though I tried to explain the task the best I could, it did not go as well as I expected. I had hoped for personal expectations and hopes but Almost all the papers had “good bonding”, “following rules”, “sharing” and “respecting others” in them.

In the meeting, I had some trouble keeping order in the group. I tried to balance between making people listen and not yelling at them too much, because I wanted to create a safe and open atmosphere instead of school-like experience. Keeping order and discussions took so much time that I had to skip one activity. Instead we played couple of rounds Form a Line, where participants had to make a line and order themselves in it based on a quality—like the length of their hair—I gave them (see APPENDIX 1).

The activity seemed to be much fun for the participants after a couple of test rounds when they understood the rules of the game. The participants had a lot of trouble trying not to speak during the activity, so I emphasized the importance of silence. I also decided to use the activity more in future meetings because it challenged the participants, already in its simplest form. The activity felt a versatile way to challenge the participants with progressive degree of difficulty, thus help them step outside their comfort zone in a safe environment and—as Liisa Halonen (2017) mentioned—let go of their internal control. During the activity, some of the participants ended up in small arguments and fights about whether someone had longer hair than the other. Those situations made a good segue to solving the problem together in an adult-like manner.

In the end of the meeting I introduced the feedback line with which I wanted to collect feedback from the participants. In addition to oral feedback and observing I wanted to use some other methods too. This felt important especially because I knew that the language barrier would exist, and some of the participants could hardly speak any English. In the method, the instructor creates a thesis or asks a question, like “How do you feel about the group”. Then he defines the other end of the room mean “extremely good” and the other end “extremely bad”. Between the two ends goes a line where the participants then have to place themselves to show what they think about the question.

After instructing the feedback line and practicing it few times I asked participants two questions:

1. How do you feel now? (very bad | very good)
2. Based on the first meeting, how well do you think the group will meet your expectations? (not at all | perfectly)

Especially the latter question seemed to be difficult to understand, so I had to explain it in more detail and ask the older participants to translate it. In the end, I felt like everyone understood it. The FIGURE 1 shows the distribution of the opinions on the first question. It is seen from the figure that 7 out of 11 participants placed themselves on the “very good side”, 3 around the “not good or bad” and 1 in the “bad” area. I interviewed some participants about their position on the line. The ones in the middle and on the “bad” area told they felt tired and hungry because they hadn’t been eating anything for a long time and they had come to the meeting straight from the school,

which made the day very long. Arguments from “very good” side were mostly about the day, especially Form a Line activity, being very nice and fun.

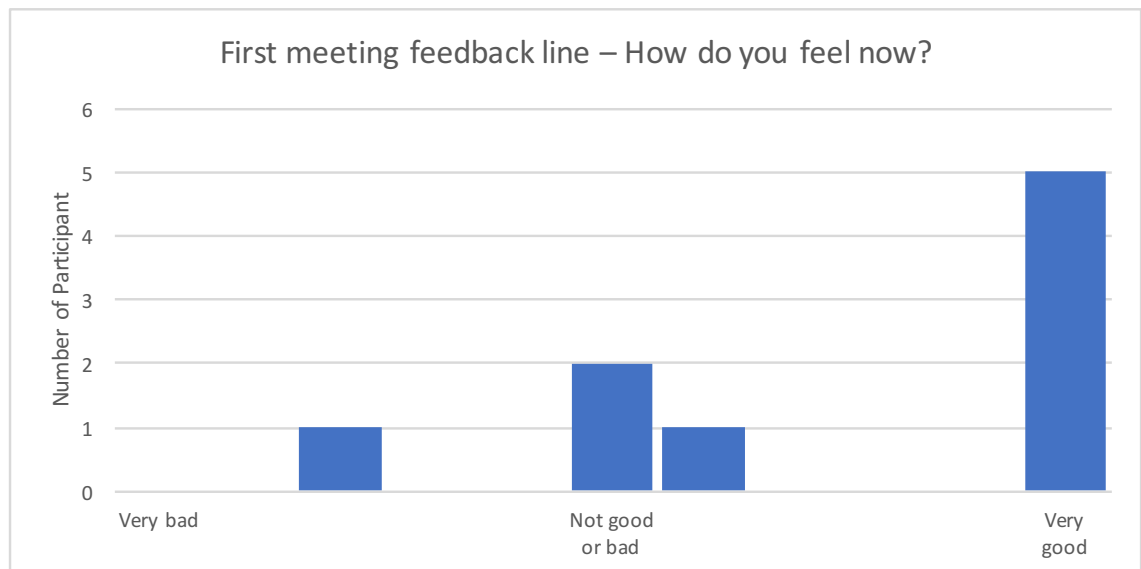


FIGURE 1: Results of first meeting's feedback line on question "How do you feel now?"

The FIGURE 2 shows answers to the second question of the feedback: “Based on the first meeting, how well do you think the group will meet your expectations?”. Almost all of the participants, 9 out of 11, placed themselves on the other end of the line, “Perfectly”. Two participants went to the middle and explained their place with the group’s restless atmosphere. They mentioned some participants arguing during the Form a Line activity and people not following the rules and disturbing others during the meeting. I asked everyone, what should we do about that problem. After a conversation, we ended up to a solution—suggested by the participants—that if anyone breaks the rules repeatedly, we will discuss it together, then give a warning, and if the behavior continues, suspend the person from the group for a while or permanently. Everyone said to be satisfied with the solution.

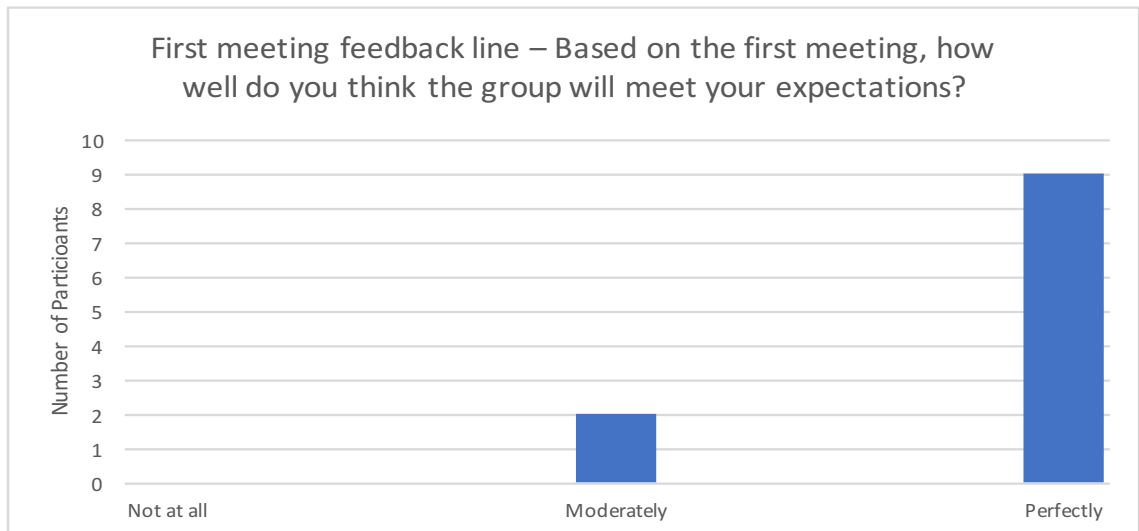


FIGURE 2: Results of first meeting's feedback line on question "Based on the first meeting, how well do you think the group will meet your expectations?"

After the meeting, I talked with two older participants about a possibility to split the group in two because I wanted to offer the more motivated participants a better group experience, and the younger participants were not matured enough to concentrate on the activities or being together in the group. Nor did they talk good enough English to understand the conversations or instructions.

So, I ended up creating a 6-member small group from participants I thought were the most motivated to really be in the group and do the activities to improve something in their life. I decided to divide the meetings in two parts where the first part would be done with the whole group and the latter part with the small group. I also had to make some changes to the plan to fit the activities better for both groups. Some activities, like Carwash, Circulating Portrait and Voice Barrage, were more practical done with more people and some, like Circle of Emotions, Emotional Walk and Own Space, I estimated to be perhaps too complicated or delicate for the younger participants who mostly seemed to be in the group for fun. For further information about the activities mentioned, see APPENDIX 1.

## 5.2 Second meeting – Sunday 29 October 2017

The second meeting also started late because I had trouble acquiring the key to the room we were supposed to have the meeting. After a 10-minute searching process the group

still had to wait for the half of the participants who were not present yet. I asked others to call for the missing participants and we started the meeting almost half an hour late.

I started the meeting with a discussion about the importance of being in time. We talked about respecting the other participants and the instructor and about the limited time we had for the meetings that they may not want to waste by being late. The participants took part in the conversation and said they understood the matter.

After the discussion, we started the actual meeting with the From a Line activity. I wanted to try different tasks for the activity and made the group form the line three times, first—as a warm-up—based on their surname, then based on how high they could jump and finally, based on how deep voice they could make. I thought that the voice task could be challenging for the participants, because my experience had been that making voices in front of others may feel somewhat embarrassing.

After every Form a Line task I checked the order in the line and made the participants, one by one, show me how high they could jump or how deep voice they could make. As I had anticipated, the participants looked a bit ashamed when making the deepest voice they could while myself and other participants were listening. Some participants needed slight encouragement and made the voice shyly, but in the end, everyone did it. Everyone also seemed to have a lot of fun listening others, and in a short discussion after the activity all the participants said they had enjoyed it very much even though it was occasionally difficult.

The first actual activity of the second meeting was Collective Painting (see APPENDIX 1). In the activity, I had prepared 3 large paperboards, and the participants were supposed to split equally around each of them. Every paperboard had a different topic written on them; the topics were: “Best day of my life”, “Worst day of my life” and “My life after 20 years”. The participants were meant to focus on their own emotions and feelings that come up when they think about the topic, remain silent and start drawing. Concurrently, they should try to create a collective picture with other participant, trying to fit their own drawings in the bigger picture. After a certain time they should move to a different topic. They were also allowed, and encouraged, to alter other participants’ drawings and add something to them. I wanted the participants to

both, concentrate on their emotions and process them through art (Karkou and Sanderson 2006, 68), and see how they react when someone messes with something emotional they created. Later I realized that the activity was perhaps too complicated and I should have just chosen one of the previous.

The participants had trouble understanding the concept of both doing something own and at the same time fitting it to the bigger, collective, picture, without talking. As it happened during the Form a Line activity, neither could the participants remain silent during the Collective Drawing. There was again plenty of commotion in the air and I often had to remind the participants to focus on the activity and give others peace to work. Some participants wanted so hard to finish their drawing that I virtually had to pull them away from the paper when it was time to change. I had anticipated similar demeanor, so I notified them many times about the time they had before the change, but it still wasn't enough. I also noticed that many participants had a lot of trouble in getting started. Many told that they don't know what to draw or that they are bad at drawing. This felt expected, as one of the purposes of the group was to challenge yourself learn to let go of self-control and perfectionism. I encouraged the participants to start drawing something very simple and not think too much about how the drawing looked like. Eventually everyone got started.

Two of the three groups discussed and agreed together what they wanted to draw, which was not the point. The reason for that seemed to be the lack of understanding or not listening the instructions. When it came to adding something to others' drawings, some participants took it too far and only concentrated on messing up the paper and coloring over everything. Couple of times I had to stop that and remind the participants that even though they were allowed to alter others' drawings, they could still respect others. Messing up the paper started a small revenge circle, so I decided that it is time to abort the activity.

I gathered everyone around and started a conversation about what had happened and why did it happen. We discussed about the anger and frustration the messing up others' drawings had caused and the reasons the it happened in the first place. I found out that at first it was just one of the older participant's whim to color over everything, and then the younger ones followed her footsteps. After laying out the arguments and emotions, I

let part of the group have a break and continued the discussion only with five people who were the major cause for the disarray during the activity. The group was seemingly remorseful and they told me they were very sorry about what happened. I asked them, how should we go on with the group, because the way the activity progressed was not acceptable.

We ended up to a decision that the five would leave the meeting and come back next time, them trying to remember the importance of respecting others. I also questioned them on whether they really wanted to be part of the group. The answer was firm yes, so I allowed them to continue in the upcoming meetings.

After five participants leaving and the end of the break, we discussed a little bit the event during the activity with the remaining six people, but I decided to leave the longer feedback discussion to the end of the meeting. The main theme in the discussion was the anger and frustration that some participants had caused with their behavior. In the end, I saw the activity—with all its twists—very helpful for the purposes of the group, because we got to talk about and process many different emotions and reactions.

Then, we did the Own Space (see APPENDIX 1) activity. In the activity, the participants split into pairs and stand face-to-face in a distance from each other. The other one is the leader who moves the other with hand signs closer or farther, at the same time listening to her own body and emotions, trying to find a convenient distance between them. We did a couple of variations of the activity in the meeting. The purpose of the activity was to learn about one's personal space and being the master of it. In the middle of the activity, two of the younger participants seemed to be already so tired that they could not listen or carry out the activity. I decided to ask them if they would like to leave the meeting and have some rest. They did.

After the activity, I made the four participants who were still present give feedback about everything we did during the day. The three questions were: “How easy the activity was to you?”, “I challenged myself during the activity” and “I learned something new about myself”. I realized that the questions might be difficult to understand, especially with the language challenges, so I explained them to the participants in more detail. The first question measured the challenge of the activity—

how embarrassing it felt, how much struggle was encountered and was it easy to do the activity as instructed or did you feel like taking the easy way out. The second question then measured the amount of effort the participants put to taking the challenges and facing the hardships. Learning about oneself in the last question did not mean any massive revelations but mostly small realization about one’s behavior, reactions or emotions like: “this wasn’t so bad”, “it is ok to feel this way”, “I reacted this way” or “this is how I feel now”.

The figures 3–8 represent the results of the Own Space and Collective Drawing activities’ feedback lines. The FIGURE 3 shows that the participants felt the activity not very challenging, although there was some variation between the individuals. On the other hand, all the four participants placed themselves on the line stating that they challenged themselves very much (FIGURE 4), which seem to be in contradiction with the results from the first question (FIGURE 3). Exactly the same happened with the feedback lines concerning Collective Drawing (FIGURE 5; FIGURE 6). Perhaps the participants misunderstood the instructions, or the questions and claims were too complicated.

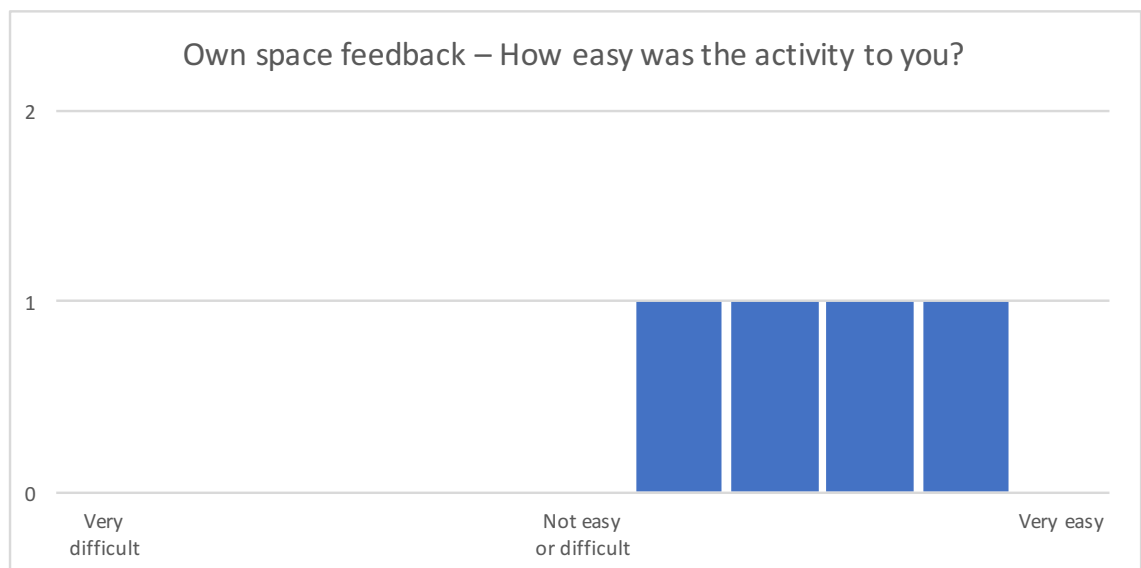


FIGURE 3: Results of Own Space activity’s feedback line on question "How easy the activity was to you?"



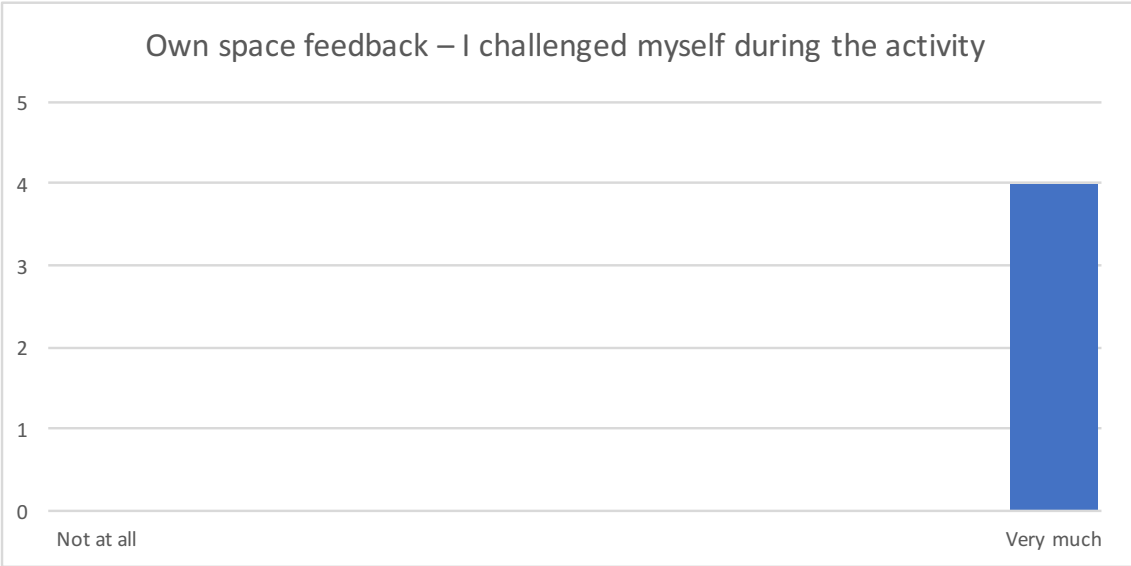


FIGURE 4: Results of Own Space activity’s feedback line on question "I challenged myself during the activity"

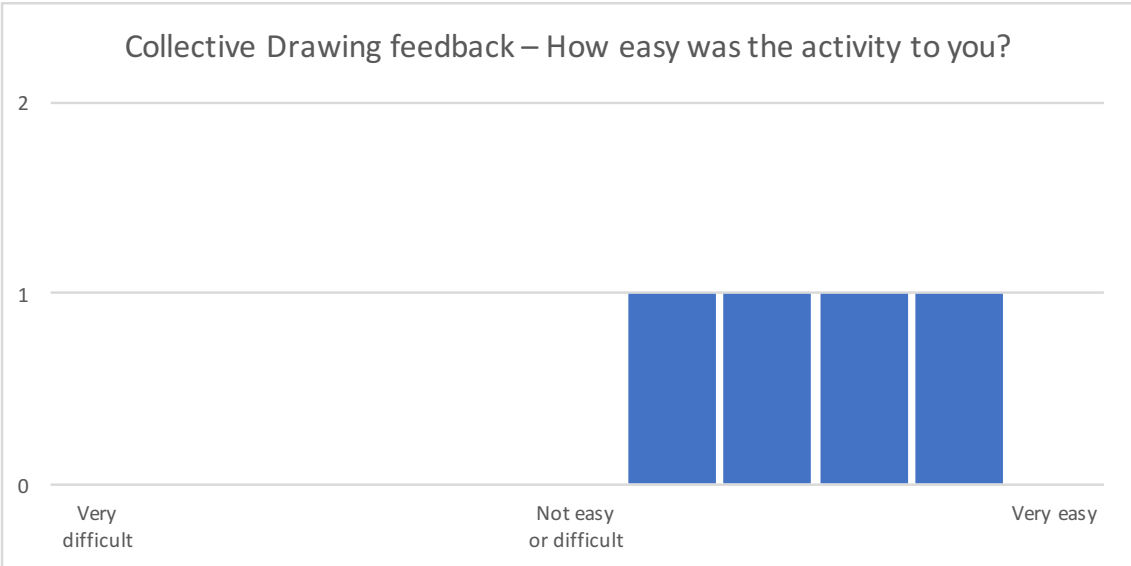


FIGURE 5: Results of Collective Drawing’s feedback line on question "How easy the activity was to you?"

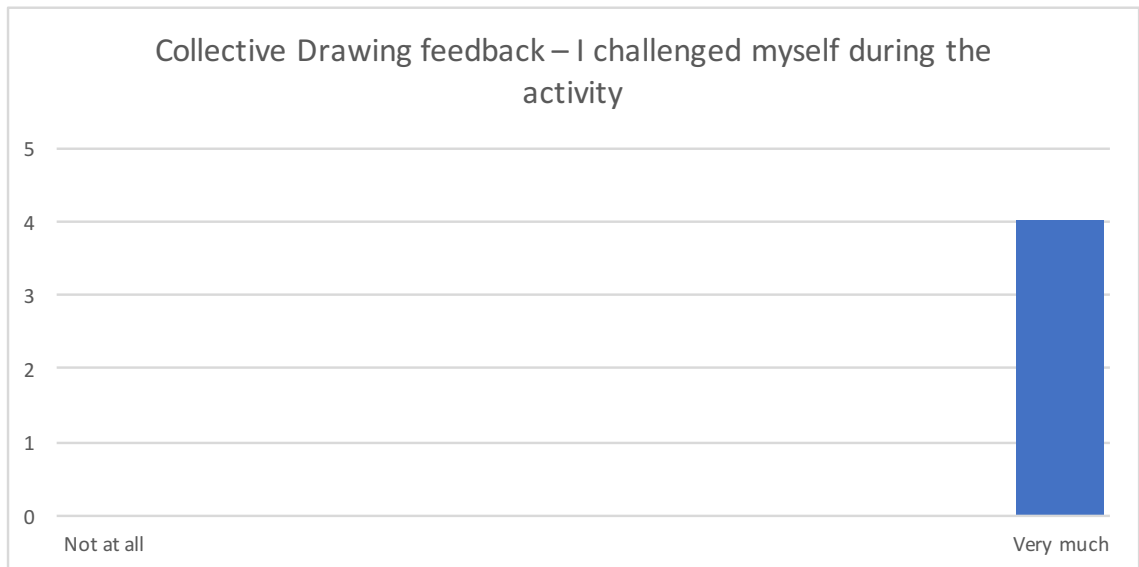


FIGURE 6: Results of Collective Drawing's feedback line on question "I challenged myself during the activity"

The last claim of the feedback line concerning the Own Space activity (FIGURE 7) dealt with learning something new about yourself. Three out of four participants felt like they learned something and one nothing. The one who places herself on the “Not at all” end of the line said that she had done quite similar activity previously in some other group, and that is why she felt that she had not learned anything new about herself.

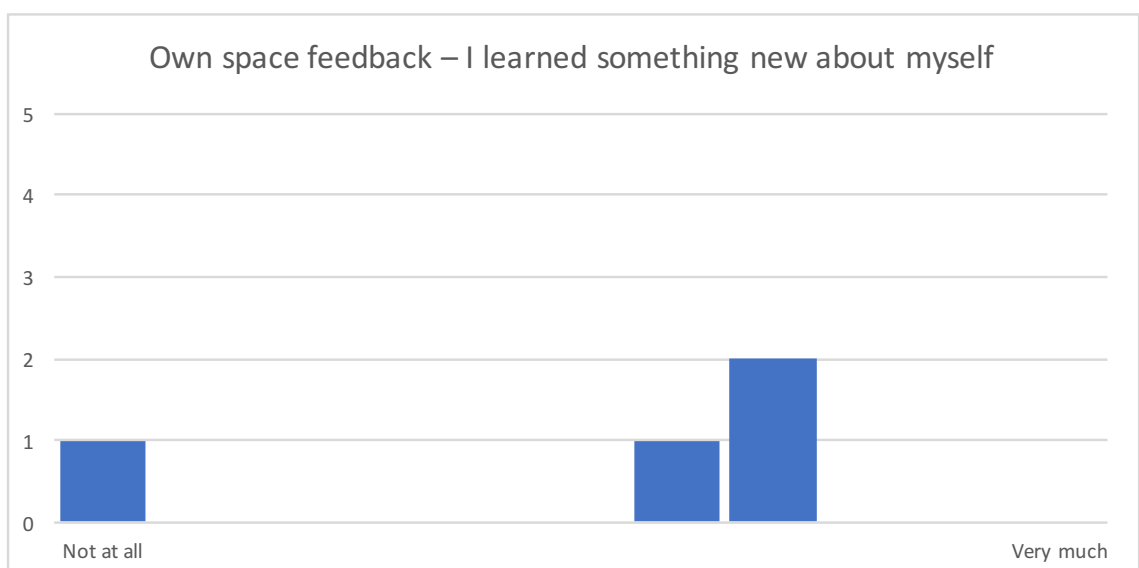


FIGURE 7: Results of Own Space activity's feedback line on question "I learned something new about myself"

After the feedback line about Own Space we had a conversation concerning the activity. The spoken feedback was very positive. The participants also said it was quite easy to find a good distance, but some parts—for example when the other person turned around and just walked away—felt a bit difficult in an emotional way. The discussion supported the theory that the participants understood the first question on the feedback line, but had trouble understanding the claim “I challenged myself during the activity”.

We also discussed about the meaning of personal space and the right to decide its limits. Some of the participants mentioned that taking care of their personal space and integrity with “bad people” is quite easy for them. I brought up the idea of everyone having a right for their personal space also with friend and acquaintances. The idea seemed to be pretty new to the participants, and I believe we had a productive conversation about what personal space with friends could mean and how could one take care of it and message it to others.

Then, we had feedback lines for the Collective Drawing (FIGURE 5; FIGURE 6; FIGURE 8). The FIGURE 8 is about learning new about oneself and it shows that all the four participants thought they learned quite much from the activity. In the discussion concerning the activity, one participant mentioned that the “Worst day of my life” was the most emotional for her, because she had had a very sad experience and the activity made her think about it. She also said that seeing someone alter that drawing of hers made her angry. Also, other people had felt anger when they saw someone touching their drawings. On the other hand, two participants who had altered others’ drawings—not everyone dared to do that at all—said they felt happiness while doing that.

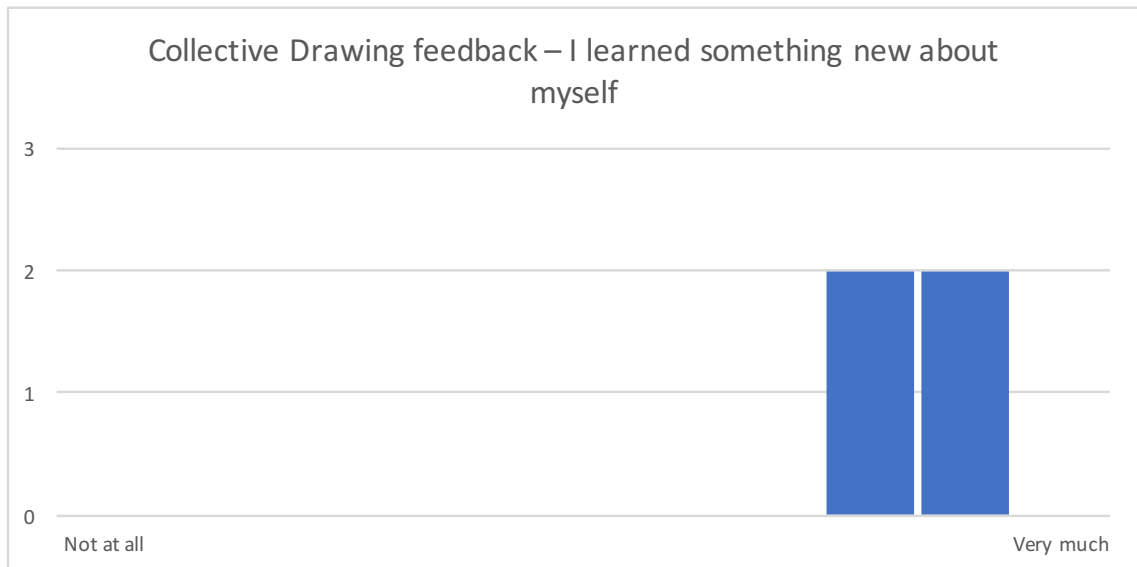


FIGURE 8: Results of Collective Drawing's feedback line on question "I learned something new about myself"

In the end, I asked for feedback about the whole meeting in general. Three out of four said the meeting was very good. One thought neutrally about it because she thought the Collective Drawing was not nice due to the problems the group underwent, but the latter part was good.

### 5.3 Third meeting – Saturday 4 November 2017

The third meeting of the group was supposed to be held on Friday the third of November but only one participant showed up. I went around asking where the rest of the group was and found out that they were at school. The information about the group had not reached the teachers of the participants so they did not know to let them go early from school. Thus, the meeting was cancelled and the meeting on Saturday the fourth of November became the third meeting.

I decided to begin the meeting with small meditation to try if that would calm the group down a notch. So, I made the group sit down on a comfortable position, close their eyes and focus on their breathing. During the meditation, I saw that some of the participants were peaking and focusing on what others were doing. Also, after a short time, many of them were already talking with each other. We were also interrupted by a staff member of IPER, which increased the restlessness.

The first activity was Mess with a Friend (see APPENDIX 1). The activity is done in pairs. Every pair gets a paper sheet which will be divided into two equally sized areas with a line. Then the pair sits on the floor facing each other, the paper between them, and start drawing a line on their own area of the paper. They can draw any shapes or lines they want, but rather not anything resembling, and they are not allowed to cross the line to other person's area. After a while they get a permission to cross the line to the other side. The purpose of the activity was to see how people react to someone drawing over their product and how does it feel to do it to others. The activity was somewhat a reprise of the Collective Drawing but in more controlled manner.

Some of the participants had trouble understanding what they should draw on the paper. I tried to explain and show them that it can be just a line that just goes around the paper randomly, but still many participants started drawing something resembling like the sun or a house. After I gave a permission to cross the line that divided the paper, nobody crossed it. After a while I decided to force everyone cross the line. The result was—based on the discussion in the small group later—that people first finished their own picture and then turned the paper around and added something they thought the other person would like.

Next activity was called Leading the Blind, where the group splits into pairs; then one person from each pair is blindfolded with a scarf and the other is leading her to the places she wants. The point was that, without talking, the leader takes care of the blind and prevents her hurting herself. The purpose of the activity was to take responsibility over and take care of another, learn empathy, concentrate on other senses than sight and trusting yourself to another person. The leader could take the blind to touch, smell or listen to different things to expand the experience.

I used time to explain the activity and emphasize the importance of taking care of the blind, because I did not want anyone to hurt herself. I also asked the older participants to explain everything to the ones who did not speak English. The start seemed fine until soon one blind person bumped straight into a door and knocked her head, because her young leader did not pay at all attention to her and only pulled her from hand. I took everyone back and did the instructions all over again.

In the end, almost everyone had had very fun time trying different things, although many had still collided with some furniture or obstacle, some even attaining small bruises. After the activity, I asked the participants to tell about the activity and the feelings relating to it. The general discourse was that the activity had been so far the highlight of the group. Half of the group experienced being the blind more difficult and half thought the leader’s part was more challenging. To question whether it was easy to be quiet during the activity, almost everyone answered affirmatively. My observations about it, though, showed the exact opposite.

Before letting part of the group go and continuing with the small group, I made the participants do one feedback line on the question “How did you like the meeting?” (FIGURE 9). Half of the group (six out of 12) went to “very good“ end of the line, two between that and “not good or bad”, three in the middle and one to “very bad”. The ones in the middle mentioned that the meeting was very nice except the meditation—which, based on the feedback, almost nobody liked—and the bruises gained from the reckless escorting in the Leading the Blind activity. The one at the “very bad” end said through an interpreter that she was there because she felt she was mistreated during the Leading the Blind activity, when she accidentally led her blindfolded friend dash against the door. I let her explain her perspective of the situation and apologized if I had been too harsh at the time.



FIGURE 9: Third meeting feedback – How did you like the meeting?

I ended the big group early enough to have an hour and a half time with the small group, but at the start, a teacher came in and told us that all the participants had to leave in 30 minutes, because it was time to celebrate guru Nanak's birthday. I decided to abandon the original plan, have a short discussion about the Mess with a Friend activity and use the remaining time with a short activity, Arm Wrestling.

In Arm Wrestling the participants—this time only four people, because some from the small group had to leave early—split into pairs. They stand face-to-face, grab other person's hands and start pushing. Later they can add voice, for example shouting, to the pushing to show their will. The purpose of this short activity was to make participants familiar with using their body and voice, but also showing their will and holding their ground (Halonen 2017).

It seemed that the start was a little bit shy, but after a while the participants started pushing more daringly. Adding the voice to the game was also difficult at first; one participant mentioned that she felt first shy shouting, but after brushing up she got even more strength from her war-cry.

In the end of the meeting we did not have time for the feedback line, but I asked the small group to give feedback for the whole meeting. Basically, the group said that the meeting had been very nice and they had challenged themselves, especially during the Leading the Blind and Arm Wrestling activities. The next meeting on Sunday the fifth of November was cancelled because of a holiday.

#### 5.4 Fourth meeting – Friday 10 November 2017

The fourth meeting started similarly with the third meeting. “The funniest face you can make” followed by “funniest voice you can make” on Form a Line activity was seemingly challenging the participants, but they all managed to do it after some encouragement. The group seemed to enjoy so much doing the funny faces and sound that I decided to take the group sit on the floor and do the faces and voices together and have fun.

The first main activity of the meeting was Circulating Portrait (see APPENDIX 1). In the activity, everyone will sit on the floor on a circle and get a paper sheet and a crayon. The participants write their name on the paper and pass it to the next person. Then everyone will start drawing the person whose name is on the paper from their perspective. After a while the papers will be passed to the next person, and the drawing will continue where the previous person left. The activity ends when everyone receives a paper with their own name.

The participants had again difficulties being quiet during the activity. They also did not understand exactly that the person was supposed to be drawn from the drawer's perspective, meaning that everyone draws everyone from different angle. In the group, almost all the portraits were from the front-side. This, though, wasn't much of a problem considering the objectives of the activity, which were: to have fun, to see imperfect peer-made drawing of yourself and to let go of perfectionism and self-control by both drawing and seeing others draw you.

Due to existing restlessness and the participants' lack of English skills, I kept the feedback section short and decided to have it longer with the small group. Next activity was Car Wash (see APPENDIX 1), in which the participants form two lines which align face-to-face, approximately one meter distance from each other. The lines form the wash. Then participants one by one play a car that drives through the wash. Before the washing, the car decided what kind of vehicle they are and what kind of wash they want.

The instructions went well, I also drew the group an example of the activity to demonstrate it. Everyone was very excited about the Car Wash claimed to have understood the instructions. The group organized itself easily to the Car Wash formation and the first person was ready to get washed, but when she started walking through the formation, the plans failed. Many participants blocked the "car's" way and started washing her too roughly by smacking her, even she had hoped for a gentle was. She fell down and I had to interrupt the washing. I had a serious discussion with the group about what had. Everyone acknowledged the misstep and wanted to do it again, but the next try was an exact copy of the events of the first attempt, so I decided to cancel the whole activity.



We had another conversation about the activity, and the participants seemed to regret what happened. Some were disappointed and angry about the ruined activity because they found it very interesting. My observation and interpretation of the situation was that some of the girls were not ready or matured enough for the kind of activity where touching in good spirit is required. I felt that the suspense was too unbearable, so some participants had to process it through humor. Even though, the activity was not completed, it became another kind of learning experience. We got a chance to process a lot of frustration, anger and disappointment.

Through the lifespan of the whole group, some of the participants had had very difficult to concentrate on anything—even during the first five minutes—regardless of whether we had meditation or something else as a warm-up. Behaving that way, they kept delaying the meetings and disturbing the ones who were motivated and capable of doing the activities. Because of that and the events of the Car Wash activity, I decided to suspend four participants from the group from that day on. The suspended girls were visibly sad about the decision but said to understand, why I did it. I also had conversations with them later and encouraged them to express their possible anger or sadness to me about them being outside of the group. Some girls asked me to take them back and I did it gradually considering the person and the coming activities.

The activities and other incidents had taken so much time that we had time left only for small unravelling of emotions and feedback. The rest of the group expressed their sadness about the activity being ruined and some of the participants mentioned that the activity sounded very exciting and that they had wanted to do it. We also discussed my decision to suspend four members of the group. The participants seemed to understand and agree with my decision, but were also sad about their friends being out of the group.

#### 5.5 Fifth meeting – Sunday 12 November 2017

The fifth meeting started with only five participants, four being suspended, two preparing for exams and one visiting her parent. We started with a short discussion about feelings concerning the group being taken apart. The consensus was that the

smaller group worked better, although, some participants were sad for the suspended friends.

As a warm-up, we played a game called Follow the Leader (see APPENDIX 1). In the game, everyone will be the leader in turn and do some move or make a sound that others then imitate. I observed some participants having difficulties in making up a move, but after the group encouraging them, everyone came up with at least some move.

Next activity was Multiple Portraits, where the point is to draw the same subject increasing amount of times in always the same performance time. Everyone got an A3 paper sheet and a pencil. I had divided the sheets beforehand in 16 frames. I gave the participants three minutes time to draw my picture in the first frame. After that I asked them to draw my picture in the next two frames in three minutes. Then again, three minutes time to draw my picture in the next four frames, and finally the rest nine frames. The purpose was to increase the haste so that the participants had no chance doing good job with the drawing and they had to compromise between pace and quality. I decided that I myself will be the subject of drawing so that the participants would have more motivation to do good job.

After the activity, the group gathered together to show the results. Some of the participants seemed first shy to show their drawings, but after the others showed their own and we had fun comparing, especially the latest drawn pictures, the rest of the group also shared their products. In the feedback, some participants mentioned that it was difficult to draw badly.

The physical activity of the day was called Free Style (see APPENDIX 1). I had created a ten-minute long potpourri containing a section from five different songs or pieces of music. The genre of the songs varied from slow and emotional, instrumental music, through Elvis Presley to fast techno. The purpose was that the participants start laying on the floor, and when the music starts, they can also start moving the way they feel like. The focus is on listening to your body and letting it lead you instead of trying to perform cool dance moves.

The participants did not seem to hesitate on the activity but looked excited and started moving or dancing to the music each on their way. Some stayed laying longer than others did. My observation was that the activity was quite easy and freeing for the participants, but many also seemed to watch what others were doing and copy their moves. Mostly the participants seemed to enjoy the activity and have fun, which was also confirmed in the feedback conversation after the activity. The participants said they had fun time and that they did not bothered by others being around and doing their thing.

The last activity of the fifth meeting was Circle of Emotions (see APPENDIX 1). The activity is a short trip to your basic emotions. As the basic emotions for the activity I selected the most familiar classifications for me from Gestalt therapy: happiness, sadness, aggression and sexuality (Kärkkäinen 2012, 7). In the activity, the participants get a sheet of paper and a packet of crayons. The emotions are introduced one by one, and the participants are asked to imagine that particular emotion or a situation where they have experienced it. Then the participants each choose a color, which represents the emotion the best. After everyone has selected four crayons, they will draw a big circle on the paper and color it with the selected colors based on how much they feel each emotion appears in their life currently.

Before the activity we had a discussion about the emotions I had selected. I introduced each of them to the participants and we talked about them so that the participants would have as good notion about the emotions as possible. After the activity, the participants first introduced their circles to a peer and then gathered together to discuss the activity with the whole group. The participants showed their circles to everyone and told which color meant which emotion. We also discussed about which emotion was the most difficult and which the easiest. Four out of five participants mentioned that happiness was the easiest and one said aggression. The most difficult emotion differed more; two said sadness, one aggression and two mentioned sexuality. One participant mentioned that sexuality is the most difficult for her because she is so young that she does not feel it yet.

## 5.6 Sixth meeting – Friday 17 November 2017

Before the sixth meeting, one of the older participants who were suspended asked if she could come back to the meetings. I had a small conversation with her about being in the group—although she did not really speak English—and then decided to take her back.

The meeting started with Follow the Leader activity as did the previous meeting. After a while we moved to the real agenda of the day, because I knew there was not too much time. The activity of the day was The Collage (see APPENDIX 1). The participants were each given a large paperboard, scissors and glue. Then I brought them a lot of different magazines which they were supposed to glance through and cut off text or pictures that remind them of the current topic, or which somehow bring forth some emotions concerning the topic. The pictures and texts were then glued to the paperboard as a collage.

The topic of the day was: “My dream future”. I asked the participants to focus on five different themes in terms of the given topic: family, friends, job, physical health and intimate relationship they could trust. I picked the five themes from Dr. Jordan Peterson’s Future Authoring Program (Deep Dish; Self authoring) but I did not follow the program otherwise. One theme in the program is drug and alcohol use, which I decided to leave out of the Collage to narrow down the topic and because I did not think it was very interesting based on previous discussion with the participants. The purpose of the activity was to make the participants think about their future and generate the thoughts about it to the paper so that the dreams and hopes would become more concrete. Thinking about dreams could also give the participants strength to their lives (Finnish Central Association for Mental Health, 53). I also thought that the five different themes would concretize and ease the task and also make the dreaming more directed.

I had estimated the duration of the activity to be about an hour but during the activity I realized that it will take longer. I decided to let the participants take all the time they needed because they were really focusing on the task and seemed to be excited about it. Because some of the participants were faster than others, I moved the general discussion about the activity to the next meeting and only asked the participants to introduce the

collage to me when finished. Then I let them go. I finished the activity with last two participants a little bit after the meeting was supposed to end.

### 5.7 Seventh meeting – Sunday 19 November 2017

In the last meeting, I took back all the participants who could come, so that we could finish the group together. I started the meeting without a warm-up because we had a lot to do and not much time. The art activity of the day was Emotional Painting (see APPENDIX 1) where the participants were supposed to paint without thinking by just letting their body and emotions move the brush. The purpose was to let the participants observe their emotions and feelings and to help them let go of their internal control and thinking. I asked them to paint with their worse hand to mitigate their perfectionism concerning the painting.

Most of the time the participants did not either remember or want to paint with their worse hand, so I had to remind them frequently about it. In time, I decided to stop reminding them and let especially the younger ones paint as they wanted, because I felt that me nagging at them would probably not help them achieve the goals of the activity. Some of the participants had also difficulties in understanding that the painting does not need to represent any actual thing.

Based on the feedback and my observations, most of the participants enjoyed the activity and used their imagination with the painting methods. Working was so intense that we had to spend quite long time to clean the floor from all the spilled and splashed paint and water.

The next activity was Voice Barrage (see APPENDIX 1). In the activity, all the participants lay on the floor in a circle face up and heads toward the center of the circle. Then they imagine that above their heads is a huge slab or a plate that they have to hold up with their voice. The voice has to be in balance or the plate will lean and fall. So, everybody has to listen to others and try to keep the voice barrage in balance. If someone wants, it is recommendable to bring new voices in the barrage, so that others can follow it.

The instructions to the activity took a while but I felt that everyone understood how the activity works. Everyone went to the formation and started shouting or keeping some other kind of voice. In the beginning, some participants seemed to be a little bit shy about using their voice, but when they heard others doing it they also started being louder. Most of the time the participants seemed to have fun, but some trouble the group had when few participants turned around and started watching what others were doing. That made some participants feel uncomfortable. The other disturbance was some participants taking the fun a bit too far by yelling loudly in to other participants' ears. The activity ended when a teacher disrupted it saying the group caused too much noise and thus disturbed the people on the lower floor.

In the feedback, most of the participants said they enjoyed the activity and that they were first shy about it but got more courage during the activity. Some participants were slightly annoyed about others yelling at their ears or turning around during the activity. We talked about the issues and the possible reasons behind them. After that I shared the participants their drawings and paintings from the previous meetings and we had a short discussion about the feelings they brought up and about the group in general. The participants said they were very satisfied with the group and felt sad because it was ending.

After finishing with the big group, I spent the rest of the time with the small group talking about the activities and the group itself. First, we had a discussion about the Collage activity from the previous time. Everyone introduced their collage, pointed out the different themes in it and told the group more about their dream future. My observation was that the participants were very brave about telling even quite personal things about their dreams, even about the intimate person they could trust. Although, it was the theme that caused the most shyness and embarrassment.

After the collage, I focused on the feedback about the whole group. All the members of the small group were very satisfied with the group. Everyone also agreed that they had wound up in challenging situations during or outside the activities and had many times taken the challenge. When asked: "what could have been done better, and what would the participants have wanted more during the group", none of the them came come up with any feedback. I encourage them a bit, and then one of the participants mentioned

that she wanted to have more bonding among the participants. I asked her, how I, as the instructor, could have made it possible. She went seemingly shy, so I decided to say that I am an adult and can handle also feedback that is not all positive. After that she gained courage to say that I could have been stricter with the discipline in the group.

Also, another participant mentioned the order in the group which I could have been more rigorous with. A third participant said that she hoped no-one would have been needed to suspend from the group because she felt that all the participants were like a family and separating some people from the group felt thus bad.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS AND EVALUATION

### 6.1 Conclusions about the group

During the planning of the group, I imagined it to be very different that it turned out to be. The low level of English skills was the first thing to surprise me, even though I had spent some time with the girls beforehand. Still, I did not know them well enough to estimate the linguistic abilities of the participants realistic. Second surprise was the age of the participants. Before starting the group, I had received some advance information about some of the participants being younger than planned, but back then I did not understand the significance of it. The big age gap between the participants proved to be complicating the group work, because the interests and motivations of the participants varied a lot with the age of the participant.

Another dilemma that the young participants being in the group caused to me was with keeping order in the group. I wanted the participants to feel free and secure to express themselves, so I did not want to be too strict with the discipline. On the other hand, some order had to be maintained for the group to be able to operate. In the last meeting, I asked the participants: “what could have been done better, and what would the participants have wanted more during the group”. Some of the participants had hoped for more bonding among the participants. After asking, how I, as the instructor, could have made the bonding possible, I was told that I could have been stricter with the discipline in the group. My observation was that, possibly culture-wisely, the participants had been used to stricter discipline and stronger adultery control than I had understood, and I was not able to adapt enough to that cultural context.

Before the group, I also had expected better commitment to the group from the participants. Soon I yet found out that many of the girls obviously had some other, more important, things in their lives that could interfere with their participation activity. Some of the girls were occasionally absent because of their studies or because they visited their parents or caretakers they had not seen in a while. Also, the participants were not very accurate with the schedules. First, I thought that it might be because of the Indian



culture, but I later understood that the reason is more probably the young age of the participants.

In the end, I enjoyed the group a lot. The meetings were not always easy to handle, but the participants were all very keen on the group and the activities, and we had a lot of fun time in every meeting. It was a delight to see the participants exhilarate and challenge themselves in the meetings. The knowledge I gained from the group was, among everything else, that things rarely go exactly as planned and it is thus good to have spare plans or ability to react quickly to surprising situations and events. I also found out that I was reasonably adaptive to different situations and could change plans and procedures swiftly.

## 6.2 Reliability of the evaluation and feedback

I gathered feedback and evaluated the success of the group by observing the participants during and after activities, having discussions about the activities and using more physical methods like the feedback line, where I asked the participants to place themselves in the room based on their opinion about the question I asked them. My original plan was to use—in addition to discussions—the feedback line after every activity and meeting with the same question set, to have a consistent way for evaluation. The three questions or theses I had prepared were:

- How easy the activity was to you?
- I challenged myself during the activity
- I learned something new about myself

To make sure that everyone understood the questions, I explained them and asked the older participants to translate them. Still, I felt that the feedback line was not very reliable method. The unreliability of the method can be seen in the FIGURE 3 and FIGURE 4, which concern the activity called Own Space. The FIGURE 3 shows that all the participants thought that the activity was approximately between a little bit easy or very easy, even though they all claimed to have challenged themselves very much (FIGURE 4). The FIGURE 5 and FIGURE 6 point to similar results for Collective Drawing activity.

My observation about the feedback line was also that the participants could not concentrate on the method. I assume that they either didn't understand the concept or didn't bother to think about the feedback and find the proper place. Another possibility is that they chose a place based on what others did. Probably some of the participants did the feedback line as I had planned it, but in general I feel that it was not a reliable method. Because of that, I abandoned the method after the third meeting.

During the feedback discussions, the participants were sitting reasonably calm on a circle and concentrated quite well on the topic, but a big problem was the language barrier. There was only couple of participants in the whole group who really understood what I said or asked. During the group, I often asked the older participants to translate my instructions and questions to the group. Without their help, I probably could not have had the group at all. But still, the conversation didn't really catch fire. Perhaps the messages changed on the way, or maybe translating was too clumsy way to communicate. It is also possible that even the older participants didn't really understand everything I said, and even though they did, they may not have been very good at giving structured instructions to others.

Another concern I had was that almost all the verbal feedback I received was around "it was very nice". Perhaps the participants enjoyed the activities, but I also felt that many of the, were either not matured enough to analyze the activities or their own feelings, or that they didn't want to share the negative parts of their opinions. Other possibility is that some of the participants didn't have good enough English skills to communicate their message and perhaps they didn't want to challenge themselves or bother the group with that. This I saw happening many times when introducing the activities. I often repeatedly asked, if the participants really understood what I said. After a positive answer, I still many times ended up realizing that the message was not understood at all.

Even though, I saw the discussions difficult and not very reliable method for feedback, the group had many conversations about the activities and meetings that I saw helpful in other ways. For example, some of the participants had a chance to express at least some amount of emotions. Also, especially with the small group, the participants shared some

very personal and delicate experiences, which I thought was them challenging themselves and being courageous.

Because I found the feedback line and discussions somewhat unreliable methods for evaluating the impact of the group and achieving its goals, I had to concentrate a lot on observing the participants, their behavior and them reaching the goals of the group. I also made many, even very quick or radical, changes to the group or the meetings, mostly based on my observations.

### 6.3 Meeting the goals of the group

The participants seemed to enjoy the activities and the whole group very much. Participants were sad to finish the group and claimed to have learned a lot of different things during the group. In the feedback line, they also placed themselves almost without exception to the good end of the line. Though, the lack of discipline in the meetings was causing some discord to the positive status-quo of the feedback lines.

I also think that I managed to create a safe enough space for delicate sharing to happen. Most of the participants “risked their reputation” in front of others and me by saying or doing something embarrassing or very personal. The fact that the participants already knew each other very well probably had something to do with the open atmosphere, but it might also have limited it. It can be more difficult to share something new or show a new side of yourself among your friends than with complete strangers. I also learned that embarrassing myself in front of the participants helped create the open atmosphere I wanted to have. It also gave the participants a permission to do the same thing (Martin et al. 2012, 82).

The participants I had to suspend for a while were also sincerely and visibly sad and repentant and pleaded to be taken back to the group later. I also bonded with and became much closer to the participants after suspending them, which assured me that I did the right thing. Lastly, I think that both the successes and the setbacks in the group were experiences from which both the participants and I could learn something new. I tried to have a discussion with the participants after every unexpected event so that they could better figure out and understand what happened and why.

My personal goals for the group were challenging yourself and learning something new about yourself. In more detail, I hoped that every participant would at least once during the group meet the goals. Measuring the goals turned out to be more difficult than I expected. I tried to ask the participants how they personally felt about these goals after every activity but I probably couldn't explain the concepts well enough to get reliable results. Still, most of the feedback seemed to point out that the participants had actually challenged and learned something about themselves.

In general, I think the group met the goals well, though not always the way I expected it to happen. Below is a couple of example situations where I thought I saw or experienced someone challenging or learning about themselves.

I saw challenging many times during the Form a Line activity. I saw many participants struggling with doing funny faces or funny noises, but after a slight encouragement, they did it. Same thing happened with Follow the Leader activity.

I witnessed Learning after Own Space activity, while we discussed the topic with the group. The center of our discussion was that you have a right to decide who is allowed to come to your personal space. The idea that you can also set your limits with a good friend of yours, was new to some participants. Some of the participants started to recall the moments they had felt some friend was too close to them.

Also, some learning experiences and challenging happened outside the group, the way I hadn't expected. One example happened with one of the four suspended girls after the fifth meeting, just before the girls' kick-boxing practice. One of the youngest suspended girls was sitting on the couch. I went to sit next to her and asked her how she was feeling. After a little encouragement, she admitted that she was angry at me because I had thrown her out of the group. I told her that I'm very proud that she was brave enough to be honest with me. Then I apologized that I had suspended her and said that I hope she still understands why I did it. Then I offered my hand and asked if we can be friends again. She said yes, but also asked me to take her back to the group. I said no. After that I noticed her becoming much closer to me and she started calling me elder brother. During that moment, I saw her both challenging herself and learning something

new about herself and her emotions. I also became much closer to other suspended participants after suspending them.

I experienced similar situations throughout the group both in the meetings and outside them. I consider some of the learning experiences happened outside the meetings being part of the group process because they had visible connections to the events in the group. So, even the group process didn't go even nearly as planned and we had many setbacks and problems, I think the group achieved the goals I had set well and fulfilled its purpose in empowering the participants and improving their mental health, at least a little.

#### 6.4 Future development and possibilities

The mental health group I organized was quite short-term. We met only seven times, which is why I did not expect big changes or improvement in the participants mental health. I anyway found the group very good and helpful to the participants. If similar group meetings were organized in regular basis, the group could have more constant impact and the participants could have a chance to create a routine out of challenging themselves. With the instruction booklet I made for IPER, arranging regular meetings would be easier, but obviously also new activities needed to be created.

I assume that if the instructor of the group was Indian and spoke the same language as the participants, the benefits of the group would be greater. The meetings could be more efficient without unnecessary interpretations and misunderstandings. The group could also be divided into two age groups where the younger group could focus on more playing social games, and the older group on more complicated and challenging activities and discussions. With dividing the group, the group size would also be more suitable for the purpose and the meetings easier to handle.

Similar group could also be arranged season-wise by, for example, interns from Diak. That would create some sort of stability and continuity to the activity without requiring too much resources from the organization. That is, if the flow of the interns stays regular.

Taking care of the living conditions and mental health of the children is utterly important because they have long lasting, even severe, consequences in the quality of the children's lives. An empowering mental health group may be one influential tool to help making change in the lives of the unprivileged, neglected and abused children, both in Indian context and globally. Empowering groups may not be the big solution for all the mental health problems of children and adolescents, but can definitely improve their self-esteem and help them take control over their own lives.

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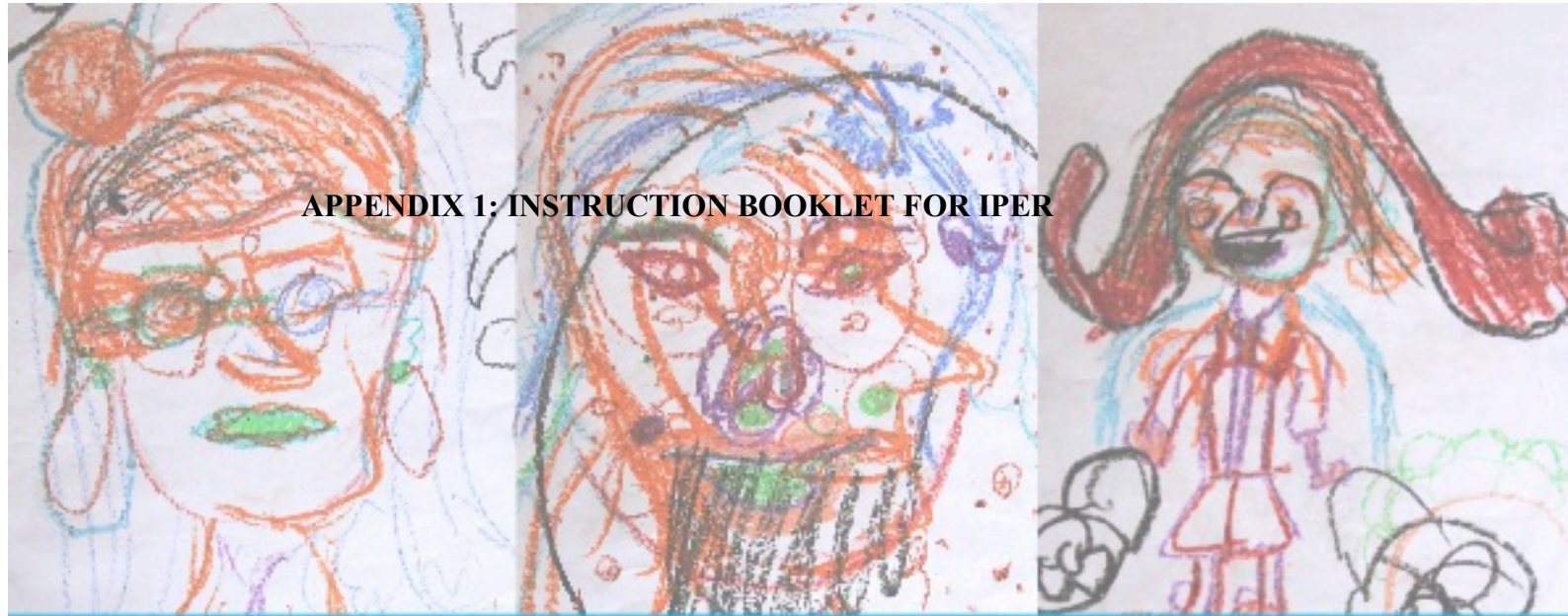


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**ACTIVITIES FROM AN EMPOWERING MENTAL HEALTH  
GROUP AT IPER ON AUTUMN 2017**





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## 1 INTRODUCTION

I arranged an empowering mental health group for 12 IPER girls on autumn 2017. The age of the participants varied from approximately 11 to 19 and we met seven times with the group. Three of the meetings lasted three hours and four lasted two hours, in total 17 hours. The purpose of pretty much all of the activities was to challenge the participants somehow. In body movement activities, I mostly tried to make them do something a little bit embarrassing, encourage them to take a step outside their comfort zone and let them find that nothing bad will happen. Instead of creating magnificent pieces of art, the art activities focused on feelings and emotions and thus, letting go of perfectionism.

In this booklet, I will introduce all the activities I did with the group and some comments about the them. The goal is to share the experience from the group and activities so that they can be used in groups or other occasions later. As an advice for the future groups, based on the experience, I would say that the older the members are, the more they benefit from the group. My estimation for an optimal group size would be around 8 participants. If the group is bigger it will be more difficult to control it and instruct and give attention to all the participants. Also, some of the activities, such as Car wash and Voice barrage, are best done with at least 8 people.

## 2 THE STRUCTURE OF THE MEETINGS

I planned every meeting to have similar structure to create a safer environment. The original plan was to have a short warm-up and two main activities in every meeting, one art activity and one body movement activity. In some of the meetings we didn't have time for all the activities and I had to make other changes too. One remarkable change was the division of the meetings into two parts, where the first part was for everyone and the second part only to a smaller selected group with whom we could do activities more seriously. The participants I selected to the small group were about 13–19 years old and, the ones I thought were motivated in doing the activities with heart.

The original planned structure of the meetings:

- *Warm up*
- *Art activity*
- *Break*
- *Body movement activity*
- *Something fun or relaxing*
- *Feedback*

## 3 ACTIVITIES

All the activities include introduction and feedback/unraveling in addition to the actual doing. The introduction is an essential part of the activity and it needs to be very clear so that everyone will understand it and benefit as much as possible from the activity. The feedback/unraveling part is also important for learning and sharing. That can be arranged for example in form of group discussion or with a pair. With smaller group, I got the best conversations when we were all together. Also, with my group the pair discussions were not very efficient because the participants seemed to need someone to lead the discussion. In the discussion, good questions may be something like: “how did it feel”, “what was the most difficult”, “what was easiest”, “how easy it was to concentrate on your own doing” etc.

With most of the activities the rule is to be silent, concentrate on your own doing and let others mind their own business. This seemed to be very difficult with my group, though mostly with the larger group, not the smaller one.

### 3.1 Arm Wrestling

**Description:** Everyone chooses a pair roughly the same size. The pair will stand face-to-face, grab each other’s hands and try to push the other person backward, starting first gently. After some while the rules change a little bit. Any person may any time change the direction of one arm from pushing to pulling and the other way around. The pair needs to follow the direction change and start also pulling with that arm. You can also add sound (roaring etc.) to the activity.

**Purpose:** to use your body, mobilise your aggression and physically show your own will.

**Comments:** We did this with the small group. Some participants were first a bit shy about using their strength and voice, but they got the better of it in time. This activity seems to be better for little bit older and matured participants.

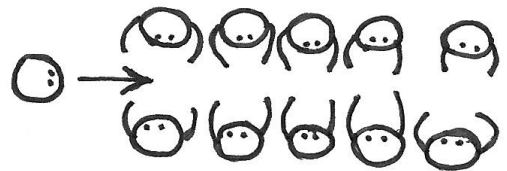


### 3.2 Carwash

**Description:** Participants will form two lines so that the lines are close to each other and face-to-face. That is the carwash. Then everyone will one by one be the car and drive through the carwash. Before washing, the car has to decide what kind of car it is (colour, maybe brand, size, form...) and also describe the wash they want to have (gentle wiping, hard rubbing, waxing...). Then based on the description the carwash will perform its cleaning while the car drives through the wash with its chosen speed.

**Purpose:** to figure out what you want and need, to set your own limits and show a good way of touching.

**Comments:** Everyone seemed to be excited about the activity but obviously some of them could not handle the excitement, so I had to cancel it. The activity could be excellent for older or somewhat mature group. In my opinion, the minimum group size for the activity is nine people.



### 3.3 Circle of Emotions

**Description:** The point is to draw a large circle on an A4 paper sheet and pick four (4) crayons/coloured pencils that the participant feels represent her emotions (happiness, sadness, aggression and sexuality). Then participants are instructed to colour the circle with the four colours in a manner that shows how much of different emotions one recognize in oneself.

**Purpose:** to get acquainted with your own emotions and see how much each of them occupy your life.

**Comments:** This worked pretty well with the smaller and matured group. The precondition for the activity is having a discussion about the mentioned emotions so that everyone understands what they mean and are at least little bit familiar with them.



### 3.4 Circulating Portrait

**Description:** Participants sit on a circle and have an A4 sheet in front of them. They will also have all one crayon. The participants write their name on the paper and pass it to the next person. Then everyone will start drawing the person whose name is on the paper from their own perspective. After a while the sheets will be passed forward to next person. Then again, the participants begin to complete the drawing from their own perspective. This will go on until participants get their own sheets.

**Purpose:** to warm up, to have fun, to let go of perfectionism and to see and encounter yourself drawn by others.

**Comments:** The activity was fun and we had good discussion about the results and the process. The concept of drawing someone from your own perspective was too difficult to understand for the group but the activity worked anyway.



### 3.5 Collage

**Description:** Participants are given a big sheet of cardboard or paper. Also, old magazines, newspapers, scissors, glue and pens are provided. Then their job is, within the given theme, to fill the cardboard with pieces of magazines, pictures, text, drawings and whatever they feel like. The theme can be for example family, home or my brilliant future. After finishing everyone will introduce their pieces of art and describe what they did and why. Our theme was “my dream future” and I asked participants to focus on five different areas of their life: family, friends, a job, physical health and an intimate person they can trust.

**Purpose:** to think about your future and make the dreams and hopes more concrete with pictures and text. Even though, the collage itself doesn't objectively describe someone's future dreams, the process will make the person to focus on the topic and make the collage personal. The second purpose is to communicate and share your dreams – even the more delicate ones – with other people.

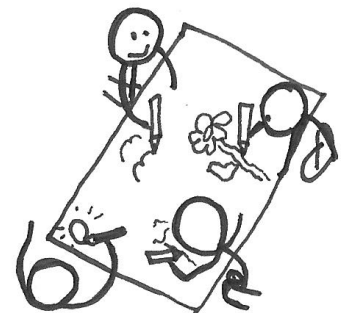


**Comments:** The activity was very interesting and all the participants were really excited about it. The activity took a lot longer than I expected so that I decided to skip the other planned activity and let people concentrate on the collage. We had also a fruitful conversation about the activity afterwards and many participants really challenged themselves with it.



### 3.6 Collective Drawing

**Description:** The group will be given three (can be any number) huge papers. Each of the papers have different themes. Theme can be something like: "the best day ever" or "the worst day ever" or anything else. Without speaking everyone will draw their own things on the paper. At the same time, they need to look what other people are doing and try to fit their drawings in the bigger picture. They can also continue and change other participants' drawings. If many papers are used you can divide the group evenly to all the papers and then change after a fixed time.



**Purpose:** to focus on the given topic, which can be something delicate or personal, but also to see how it feels like to change someone else's drawing and how does it feel when someone else modifies your drawing. Some emotions can raise especially if the topics are delicate.

**Comments:** One point was not to talk with others, and it didn't work at all. The concept was also a little bit too difficult to understand, especially the continuing and changing other people's drawings. Most of the participant did only their own thing and didn't care about others, and the ones who changed others' drawings did it mostly in a bad and messing manner. Even though, the activity itself wasn't much of a success, we could have a long conversation about how everything went and why.

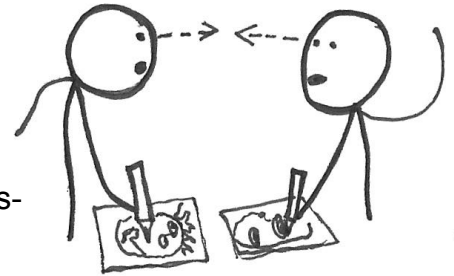


### 3.7 Draw a Friend

**Description:** Everyone will choose a pair. The pairs will sit face-to-face on the floor and have A4 sheet in front of them and pencil or graphite in their worse hand. The point is to, without talking, stick the pencil on the paper and start drawing the pair without looking at the paper or lifting the pencil from it.

**Purpose:** to let go of perfection, endure the pain of not seeing what you're doing, showing your "bad" drawing to others and to see a "bad" drawing about yourself.

**Comments:** This activity was left out due to the lack of time. I assume it might be difficult not to look at the paper or not to lift the pencil from it, so it is good to emphasize this in the instruction.



### 3.8 Emotion Cards

**Description:** Multiple different picture cards are spread on the floor. Participants are asked to pick 1 (or 2) cards that reflect their current emotion (can be also for example feelings about some particular matter like the group coming to an end or current feelings about the group). After everyone has picked their cards, they will, one by one, show the cards to the group and tell what is in the cards, why did they decide to pick those cards and how do the cards reflect their emotions.

**Purpose:** to figure out and express your emotions and feelings about different topics through pictures. Pictures make the emotions more concrete and also easier to explain or express. If the emotion is very difficult, the person can just describe the content of the selected cards and nothing else, because that already will bring up some part of the emotions.

**Comments:** The activity worked very well with the smaller group.

### 3.9 Emotional Painting

**Description:** The purpose of the activity is to relax for a moment and concentrate on one's current emotion. Then to have a large sheet of paper, use water colours, finger painting, crayons or other painting method to reproduce that emotion or feeling on the sheet. The point is to let go of thinking or planning and let the emotion move the brush wherever it leads, not to create something considered as high-class art or anything performing. The activity is done

with the worse hand to reduce the pressure of drawing well enough.

**Purpose:** to let go of your thoughts and perfectionism, to feel your body and emotions and follow them.

**Comments:** We did the activity with water colours and it worked pretty well, though the enthusiastic painters made quite the mess which took some time to clean. The participants had a little bit trouble understanding that the purpose was to just go with the flow and not to think at all.

### 3.9.1 Emotional Walk

**Descripton:** Everyone is instructed to walk randomly in the marked or shown area. They have to express the currently mentioned emotion with the way they walk. We used happiness, sadness, aggression, sexuality but they can be also different. First, they are not allowed to take eye contact with other people. On the second round, they are encouraged to take contact whenever they can. If the participants are not too familiar with the meanings of the emotions, they should be discussed or made clear before the activity.

**Purpose:** to see how the given emotions feel and how would you express them. The purpose is also to practice expressing the emotions to other people and to encounter the embarrassment of exposing yourself the them.

**Comments:** This activity was left out due to the lack of time.

### 3.10 Family Picnic

**Description:** Everyone will get an A3 sheet. They are instructed to draw a picnic and in it themselves and their family sitting on places that feel the most natural.

**Purpose:** to think about people who belong to your family and to – perhaps quite unconsciously – see how close they are or what they mean to you. After drawing the picnic, it is good to have a conversation about why did you place the certain family members where they are.

**Comments:** This activity was left out due to the lack of time.

### 3.11 Follow the Leader

**Description:** Participants form a line. The first person of the line is the leader and will perform some move while everyone behind her has to repeat it. After that the leader moves to the end of the line and the next person becomes the leader. Voice can be added later. If there is not enough space for the line to move freely, participants can also form a circle.

**Purpose:** to warm up, to have fun and to expose yourself to other people on embarrassing and funny way.

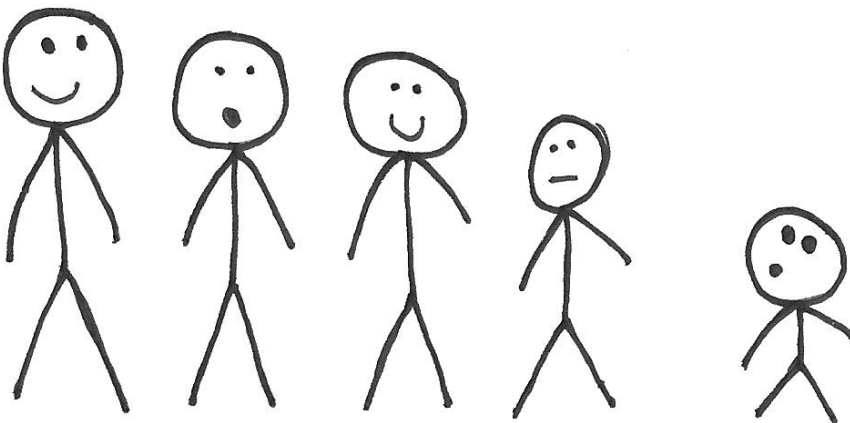
**Comments:** A good exercise for all the participants, everyone seemed to enjoy it. For some people, it was difficult to come up with the move, but everybody made it after a minor push or encouragement.

### 3.12 Form a Line

**Description:** No speaking allowed. The participants need to form a line and order themselves in it based on given feature like age, first letter of surname, size of feet, funniest face, who can make a funniest sound...

**Purpose:** to warm up, to have fun, to learn communication without talking, improve group spirit and to take a leap to discomfort zone.

**Comments:** This seemed to be very good activity for the group. The participants were excited and had a lot of trouble trying not to talk. I extended the activity later to funniest faces and sounds so that the participants had to “embarrass” themselves.



### 3.13 Free Style

**Description:** Everyone begin with lying on the ground. They will be instructed to listen to their bodies, and when the music starts to play feel how the body wants to move. They can get up if or when they feel like it. The genre of the music will eventually change.

**Purpose:** to feel your body and listen what it wants and express it. The purpose is also to forget other people around you and concentrate only on yourself. It might be very difficult but that is also totally ok. Those issues and thoughts can be then unravelled in the discussion after activity.



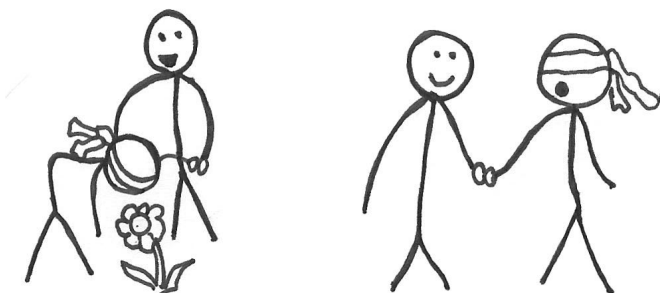
**Comments:** The participants had fun time doing the activity. They also seemed not to stress too much about how their dancing looked like, and did it the way they wanted.

### 3.14 Leading the Blind

**Description:** Everyone chooses a pair. The other person is blindfolded and the other the leader. The leader is supposed to lead the blind to different places (wherever the leader wants) and take care of the blind. No talking is allowed. The leader can take the blind for example to smell or touch different things. After a certain time, the roles change.

**Purpose:** to take responsibility of someone else, to trust yourself to someone else's responsibility and to focus on other instincts than sight.

**Comments:** The activity was good but I would do it next time with only the more matured participants, because the younger ones didn't understand the responsibility, nor could they take care of the blind. So, the result was many people bumping into a door or wall. In the end, most of the participants still enjoyed the activity but I think only the older ones really got something else than fun out of it.

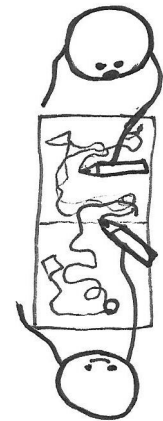


### 3.15 Mess with a Friend

**Description:** Everyone will choose a pair. The pairs will sit face-to-face on the floor and have A3 sheet in front of them. The sheet is divided in two equally sized portions with a line. First the participants start drawing a line and some other forms they feel like drawing on their own half of the sheet. It's better not to draw anything that resembles real life, only shapes. After a while they are given a permission to take their line outside their own half to the other person's side. This crossing the border can also be made mandatory after first just allowing it.

**Purpose:** to see how it feels to mess with someone else's drawing and how it feels when someone else messes with your drawing.

**Comments:** None of the participants took their crayons on the other person's side of the paper until it was made mandatory. The biggest reason for that was probably because they didn't draw just lines or shapes but something resembling. That is why the participants wanted to finish their own drawing before doing anything else. If the activity was done later again, I would recommend drawing only one line with one crayon, without lifting it from the paper during the whole activity.

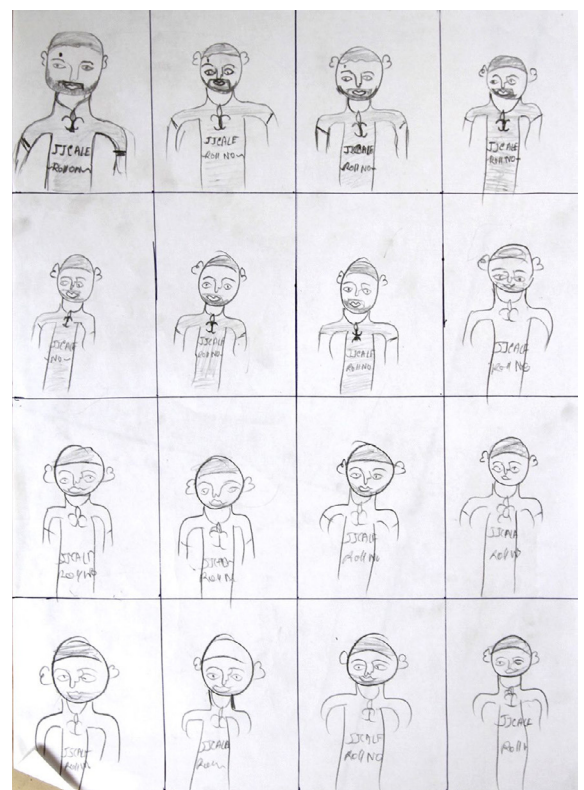


### 3.16 Multiple Portraits

**Description:** The participants are given a big paper sheet and a pencil. First, they will draw an about 10x10 cm rectangle to the top left corner of the sheet. Then they have 3 minutes time to draw someone (for example the instructor) inside the rectangle. After that they will draw two new rectangles and have to draw two pictures of the same person in 3 minutes. Then four and finally eight.

**Purpose:** to let go of perfectionism, be ok with unfinished drawings and to show your unfinished drawing to others. It seems to be better if the target of the drawing is a human, because then it is harder to draw badly.

**Comments:** The activity worked well with the smaller group. We had also fun time introducing the finished drawings.



### 3.17 Own Space

**Description:** Everyone chooses a pair and do couple of practices with them. The couple stands in a distance from each other (for example 3 m), the other one is the leader and the other a “marionette”. After couple of repeats in every practice the roles change.

No talking. The goal of the leader is to listen to her body and move the marionette back and forth with hand signs to find a distance that feels good and safe at the current moment. The leader may try first closer and then farther to find out the best distance. When a good distance is found, the pair can stay there a moment in eye contact and then start over.

In this practice, the marionette starts walking toward the instructor and when the instructor feels the distance is good she stops the marionette by saying “stop” and putting her hand in front of her as a stop sign. Again, after stopping, the pair can stay there a moment in eye contact and then start over.

Same as earlier but this time when the instructor stops the puppet she will stop and immediately turn around and walk back.

**Purpose:** to listen to your body, to find a distance between you and someone else that feels good in that exact situation and to understand that you can have your own space also with people you know and like and that you yourself are responsible and capable of taking care of your space.

**Comments:** We did the activity with the small group and it worked pretty well. We could also have a nice conversation about the activity afterwards. I would recommend doing this with the more matured group, because the younger participants might make too much fun out of the practise and thus disturb the others.



### 3.18 Voice Barrage

**Description:** Everyone will lie on the ground in a circle face up and heads toward the centre of the circle. Then they imagine that above their heads is a huge slab or plate they have to hold up with their voice. The voice has to be in balance or the plate will lean and fall. So, everybody has to listen to others and try to keep the voice barrage in balance. If someone wants, it is recommendable to bring new voices in the barrage, so that others can follow it. The altitude of the plate can be regulated with the volume of the voice. When the common consensus is that the plate should be put down, they can slowly start to turn down the volume.

**Purpose:** to use your voice also in funny way in front of other people. The purpose is also to

listening to others, experimenting with your voice and doing something together.

**Comments:** The activity worked pretty well, we had fun time and reasonably good conversation afterwards. The problem was, that the activity was obviously a bit too exiting for some participants, for they did not have patience to lay on their back and turned many times around to see what others were doing. A couple of participants also had trouble in respecting others but they yelled very loudly to other peoples' ears. Again, would be very good activity with the more matured group. The activity also needs, I would say, at least eight people to work well.

