ART FOR THE OVERSTIMULATED

Methodical Guide

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małopolski instytut kultury mik

MIND THE GAP

małopolski instytut kultury mik INSTYTUCJA KULTURY WOJEWÓDZTWA MAŁOPOLSKIEGO MAŁOPOLSKA

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Table of Contents

Introduction 5

About Mind the Gap 6

Maja Dobkowska, Katarzyna Kanowska

Idea behind this project 7

Maria Libiszewska

Overstimulated Teacher: How to Help Yourself 18

Lesson Scenarios 22

Maria Libiszewska, Maja Dobkowska

INTRODUCTION
ERROR! The system has overheated 23

Monika Szpunar, Anna Grajewska

MOVEMENT. Bodyreset 31

Kinga Nowak, Anna Grajewska

COLOUR. From the inside 39

Kamil Kruk, Katarzyna Kanowska

SOUND. I play the world anew _____ **45**

Dominika Bednarczyk-Krzyżowska, Wojciech Rzehak

THEATRE. 'All the world's a stage...' _____ **53**

Małgorzata Konieczna, Maja Dobkowska

WORD. Between words _____ **61**

Marcin Koleśnik, Katarzyna Kanowska

**PAINTING. Painting with elements:
I watch – I choose – I create** _____ **69**

The teacher's reflection cardafter the lesson _____ **76**

Student reflection cardafter the lesson _____ **77**

Annex 1. Voting record _____ **78**

Annex 2. – to the 'Movement' scenario _____ **79**

Annex 3 – to the 'Painting' scenario _____ **81**

Introduction

In 2025, a team of experts cooperating with the Małopolska Institute of Culture in Kraków implemented a pilot project 'Mind the Gap' focusing on the problem of students in schools being overstimulated. The aim of the project was to develop and test tools – inspired by artistic activities – that would support teachers and educators in their work on reducing stress and regulating students' emotions.

Seven easy-to-use lesson scenarios based on creative activities were created in collaboration with artists; afterwards, they were implemented and tested in selected school classes. The pilot process brought a number of conclusions – both confirming the scale of the problem of overstimulation and showing the potential of art as a tool supporting the well-being of young people.

This publication presents the project assumptions and lesson scenarios – improved with notes from the pilot implementation– along with supporting materials, as well as practical tips for those who will conduct classes.

ABOUT
„MIND THE GAP"

About Mind The Gap

Mind The Gap is an innovative Creative Europe project that strengthens artistic and cultural education while promoting wider participation among children and young people across Europe. It builds cross-sectoral cooperation between culture and education to address key challenges affecting young people's well-being.

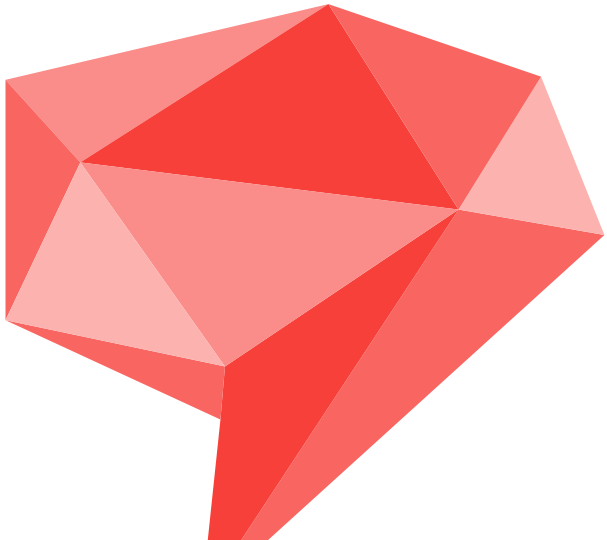
Throughout the project, each partner has designed a unique art education laboratory within an educational environment. Partners share methods, conduct peer reviews, and provide feedback. This collaborative approach equips art educators and organisations with tools to support children's and young people's well-being, creativity, and self-expression.

The learnings from the laboratories are collected into four method guides, which make the implementation of the methods easy. The method guides are available both in the partners' national languages and in English.

These method guides and the Mind The Gap project have been made possible through the co-funding of the European Union.

Mind The Gap project (11/2024 – 8/2026) is coordinated by the Association of Children's Culture in Finland. The project partners are Kulturtanken (Norway), the Małopolska Institute of Culture in Kraków (Poland), and Pionirski dom – Center za kulturo mladih (Slovenia).

MIND THE GAP



Idea behind the project

Maja Dobkowska, Katarzyna Kanowska

The average school student spends at least five hours a day in a school full of noise, smells, colours, and other stimuli. Most of this time, students are required to fully mobilize their body and mind: they should focus on the lesson, be ready to answer the teacher's questions at any time, maintain a proper (usually sedentary) posture, and show commitment. At the same time, they struggle for the attention and acceptance of peers, as well as attempt to control emotions – those from school and those brought from home. The teacher is in a similar situation: they are also in a state of complete readiness: they care for the needs of the students, explain, ask questions, produce calm, answer various questions. After the fifth, sixth, and often even the eighth lesson, the nervous systems of both students and teachers begin to signal the state of 'overheating', which manifests itself in very different ways: some people back out, others have a headache, feel drowsiness, apathy or agitation, irritation or even aggression. What can be done about it?

We created a set of lesson scenarios inspired by various fields of art, which allow for a 45-minute respite, while the creative action proposed in their framework can bring the effect of rebuilding balance and regulating emotions. We were supported by artists, whom we asked about their favourite practices, which were then adapted to the needs of the school. Each scenario contains proposals for activities that can be done in the classroom, in school settings, and which are designed to produce peace and quiet and restore the sense of balance in the stimulated minds.

Why is preventing overstimulation important?

Overstimulation is a condition in which the brain receives too much information from the environment and can't keep up with processing it. Excess noise, light, messages, emotions or smells leads to the overload of the nervous system, which is manifested by irritability, anxiety, fatigue, decrease in concentration, and depressed mood. The problem of overstimulation affects all of us,

but children and young people are particularly vulnerable, among others because of the very long time spent on the Internet. The digital environment provides a constant stream of stimuli: short videos, notifications, reviews, sensational headlines and news, all of which increase confusion and tension.

Long-term overload of stimuli results in the worsening of the mental well-being of young people. More and more often, they have to deal in their everyday life with a sense of sadness, loneliness and lack of motivation, and the number of mental disorders is growing, especially among young people aged 16–17 years. However, the first effects of overload can be seen already among children in the younger classes of primary school: difficulties with concentration increase, the motivation to learn decreases, problems with understanding one's emotions, peer relations and self-esteem appear. Teachers and specialists emphasize that the scale of these difficulties is systematically growing year by year. Young people often realize that some of their problems are caused by excessive use of the Internet, but at the same time they fear that limiting their online presence would worsen the quality of their lives and social relationships. Paradoxically, despite a very high level of activity on social media, more than half of Polish teenagers experience high levels of loneliness.

The uncertainty about the future is another source of stress. Many young people feel daily anxiety about the world situation – armed conflicts, epidemics, climate change – and a significant part of them perceive the prospects of their generation as worrying. According to a report prepared by the Council of Children and Youth of the Republic of Poland at the Ministry of Education and Science (2023), the young generation declares the highest level of stress and anxiety among all the surveyed generations.

What does art have to offer?

In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized art – both being exposed to it and creating it – as one of the key conditions supporting mental, physical and general human well-being. Therapy through various art disciplines is carried out as part of health care programmes and some countries (Canada, France, Great Britain) even implement programmes to allow doctors to issue prescriptions for... a visit to the museum.

Meanwhile, in schools in Poland, art is of marginal importance, and students rarely have the opportunity for creative expression. These types of classes are usually considered less important than activities considered as preparation for exams, or even sports. Art, meanwhile, develops the creativity necessary to innovate and create new solutions in the future, and can contribute to a healthy and long life by triggering curiosity and stimulating brain activity. Contact with art affects the condition of the whole organism. Aesthetic experiences can improve health and well-being, as well as increase our ability to learn and self-develop. Numerous scientific studies prove that artistic practices, experienced both from the perspective of the creator and the recipient, reduce stress, increase the level of oxytocin, serotonin, and dopamine; they lower blood pressure, regulate the endocrine system, and even build new neural pathways. They can also strengthen mental resilience. All this makes art more and more often referred to as the fifth pillar of well-being, alongside healthy sleep, proper nutrition, physical activity and contact with nature. In addition, joint creative activity leads to relaxation and integration, supports the building of community and a sense of belonging.

Before we see medical referrals in Poland recommending a visit to the museum, we can use art ourselves more – contact with it has good effects also without a prescription!

The concept of flow

The phenomenon of flow, examined and described by the Hungarian-American psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, is a particular state of deep involvement in the performed activity. A person in the state of flow is completely focused on one particular activity, they take pleasure and satisfaction from it. It's about all those moments when we lose ourselves in doing something, so much so that we can't say how much time has passed. Although the brain does hard work, this state is generally very joyful – it allows you to break away from the multitude of thoughts and focus on one activity; it gives you a sense of commitment and meaning. Achieving it, we have the impression of a flow – the action comes lightly, naturally and smoothly.

Today's children are increasingly deprived of such experiences. The state of flow appears in their lives less often than ever before. The world in which they grow up is full of stimuli, distractions and instant rewards – notifications, short videos, games designed to constantly

distract from one track and shift it to another. In such conditions, it's difficult to focus for a long time, to immerse yourself in one action deep enough that time ceases to matter. Instead of a flow, there's a continuous 'instant', and instead of concentration, there is constant distraction.

There's also less and less space in children's lives for boredom, daydreaming, letting the mind wander, casual play, and activities that are not evaluated, measured or immediately interrupted. And it's in these conditions that the flow has a chance to occur: when the challenge is adjusted to the possibilities, when there's no pressure on the outcome, when you can make mistakes and keep trying. Without these experiences, it's more difficult to build inner motivation, a sense of agency, and contact with one's own talents. Flow is not a luxury or a whim – it's an important type of experience during which children learn that effort can be enjoyable and that focus gives joy.

Who's behind it?

As the Małopolska Institute of Culture in Kraków, we have been looking at, researching and describing for years the relationship between people and art. We dedicated them, among others, the book trilogy: *Children and Art*, *Teenagers and Art*, and *Adults and Art*.

The 'Mind the Gap' project allowed us to join the forces of experienced educators with artists from various fields of art, which we recruited in cultural institutions, galleries and theatres. Work in educational and artistic tandem allowed for the synergy of the two approaches. Educators have a good understanding of the processes taking place in the group and the needs of both participants and animators. They know the methods, exercises and modes of action that allow a group to do something together. Artists, on the other hand, are 'immersed' in art, know how it affects people, know various creative techniques, and at the same time often experiment with new materials, techniques or methods of work.

The basis of our approach is to combine these two perspectives – we thus want to support cooperation between the school community and cultural institutions. Who knows – maybe, after trying the scenarios we suggest, you decide to search for inspiration in the world of art for yourself?

A short guide to the programme

Who can conduct classes?

The workshop cycle consists of seven school lesson scenarios, to be used in grades 7–8 of primary school and in secondary schools. The assumption is that lessons are led by a teacher who knows the class well – for example the class tutor, although of course these can also be subject teachers. Artistic competence isn't required to conduct the classes. The exercises are described in such detail that even without professional knowledge or predisposition in a given direction, the teacher feels confident in conducting the class.

What's the formula of the lessons?

Each lesson is built in a similar way: it begins with a brief introduction that will give students an idea of what will happen and will provide them with a purpose of their actions. The next part is a short, three-minute mindfulness training – an exercise to calm down and prepare for further activities. The main part of the lesson is filled with activities inspired by a chosen field of art of an individual or team nature. The last minutes of the lesson are left for a summary – it's a time for self-reflection, as well as confronting the feelings of different people, to discover common points, but also separate impressions of each student.

The scenarios are adapted to 45-minute lessons, although we recommend using each time two consecutive lessons whenever possible. Thanks to this, we'll leave ourselves more freedom for spontaneous discussions and extension of activities that the participants particularly liked, allowing everyone to speak.

A cycle or individual lessons?

The scenarios are arranged in a cycle that can be realized in its entirety (we supplement it with an introductory lesson, introducing the concept of overstimulation) or treated as a resource of exercises for homerooms, daycare hours, substitutions, art or music lessons. Classes can take place on a weekly basis, but they can as well take place only once or once a month. The decision is yours.

How to prepare?

Preparing for a lesson requires a thorough reading of the script, as well as gathering the necessary materials or determining with the class who'll deliver them. We've tried to limit the need to provide realization materials to the absolute most-basic elements. In some scenarios, it's recommended to rearrange the classroom.

You don't have to learn the script by heart or read the exact instructions from a sheet of paper. It's more important that you feel what the action is and for what purpose you're doing it. If necessary, you can always use the printed script.

How do we know it works?

The pilot conducted by us in autumn 2025 showed that the method we proposed works and that it has a positive impact on relationships in the classroom. Sixteen teachers from eight different schools applied for the pilot (primary school from a large city, rural schools, industry school, private Montessori school, a renowned general education high school, and a music school). Our 'testers' were teachers, most often also class tutors, who conducted lessons in one or more classes. On the basis of the feedback received from them, we introduced the necessary adjustments to the scenarios.

After analysing the evaluation surveys, as well as based on the conclusions presented by the participants during the focus meeting, we can confidently say that the experiment worked! Of course, there were more and less successful lessons, but when talking about various challenges, the teachers emphasized that they see the sense of introducing these types of activities in school. It turned out that in addition to our goal – to bring relief to over-stimulated minds – the workshops brought many other positive effects, such as breaking down barriers, opening up to conversations about emotions, engaging in dialogue with less active people, deeper integration of the class, along with instilling new interests.

To make all that work...

Openness to experiment and flexibility

You may feel that conducting a painting or music lesson is beyond your ability because you lack expert knowledge or personal experience in the given field. Good news: the scenarios are prepared in such a way to enable even someone who's a layman in a given field to easily cope with conducting such classes. All the necessary information is included in the scenario.

Your flexibility and openness are key to success. Don't assume any specific outcome or seek a given result. Observe the reactions of the students and follow them. If one of the exercises engages the class so much that there's not enough time for the next one – it doesn't matter! Maybe you'll get back to this scenario, or maybe not; in the end, the most important goal – rest and commitment to creative activity – is achieved! If you feel that an exercise is too difficult and students aren't ready for it at the moment – you can simplify it, replace it with others or completely abandon it. Adapt the lesson to the pace of youth work, class dynamics, special needs or challenges.

Organisational comfort

Out of concern for your own comfort, read the script, imagining a specific class – with which you'll conduct the class – engaged in the described activities and a specific space in which the lesson will be conducted. Think carefully about how to distribute the action in space. Maybe it's worth changing the layout of the benches? Can you gather the materials on one table so that everyone has access to them? Perhaps it's worth sitting in a circle or going out into the hallway? And one more thing: the need to get the room in order before the next lesson takes a lot of time and shortens the time allotted for action. It's worth it to establish the rules of order and cleaning after the lesson with your class or change the room so that, for example, you have at your disposal a sink and other such facilities.

Choose the right moment

The mental condition of students has a huge impact on how they work and whether they are able to 'enter into' the proposed activities.

Fatigue, stress or strong emotions – for example, after a difficult test – effectively hinder focus and engagement. Current events and moods can dominate students' attention, and tension often finds its outlet in distraction, impatience or resistance to action.

Students should know that there's no universal 'cure' for the overstimulation that works for everyone in the same way. Art is one of the possible paths – and it's natural that it'll prove more helpful for some and less helpful for others. It's worth telling students clearly that you invite them to an experiment: to check on themselves how the proposed activities affect their well-being, attention and commitment, and then to reflect together on the experience.

No assessment!

In order to achieve a good effect of the actions, it's necessary to abandon any assessment. The purpose of these lessons isn't to correct mistakes or improve the result, but to experience action, focus and commitment. Be helpful when a student asks for advice or when there's a situation that requires your intervention, but, for the purpose of the class, refrain from all forms of assessment.

Students often ask for an assessment themselves: they ask if what they did is 'nice' or 'good'. At such moments, it's worth consistently reminding that in these classes, we don't assess or value the effects – we focus on the experience itself. What about approval or genuine admiration? Of course, you can be happy if something special is created, but it's worth being aware of how such praise can affect other students. It'll also happen that some people won't produce any spectacular 'effects' in the form of works. And that's perfectly fine. The absence of a visible result doesn't mean that the experience had no value.

The principle of suspension of assessment applies not only to the teacher, but also to the whole class. It's worth agreeing with students that you don't comment on the aesthetics, quality or 'correctness' of each other's works, and especially don't judge a work as a 'flop' or a failure. Only in an atmosphere that allows for experiment and real immersion in action can students let themselves be completely free.

Q&A

Do all scenarios need to be implemented?

No. The whole project consists of seven workshops, so at least seven lessons. Of course, you don't have to spend so much time on it. We recommend starting the lesson with the preliminary scenario and then implementing any number of scenarios according to your wishes and given the amount of time and the conditions.

Who chooses scenarios to be implemented?

In what we envision, the whole class is invited to involve itself in making the decision. And it usually works – it's good to give young people the opportunity to choose, because it changes their attitude toward classes. The choice can take various forms – from discussion to voting (you'll find a helpful voting card in the materials). But from the pilot we've already learnt that some teachers prefer to make this decision on their own, based on, for example, their knowledge of the temperament of the class. And of course that's okay too!

Do I have to do all the exercises included in the script?

The scenarios were created taking into account age-appropriate dynamics and are based on pedagogical knowledge. Therefore, we recommend that you stick to the script. Of course, in justified cases, the teacher can consciously resign from the implementation of one or another part of it. It's also difficult to balance the pace of individual activities – some classes reported that the time allotments were right, while others needed to stop longer on an activity and didn't manage to complete the whole scenario. Therefore, we believe that the final decision should rest on the common sense approach of the teacher.

Do I have to read the instructions from the script?

No, it's even better that you try to speak off the cuff, impromptu, based on tips and notes. However, it's worth having a script on hand just in case.

What should I tell students about the workshops?

Tell them that you want to look together at what causes a state of overstimulation in a young person. As well as look for ways to regulate your emotions and reset your nervous system after a hard day. First of all, you'll check what art has to offer in this respect and how it works for you. The lessons will be of experimental nature. You'll act based on different fields of art and then discuss your impressions. Perhaps the result of the workshops will be new practices that some students will want to introduce to their everyday life.

How to prepare for the classes?

A few days before the planned workshop, read the script and think about whether its implementation in a particular class requires any changes / simplifications / special conditions – e.g., changing the classroom to a larger one, gathering materials, etc. Check if the instructions are clear to you and if you'll be able to give them to your students in a clear way. If the scenario requires it, prepare materials and the room.

Do the lessons require special conditions?

Each scenario can be realized in a regular classroom. However, there may be a need for some rearrangement – for example, a different layout of benches or changing the room to one where it'll be easier for you to keep order (e.g., a room with a sink). It all depends on the specific scenario, but also on your habits, the size of the class, the capacity of the building and the flexibility of the teachers.

Is it necessary to start the lesson with a warm-up mindfulness exercise?

These exercises were introduced for a specific purpose: they're intended not only to introduce the subject of the lesson, but also to relax the students, to let them cut themselves off from what may have absorbed them during the break. We recommend to not omit them. If the activity described in the scenario doesn't suit you for some reason or you're concerned about the reaction of students, you can refer to the list of 'replacements' in the supporting materials.

Do I have to tell my pupils about an artist who was involved in the creation of a given script? Do I need to know this person's work?

It's worth mentioning a few words about the artist so that students can imagine where the idea for such an action comes from. It's worth to arouse their curiosity – maybe someone would like to take a closer look at the given work? However, there's no need to present biographies or detailed information to students – instead, show them a few pictures, play a piece of music or a moment of theatre performance.

I'm not an expert in music/painting/poetry... Do I have to implement this particular scenario?

If the stress associated with your lack of self-confidence in a given area of creativity is high, of course, you can give up conducting the classes. But we urge you not to do it hastily, and certainly not before reading the scenario! The pilot showed us that the initial concerns of teachers were largely resolved.

Has the project been consulted with experts? Is it adapted to the development needs of young people?

Yes. We asked for a psychological opinion and get a positive review. Our expert was Maria Libiszewska, psychologist, child and youth therapist, tutor and supervisor.

Can I legally use scenarios in school and outside? Do I have the right to modify these scenarios?

Scenarios were created mainly for schools, but of course you can also use them as part of extracurricular activities. Our materials are available under the open license Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0. This means that you can freely modify and distribute them, provided you retain the authorship and share your modifications (derivative works) under the same license.

Overstimulated Teacher: How to Help Yourself.

GOOD PRACTICES FOR TEACHERS

Maria Libiszewska

If you want to accompany your students in dealing with overstimulation, learning to regulate emotions, mindfulness, or finding focus, you need to experience these states yourself. It's difficult to invite students to stay silent if you live in constant noise every day yourself. It's hard to talk about balance when your nervous system has been operating at its highest speed for a long time.

It's not about being a model of control in every situation – that would be unrealistic. It's more about your willingness to look at your own reactions, look for ways of regulation and practices that help you get back into balance. Your personal experience of coping with overstimulation becomes a resource that helps you better understand students, their behaviour, difficulty with concentrating or experienced emotions. It also builds your credibility, because young people quickly sense whether the proposed actions are a living practice or just a theory.

Your overload isn't a sign of weakness. It's a natural consequence of working conditions that intensively burden attention, emotions, mind and body. School is a space of strong stimuli – both sensory and relational – and your nervous system rarely gets a space for regeneration. Therefore, caring for one's own well-being isn't only an option, but an ethical and professional commitment to oneself and the students.

Below you'll find some practices that can help you deal with stress in school work. These are not ready-made recipes, but inspirations to search for your own ways of regulation.

Stop before acting

In the reality of the school, reaction often precedes reflection. Try to practice brief moments of restraint – even a few conscious breaths before the start of the lesson, before answering a difficult question, or after the end of a conflict situation. Such a micropause allows your nervous system to 'change gear', reduce tension, and regain a sense of control. Regulation begins in such small moments of mindfulness.

Stimulation hygiene at work

You can't control all the school stimuli, but you can consciously limit some of them. If possible, take care of:

- **order and simplicity of the work space – excess of objects increases cognitive load,**
- **brief moments of silence between lessons,**
- **limiting multiple tasks being done at the same time,**
- **conscious use of the phone during work (e.g., muting notifications).**

Even small changes in the environment can significantly reduce the level of overload.

Rituals of passage

One of the biggest challenges in a teacher's job is the lack of clear boundaries between tasks. The lesson smoothly turns into a break, a break in on-call, on-call into another lesson. Short rites of passage – repetitive actions that symbolically close one situation and open another – can be helpful. It can be a few breaths with the window open, a short walk in the hallway, writing down a reflection after the lesson, relaxing your body or putting your desk in order. Such moments help your nervous system regain a sense of structure and security.

Contact with your body

Overstimulation isn't just a mental experience – it's primarily a physiological state. Therefore, practices involving the body are helpful: stretching, movement, conscious muscle tightening and relaxation, careful walking or breathing exercises. Even short actions of this type reduce tension and facilitate a return to balance. Regulation through the body is often faster and more effective than trying to calm down through force of willpower alone.

Creative experiences as regeneration

Creative activities can also be a form of regulation and rest for adults. Drawing, movement, word play, sound improvisation or other artistic activities don't require talent or preparation – all you need is a willingness to experiment. It's worth having your favourite forms of creativity and reaching for them in times of overload. When you experience such regeneration yourself, it's easier to create a space where students can experience it as well.

Realistic expectations for yourself

Overload often involves very high demands from oneself. The belief that you should always control the situation, be available, calm, and effective leads to chronic tension. Meanwhile, an important element of prevention of overstimulation is the consent to one's own limitations, fatigue and the need for rest. Self-care isn't the opposite of professionalism – it's the very basis of it.

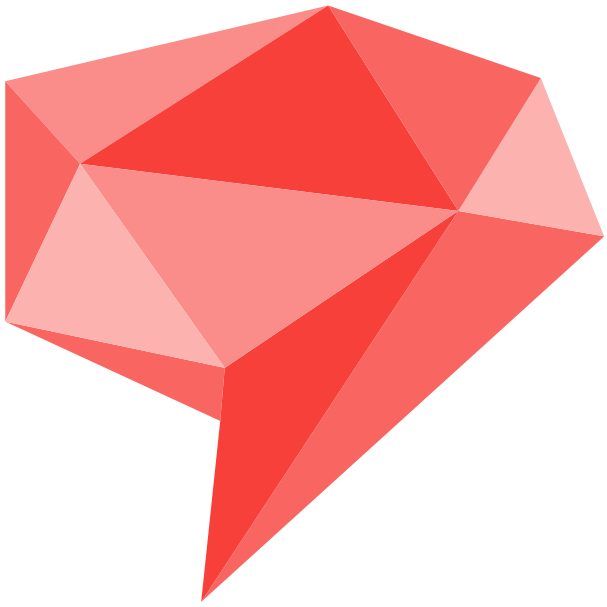
Support and community

Your nervous system is also being regulated in your relationship with another person. Talking to another teacher – sharing experiences, looking for solutions together or even feeling understood – significantly reduce the level of stress. It's worth co-creating a space of mutual support and kindness in the school environment.

Working with students on overstimulation begins with working with yourself. It's not about achieving perfect peace of mind, but about developing sensitivity to one's own needs, looking for ways of regulation and readiness to learn with students. When you can notice your own overload and respond consciously to it, you not only protect your well-being, but you also become an important example for students to deal with the challenges of the modern world. The experience of an attentive, conscious and caring adult is one of the most valuable lessons for young people.

Lesson scenarios

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ERROR!
The system has overheated

Maria Libiszewska, Maja Dobkowska

Assumptions

Participants: students who know each other and the teacher

15–30 people
Age: 13–19 years
Time: 45 minutes

Goals

During classes, students:

- will learn about the concept of overstimulation and its most important determinants;
- will have the opportunity to reflect on the impact of the overstimulation on their functioning;
- will learn the concept of flow and will be encouraged to look for it.

Work methods

- Guided discussion – sharing your own experiences related to overstimulation
- Mini-lecture
- Individual work – designing your own 'error' sign
- Self-reflection – recording activities that bring students into a state of flow, marking those related to art.

Before classes

Space: room with the possibility of sitting in a circle so that everyone can see each other. If this is a problem, the classic arrangement of benches is fine as well.

Prepare:

- small post-it notes,
- pens/pencils/markers.

What are we going to do?

Tell your students what you will do during the classes.

> Today we'll talk about what overstimulation is and how it affects our daily lives. You'll think about when you experience it yourself and how you can recognize it. We'll try to express this state in a simple way – by drawing or gesture – and then we'll look for activities that help to calm down and put into a pleasant state of flow.
>
> Finally, we'll select the creative activities you want to check out in the next class to see what really calms you and gives you energy.
>
> These activities were created by the duo: Maja Dobkowska, educator, and Maria Libiszewska, psychologist, therapist and tutor who works with adults, children and youth.

Process

Introduction (10 minutes)

Ask your students to raise their hand if they felt at least once this school year that:

- their head is going to burst due to excess sounds;
- in the evening, although they're tired, they can't fall asleep because they have so many thoughts in their head;
- they have to leave a premise (e.g., bus, shop, school) because they feel that they can't stand it any longer (due to noise, smell, etc.);
- they know nothing, understand nothing, can't do a thing (at the end of the lesson), and then discover (e.g., the next day) that it's not so bad;
- respond suddenly inadequately for the reasons they don't understand (e.g., get excessively irritated, cry or laugh for no apparent reason);
- they can't focus;
- they look at reality as if from behind a glass;
- their whole body hurts, although they're not sick and had no physical exertion.

If the students don't know each other well and aren't open to speaking honestly about themselves, you can also ask everyone to write an X on a small piece of paper each time they identify with the situation. You can then count your signs, and those who are willing can share their number out loud. You can also collect all the cards to see how much the problem affects you as a class. You can provoke a mini-discussion by asking what these numbers indicate.

Other options of this exercise:

If the class likes movement, and the space allows you to rearrange the room so that you can sit in a circle, you can also use these sentences to play the 'housing commission' (people who identify with a given sentence have to get up and switch places with another person who got up).

You can also draw a brain on a large sheet of paper. Stand around the drawing. Every time someone identifies with a statement, they throw a ball of paper on the 'brain'. Thanks to this, after the finished task, you can see how many balls-stimuli attacked the brain.

Summary:

> These can all be signs of overstimulation – they can be, but don't have to be, because similar symptoms sometimes indicate other problems. But sometimes we search deeply, while the cause is quite simple and it's precisely the OVERSTIMULATION.
>
> Overstimulation is a situation in which the brain receives too many stimuli – i.e., information from the environment – and doesn't keep up with their processing. This may include noise, lights, smells, conversations, screens, emotions, and many other things.
>
> Imagine that your brain is a computer. Each stimulus (e.g., sound, light, conversation, notifications from the phone) is like a new tab in the browser. At first, everything works fine, but when you open 100 tabs at a time, your computer starts to lag. Our brain works in the same way, when it gets too many stimuli – it slows down, gets lost, and

sometimes ‘closes’ (i.e., for example, withdraws, cuts off emotions or needs silence).

Short introductions (5 minutes)

Tell the class a little bit about how exactly the mechanisms of stimulation work.

Flying balls syndrome

Too many stimuli and information attack the brain at the same time (e.g., notification sounds from several communicators + the voice of a parent complaining about the disorder in your room + background music + flashes of light from the TV + neighbour’s dog barking + ...). The system gets clogged and stops filtering. You’re then like Iga Świątek, who tries to return serves from five players at once, and as a result doesn’t return any of them.

Too much pressure

The brain is also overloaded when it has to make several decisions at once, and thus switch between several thought processes. Imagine standing in line for your favourite drink. Suddenly, the trainer asks you via the communicator if you can postpone the Wednesday training to Thursday. At the same time, the waitress asks you whether your drink should be sweetened with honey or cane sugar. People wait in queue behind you, so hurry up! Especially since the friend you’re here with is already staring impatiently at you (how long can it take to buy a drink???)... And you still have ‘in the back of your head’ that by tomorrow you have to declare at school which subject you want to take at the high school exam... Suddenly you feel that each of these decisions, including the one about the drink, seems too difficult.

Cocktail of hormones

And then there’s also the chemistry in your brain: emotions = secretion of hormones. Hormones are great,

> but not in abundance. Just as eating a pack of sweet jellies at once can make you addled, too much dopamine can lead to irritability, and too much cortisol can lead to stress and fatigue. So you can stimulate yourself on a super trip with friends, or on a date – from the mere excess of dopamine. Or during a one hour drive around the city on a driving license course – your brain has kept maximum concentration for too long, and you've produced a supply of cortisol that can last for a month. Neither dating nor driving around the city is a bad thing. But the brain gives a signal that it needs rest. Something like a stomach that threatens: 'Okay, let's have those jellies, but the next meal can't come earlier than in 8 hours, otherwise I'll make you regret it!'

If you want to activate students, you can divide the class into three groups and give each of them a printed description of one of the effects. Ask them to read and then choose one person who'll try to tell the rest of the class what the effect is.

Action (20 minutes)

Individual activity. Expression of the overstimulation (10 minutes)

Offer the students an individual activity:

> Imagine that when you experience overstimulation, you can press a certain 'key'. It acts as an 'error' message: it sends a signal to others that something is wrong with your brain and you need to calm down. What would such a sign look like?

Students design their signs on small cards. To avoid this activity taking too much time, you can draw signs on post-its with a pencil or a pen. Then, when you're finished, you can stick the notes to the common board and look at them, searching for similarities or original ideas.

Alternatively, you can also try to express the overstimulation in the form of pantomime:

Show: what do you look like when you're overstimulated? What gesture or sign could inform others that you need to calm down?

Self-reflection. Flow (10 minutes)

And now I'll ask you to remind yourselves of a situation when you were so focused on some action that you broke away from reality and didn't know how long it had taken you. Give examples when this happens to you.

If it's too abstract for students or they don't want to express themselves, you can read them a story of your choice (or all three of them):

1. Jake put on headphones 'just for a moment'. He wanted to practice one difficult passage on the guitar. His fingers were wrong at first, but after a few attempts something clicked. The sounds began to arrange on their own. Jake stopped thinking if he was playing well – he just played. He didn't check his phone. He didn't count the time. There was only rhythm, strings, and that one moment that kept him going. When he took off the headphones, it was already dark.

2. Michael went out for a jogging to 'clear his head'. Without a plan or application. At first he thought about everything: the exam, the conversation, the fact that he was tired. After a few minutes, the thoughts slowly dissipated. He only stopped when he felt cold on his skin. He looked at his watch and was surprised how long it had been.

3. Anne was working long on her dissertation and was close to giving up. Every new version of the first paragraph was getting worse. Instead of closing her laptop, she took a sip of water and decided to give herself another chance. At some point, she stopped being frustrated. Something changed. Each sentence led smoothly to another. Her thoughts slowed down, and her focus sharpened. An hour later, Anne was shocked that she had written four pages of text.

Comment:

This particular state is called flow. Flow is a state of focus and immersion in one activity that:

- is interesting,
- is neither too difficult nor too easy (so neither does it stress nor bore us).
- gives a sense of control and meaning.

In the flow state, the brain organizes attention instead of bombarding it with stimuli. Flow is the relaxation our tired brains

deserve from time to time! Write down on your cards what actions can bring you this state.

Whoever wants, can read their notes. But this isn't necessary. Then ask everyone to mark on their list all the activities that are related to art. Propose a reflection on why art has the power to reduce overstimulation.

Summary of work (10 minutes)

Ask:

- How did you feel when designing a symbol of overstimulation? Did you find this task difficult?
- Was it easy for you to find art-related activities on the list?
- Why do you think art can help? What are its powers?

Finally, you can comment on the students' reflections:

> Art is relaxing not because it's 'pretty' – but because it allows us to rest and be free. When we try to create ourselves, it doesn't have to be about the effect. For the brain, it's pleasant and relaxing to create, no matter what someone says about the effect. That's why in some countries, art-related activities are prescribed to patients as a cure!

Voting and lesson summary (10 minutes)

Tell your students that in the next class you'll discover how art works for each of you and what actually helps you to overcome the overstimulation. Importantly, these lessons will be of experimental nature – this means that you won't focus at all on effects and talents, but only on how you feel and how much the action helps you to reduce stress. There will be no evaluation.

Depending on your choice, you can choose which lessons you'll conduct or invite the whole class to vote or discuss this issue. If you want, you can use the voting card we designed (Annex 1).

Maria Libiszewska

Psychologist, pedagogue, psychotherapist and trainer. Passionate about the world of emotions, her mission is to develop emotional intelligence and the ability to creatively use feelings while learning, making decisions, and building relationships. She works therapeutically with young people, families and couples. She also conducts workshops for parents, teachers and children as well as supervision for cultural workers and educators. She likes to inspire others to develop and look for new solutions. Her way to deal with overstimulation is the road and open space, preferably in green and blue tones.

Maja Dobkowska

Educator, trainer, cultural animator, director of amateur theatre and author of books for children. She works at the Małopolska Institute of Culture, and after hours manages her own and other people's creativity. She fulfils herself in projects on the border of education and culture, cooperation with youth and in the beloved program Odyssey of the Mind. An enthusiast of walks in the Wolski Forest and small communities.

MOVEMENT
Body reset

Monika Szpunar, Anna Grajewska

Assumptions

Participants: the teacher and students who know each other

15–30 people
Age: 13–19 years
Time: 45 minutes

Goals

During classes, students:

- will learn simple ways to calm and regulate emotions;
- will learn to recognize tension in the body and react to it;
- will experience mindfulness and working with the body in a safe atmosphere.

Work methods

- Individual and group work
- Simple physical exercises
- Careful observation of the body
- Calming exercises
- Reflection and conversation in the group

Before classes

Space: Move the benches against the walls. Place chairs in the centre of the room in a circle – one for each participant.

Make sure there's enough space inside to let everyone move freely and that the floor in the space is clean. During the exercises, suggest students changing their body position: standing with their legs crossed, or perhaps lying down. If you have mats or blankets, prepare them. You can ask students to bring them from home.

Prepare:

- audio equipment (speaker + player),
- tracks to use: Alabaster DePlume, *A Gente Acaba (Vento Em Rosa)*; Gotye, *Somebody That I Used To Know*,
- printed map of self-adjusting points (Annex 2), 1 copy for each person,
- water for participants.

Exercise is based on simple movement techniques that help you calm down, relax and feel better. You'll find here elements taken from various methods, such as EFT, which is gentle tapping of the body to help reduce stress, as well as calm movements inspired by tai chi and qigong, or other health exercises originating from China.

What are we going to do?

Show students what you'll be doing and who co-wrote the script of this lesson.

> In these classes, you will learn simple ways to relax your body – when sitting on a bench in the class, with the possibility to move a bit. With exercises involving breathing and gentle body movements, you'll be able to recognize when you're stressed or tense and learn how to help yourself.
>
> These activities were created by Monika Szpunar – a dancer, performer, and choreographer with international experience and education.

Process

Introduction (1 minute)

Introduce students to the workshop:

> Today's classes are a short movement workshop that you can do even when you sit in desks during the lesson and feel tired or overloaded. Through simple movements, breathing and imagination, we'll look for ways to calm down and relax, even when you don't have the ability to move freely. At first, these exercises may seem a little strange or funny to you, and that's fine.

You may be surprised that we're talking about movement but everything in today's lesson will be done very slowly. Slow movement allows the muscles and nervous system to relax better, which promotes deeper regeneration. It also gives you more time for conscious breathing and better oxygenation of tissues. Moreover, it reduces the level of stress in the body, thanks to which the body returns to balance faster.

There's no need to rush or prove anything. All the exercises are meant to help you get back to yourselves: when you're stressed, excited, or just need a moment of mindfulness during classes. We won't judge or compare anything. This is the time for you to experience how your body can help you calm down and regain concentration.

Warming up on a chair (7 minutes)

Invite students to move to the chairs. Slowly give them another command:

Sit comfortably on the edge of the chair. Place both feet flat on the floor. Your back is straight, don't lean back. Take three calm breaths. Wait a minute. Turn your wrists to one side and the other. Roll your feet on the floor – touch different parts of the floor. Clench fists and then open your hands wide – repeat five times.

Put your hands on your shoulders and hug yourself. Rub and knead your shoulders, as if you were kneading yeast dough. Our arms and neck often accumulate tensions and stresses – by massaging these places, you help them, and therefore yourself, to relax and reduce tension. Turn to the right and grasp the back of the chair, then to the left – do it three times. Stand up. Stand steady. Slowly turn right once, left once, allowing your hands to hit your body loosely. Breathe calmly.

Turn to the right and grab the chair back with both hands. Then do the same to the left. Repeat this movement three times in each direction. Every time you look back, you may see something you haven't noticed before.

At the end of this part, get up and stand comfortably. Feel your feet touching the floor. Straighten up. Now start gently turning around once to the right, once to the left. Let your hands move loosely and touch your body lightly. Look behind you every time – first through your right arm, then through your left arm.

When something overwhelms you, or you feel that everything is acting too hard on you, these simple twists can help you calm down and feel better.

Keep spinning for 10 seconds. Then slowly stop the movement. Take a calm breath, then exhale.

This short warm-up is a prelude to getting to know your body with more attention and curiosity. Can you encourage your students to share what has caught their attention, perhaps, for example, they felt their feet or shoulders better?

Now participants are prepared to go on to the next exercise. Invite them to learn some interesting facts about the body, because better knowledge and understanding of it allow us to cope with stressful situations. Students can get in pairs and sit opposite each other on the floor.

Action (20–25 minutes)

Body and related fun facts (15–20 minutes)

FUN FACT:
THE SPINE BEGINS BEHIND THE EYES AND HAS 33 VERTEBRAE.

Time: 1 minute to read the fun fact, 2 minutes to practice, 2 minutes of talking

Place: Students sit opposite each other with their legs crossed. They do the exercise at the same time.

Task: With your fingers, find the place at the back of your head where your spine begins.

Move your hands down your back – how far can you reach? If you need to turn, change your hands or position to reach your spine, do it.

Can you touch all 33 vertebrae?

Did you manage to move with your hands all over your spine? How many vertebrae did you touch?

FUN FACT:
YOUR NECK AND HEAD MOVE IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS.

Time: 1 minute to read the fun fact, 2 minutes to practice, 2 minutes of talking

Place: Students sit opposite each other with their legs crossed. They perform the exercise alternately.

Task:

Our head can move in three main ways: forward and backward, right and left, and tilt sideways. Try to 'write in the air' your name using only head movements. Imagine that you have a pencil on the tip of your nose and then start writing with it. Try to make your movements as precise as possible – imagine that someone who would see it from the outside would be able to read it. Take your time. You can also choose some other word. The second person in the pair is supposed to guess what was written. Once you've finished, switch roles.

FUN FACT:
YOUR BODY IS LIKE A RESERVOIR, 60-65% OF IT IS WATER.

Time: 1 minute to read the fun fact, 2 minutes to practice, 2 minutes of talking

Place: Students lie down on mats or blankets on the floor.

Music to play: Alabaster DePlume, *A Gente Acaba (Vento Em Rosa)*

Task: Close your eyes. Listen to music. Imagine that your breath and movement move the fluids in your body. Try to feel the fluids in your body.

Question: How would you describe this experience? What surprised you during this exercise?

After this series of tasks, drink water.

Optional tasks, depending on the capabilities of the group (if you have enough time and the group is willing to move more):

'Controlled movement' – invite students to stand freely in the space. The exercise consists of moving according to the directions given. Each instruction determines how you move, for e.g., as if you were water, stone, a feather, jelly, a line. This is a time for fun and shared joy. You can come up with your categories or ask the group for new ideas.

'Free dance' to a musical piece: Gotye, *Somebody That I Used To Know*. More dynamic this time. Invite students to try to see each person in the room at least once during this dance. In addition, you can suggest them to repeat some movement from the part with fun facts. They can also simply follow the music and their imagination. It's a moment of movement in pure form.

Tapping points – self-regulation technique (5 minutes)

This is a simple exercise based on the EFT technique that helps you come back together and calm down when you have a lot of emotions. It's good to do it together with the group.

Give each person a drawing that they can take home with them (Annex 2).

Summary and thanks (5 minutes)

Invite students to the circle again. Encourage the conversation by asking questions:

- How do you feel now?
- What do you remember from today's class?

- Was any exercise particularly interesting or helpful to you?
- What do you take away with you from this meeting?

  What we did today in class are simple methods to help regulate your nervous system – movement and breathing are helpful with it. You can do these simple exercises every day. I encourage you to create your own set of such exercises – it'll be your lifeline in times of fatigue.

  Focusing on the here and now (on the body, movement, breathing) and trying to understand your body, as well as simply moving around, distract our attention from the excess of external stimuli that can overwhelm us and help us 'ground' ourselves in the present moment. Thank you for your presence and commitment.



Photo: Szymon Sokołowski

Monika Szpunar

Dancer, performer, and choreographer working inter-disciplinarily and internationally. She operates mainly in Poland, the Czech Republic and France. She is interested in introducing movement into new, unconventional spaces, social activism through dance, and dialogue of choreography with other disciplines. She works with PocketArt and Interscribo ensembles, among others. Associated with the Kraków Choreographic Centre.

Anna Grajewska

Cultural educator, cultural manager and community development expert. She helps institutions and companies build programmes aimed at developing people through culture. She conducts training workshops aimed at cultural staff in the field of designing cultural offers and integrating new groups into activities. She facilitates the process of building open communication in teams and groups. She co-creates the A Sztuka? Foundation, which promotes a greater presence of art in education and everyday life.

COLOUR
From the inside

Kinga Nowak, Anna Grajewska

Assumptions

Participants: students who know each other and the teacher

15–30 people
Age: 13–19 years
Time: 45 minutes

Goals

During classes, students:

- will experience the expression of emotions in a non-verbal way – by colour and shape;
- will experience a moment of self-reflection;
- will have a chance to see and hear 'how others feel';
- will work on a greater awareness of their emotions.

Work methods

- Individual work – in silence and concentration
- Artistic activities without assessment
- Mindfulness training
- The method of artistic expression – creative work focused on the process, not the effect

Before classes

Space: Make sure that each student has their own space; if possible, make them sit separately or back to each other. They don't have to sit in pairs.

Prepare:

- A4 cards (one per person),

wax crayons, markers, pens – the more colours, the better.

As a preparation for the classes, it may be helpful to review the reproductions of paintings by artists such as: Henri Matisse, Jackson Pollock, Paul Klee, Robert de Kooning.

What are we going to do?

Show students what you'll be doing and who co-wrote the script of this lesson.

> At the workshop, we'll draw colours and shapes that show our emotions. We'll also talk about how different colours can affect our mood.
>
> These activities were created by Kinga Nowak – an artist who deals with painting, sculpture and graphics. In her work, she uses colour to tell the story of the world she lives in.

Process

Introduction (3 minutes)

Introduce your students in the subject of the class; you can say, e.g.:

> Today we'll try to draw something that can't be easily described in words – emotions. It's not about making something look good. We cut ourselves off from the rating system, we don't compete, we don't want to prove anything to anyone. We're interested in how our thoughts and feelings flow. It'll be a time only for you – focus on what you feel. We want to be alone with ourselves and our emotions for a while. You won't have to tell about it. Your job is to put it on paper, you don't have to put it in words.

Mindfulness training (2 minutes)

Invite students to a short mindfulness practice. You can read the instructions:

> Close your eyes if you want. For two minutes, just sit in silence. Now focus on your breathing – notice how you inhale and exhale the air. Take a deep breath three times. Now, for a moment, move your thoughts to your favourite place –

> wherever it is. See it in your mind. Ask yourself: what colours do you see? What's their intensity? Does any colour prevail? What colour is absent? Do you notice any difference when you have your eyes closed longer? Are you ready? Open your eyes.

Creative activity (20 minutes)

The exercise consists of two parts. Guide students in subsequent phases, giving them about 10 minutes for each part of the exercise. Each participant should have one A4 card and crayons or pens prepared. The exercise is based on working on one set of categories. We offer three sets to choose from:

- CITY – NATURE
- SCHOOL – SPACE OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL
- GROUP – ME

Choose the set that suits your group the most at the given moment. You have two instructions to choose from. If some students find it harder to start, provide them with more detailed instructions. Guide them step by step.

Distribute A4 cards and colour pencils or pens.

Give instructions for the exercise. Control the time. After 10 minutes, ask students to move to the other side of the card and start working on the second key word.

> Take an A4 piece of paper. Fold it in half. Select colour pencils/pens. You'll work on both sides of the folded sheet. On the first side, try to convey with colours and expressions what emotions the city/school/group evokes in you. How do you feel when you're in this space? The other side will be used to reflect on how you feel – in nature / in space outside school / alone with yourself. Use abstract forms, line, daubs, shapes; what you draw isn't meant to resemble anything. After unfolding, your two drawings, not necessarily similar to each other, will give one picture.

Instructions for people who find it harder to enter the topic:

If you find it difficult to feel abstract, start with a simple association. It can be a shape, colour, emotion or image that comes to your mind. It doesn't have to be precise or realistic, it just needs to be something you start with. Choose one colour or one simple shape that will be your base. Don't think about the details yet or what it should look like 'at the end'. Hold the brush or crayon freely and start moving your hand across the sheet. Don't plan specific forms or try to draw something recognizable straight away. The movement can be wavy, spinning, fast or slow. Let your hand guide you intuitively. As you feel more at ease, you can add more colours, lines, spots, or shapes. You can also repeat what you already have. It's important not to judge whether it 'looks good'. Abstraction has no rules.

Group reflection (15 minutes)

After completing the exercise, ask the students to spread the paper so that the two drawings are side by side. You can do this in the form of a joint presentation, spreading the work on the floor. Give the group a minute to see all the works, then invite them to talk, but let the students decide for themselves whether they want to speak. You can encourage them to talk with a few open-ended questions, such as: 'What do you see? Do these drawings share a common feature? What colours dominate? What's the difference between the two parts? Does anything surprise you?'

If a longer conversation takes place, you can imagine together with the group which colours from the drawings could be found on the wall of the classroom.

Ask:

- What colour would you use to make it easier to concentrate while working on your own?

- And what colour would be good when you work together, in a group?

If the task is finished quite fast, group reflection may be preceded by work in pairs. Ask students to pair up and show each other their

drawings. Each student has five minutes to describe the drawing of the other person. When describing, they should focus only on what they see: colours, lines, shapes and arrangement of elements. Only at the end can they tell what the image is associated with, what impression it makes. It's important not to evaluate the drawing during this description. Avoid words and expressions such as 'nice', 'ugly', 'I like it' or 'I don't like it'. After five minutes, the roles switch and the other person describes the partner's drawing in the same way.

Thanks and invitation to continue (5 minutes)

At the end, say:

> Thank you for staying focused and sharing your thoughts. If you want, at home you can draw your own mandala – a circular composition that shows your mood. You can also play with the form – crumple a piece of paper, tear it, cut something out of it, glue something out with paper. Let this be your way of telling yourself how you feel. I encourage you to repeat today's exercise on different days, especially when you feel overwhelmed by emotions and thoughts.

You can also invite the group to another simple colour and shape practice that they can try at home.

Instructions for making a mandala at home:

> Draw a large circle on a piece of paper the way you can. The shape of the circle helps reveal the emotions you feel at a given moment. This will be the starting point for your mandala. Fill the shape with any figures. These can be: lines, waves, points, flowers, geometric figures – whatever comes to your mind. Choose colours that match your mood. Don't compose. This work is supposed to reveal your emotions. Finish and look at your mandala. Look at it and ask yourself: 'What does it say about my mood? What do I like about it? How do I feel when I look at it?'



Photo: Krzysztof Marchlak

Kinga Nowak

Painter, sculptor, graduate of the Faculty of Painting of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, where she has been running a painting studio since 2023. She also studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Her paintings have been included in the 2014 album *100 Painters of Tomorrow*, and are also kept in the collections of the National Museum in Kraków, the Wawel Royal Castle, the Museum of Photography in Kraków, the National Museum in Gdańsk, the Bunkier Sztuki Gallery in Kraków and many private collections.

Anna Grajewska

Cultural educator, cultural manager and community development expert. She helps institutions and companies build programmes aimed at developing people through culture. She conducts training workshops aimed at cultural staff in the field of designing cultural offers and integrating new groups into activities. She facilitates the process of building open communication in teams and groups. She co-creates the A Sztuka? Foundation, which promotes a greater presence of art in education and everyday life.

SOUND
I play the world anew

Kamil Kruk, Katarzyna Kanowska

Assumptions

Participants: students who know each other and the teacher

15–30 people
Age: 13–19 years
Time: 45 minutes

Goals

- Focusing on inner experiences, imagination and conscious perception of music as a tool for relaxation and expression.
- Listening carefully and developing the ability to associate music with emotions, colours and artistic forms.
- Creating your own sound object from recycled materials and spontaneous improvisation – combining sound with visual form.
- The experience of co-creation by listening, observing and performing together with others, as well as sharing reflection or silence.

During classes, students:

- will learn to listen not only to sounds, but also to their own emotions and imagination;
- will create spontaneously and without evaluation, seeking meaning and beauty in simple actions;
- will experience cooperation through improvisation and joint creation;
- will develop aesthetic sensitivity, joy of creation and empathy for other participants.

Work methods

- Impression method – reception without the need for analysis, assessment
- Auditory perception – listening to fragments of songs in different musical styles
- Visual and auditory interpretation and creative expression – free drawing of the figures interpreted, sketching aimed at associations, metaphors and comparisons
- Workshop work/construction activities – creating simple quasi-instruments
- Individual and collective sound improvisation – spontaneous experimentation with sound, rhythm, texture, and empathic listening

Before classes

Space: a regular classroom; it would be good if students could sit in a circle.

Prepare:

- films of various types, e.g., sheet, aluminium, bubble, renovation,
- cans, bottles, bags of rice or groats,
- adhesive tape (wide),
- paper (A4 cards),
- tissue paper,
- crayons/pastels/markers,
- sound source (computer with internet access and speakers),
- 1–2 several minute recordings presenting the sound of the sea, birds singing, calm sounds of nature for sleep and relaxation.

What are we going to do?

Show students what you'll be doing and who co-wrote the script of this lesson. Adjust the language of communication to the age of the participants – you can talk about playing with sounds but as well about creating experimental or avant-garde music.

> During the workshop, you'll listen to different sounds and see how you can translate them into colours and shapes. You'll build your own 'sound object' from simple materials and

play it during a group improvisation. The most important thing will be the experience and joy of creating together, not the end result.

These activities were created by Kamil Kruk, a composer, music theoretician, lecturer who loves musical experiments, one of the few musicians playing a concert music saw.

Process

Mindfulness training (3 minutes)

The time of this exercise can be treated flexibly; adapt it to the needs of your students.

Prepare the tracks that you'll play during the exercise. Invite students to sit comfortably in a chair or elsewhere where they can relax. Give them instructions with a calm voice:

- Place your feet firmly on the floor, rest your back, lower your arms.
- Close your eyes and feel that you can cut yourself off from what distracts you for a moment.
- Take a deep breath with your nose... and slowly release the air with your mouth.
- Breathe calmly, without haste.
- Listen carefully to the two sound fragments that will come from the speakers in a moment.
- Imagine that you're in a place that represents these sounds.
- Maybe you can feel the wind on your skin, maybe the warmth of the sun, maybe the smell of plants...
- Don't analyse what it is. Just be there.
- If some thoughts arise, let them float like leaves on the water and return to listening.
- Stay in that picture until the music stops.

Play the first recording, then the second. You can also decide to play only one of them.

Introduction (1 minute)

> Today, we'll try to stop for a moment, listen to ourselves and others. We'll see how much can be expressed with sound – even without words and without notes. That's why you'll listen to different sounds and check what images, emotions and associations they evoke in you. Then you'll try to transfer these impressions to paper, give them shapes and colours. Finally, you'll become creators yourselves, because you'll build your own sources of sound, your own 'instruments' – sound objects, to experience the pleasure of playing them and creating a common musical story.

Action (36 minutes)

Listening to music and synesthesic associations (6 minutes)

Ask everyone to take a card and something to draw (these can be pens, crayons, pastels – let everyone choose what they like). Give students instructions:

> Sit comfortably and prepare to listening. You're about to hear the same sound fragments as you've just heard. When listening, don't judge – just feel, and then let your hands put shapes, figures on the card. They don't have to be anything precise, let the hand move freely. Don't stop, don't improve, it doesn't have to be 'nice', it's meant to be yours. Remember that you can use one or more cards.

Play once again the tracks or one of them. After the music is over, invite students to take a look at their work, and let them ask themselves questions: 'Did anything surprise me? What emotions do I see in this work?'

Building ‘sound objects’ (15 minutes)

Explain to students what sound objects are.

> A sound object is an object that can make sound, but it doesn’t have to be a real instrument, like a guitar or piano. It can be made of various materials – e.g., aluminium foil, bubble foil, paper or can. The important thing is that it has to be something that makes sound – when we hit it, shake it, crumple it, rub it or blow it. We call such an object a quasi-instrument. It gives us the ability to create sounds, although there are no traditional strings, keys or tuning at a specific sound height. In contemporary music, sound objects are a way to discover new, unusual sounds and are used to produce musical works. Each of you is about to build their own sound object and then use it to create a short improvisation.

Invite students to come to the table where the materials are located. Encourage them to try their sound.

> There are different materials in front of you. Each of you can choose one or several of them – touch them, see if they are smooth, rough, soft or stiff... Shake, crumple or blow them and listen to the sounds they make. Then each of you should take a few materials and check how they sound together. Then think about how to combine them to create your own quasi-instrument.
>
> And now start sticking, wrapping, binding the pieces together – follow your imagination – and test the sounds on a regular basis: hit, rub, shake, squirt, scratch... Don’t think about its appearance, focus on the sound. When you feel the object is ready, put it in front of you and prepare for the next task. Remember, there are no restrictions here. The imagination of each of you is huge and unique. You can create anything that comes to your mind. Don’t be afraid to test new ideas. This is your own sound world – play with it and discover it your way. This is how experimental, avant-garde music is created.

Sound improvisation inspired by figures and shapes drawn by students (8 minutes)

Divide yourselves into two or three groups and sit together, so that each person has their sound object and picture drew before the listening.

> Together, choose a few pictures that you like the most or that seem to be the most interesting, the most varied. It can be one picture from each person, or maybe you'll be guided by a different intention – the decision is yours. Once you've chosen, think about what sounds can be adapted to them.

Students can be given some tips:

> If you see waves, think: how to play the sound of the sea? If you see something sharp or angular – maybe it'll be rhythmic, short strokes, and if the picture shows delicate lines – maybe it'll be quiet rustling?
>
> Now try playing them on your quasi-instruments. You can play music inspired by your pictures in any order, you can repeat some sounds, extend them or shorten them – it all depends on your imagination.

In this part of the course, it's important to prepare with students a glossary of terms that are worth using and terms that should be avoided when watching and then listening. We avoid words such as: 'nice', 'ugly', 'false', 'stupid'. It's better to conduct a discussion based on observation rather than evaluation (e.g., 'metallic', 'rough', 'rhythmic', 'silent').

Group improvisation (7 minutes)

Invite groups to present their sounds in the form they choose. Not everyone feels comfortable performing in front of the rest of the class, so let them choose whether they want to play their sequence with others listening, or whether all the groups play simultaneously, building an ambient atmosphere, or maybe arrange the order of the individual sections. It's up to you.

In the next step, you can try to improvise collectively so that everyone becomes an orchestra. One person then becomes a conductor who indicates which group or even person is supposed to play at the given time.

> Remember, there are no bad sounds! Every idea is unique, and what you're about to play is unique. The more you listen to others, the more interesting the effect will be. Play with sound and improvising together – enjoy what you create as a group. Describe, but don't judge. This isn't a musical test, there are no mistakes. We don't compose symphonies, we study the sound.

Summary and thanks (5 minutes)

Invite students to find a comfortable place.

> Sit comfortably, put your sound objects in front of you and close your eyes. Take a calm breath... and slowly release the air. Feel your bodies gradually relax after all the fun and play. Think of all the sounds that you've heard today and that you've made yourselves. Maybe you particularly liked one of them? Maybe one was surprising?
>
> Keep that feeling as if you were taking a picture in your memory. Now sit in silence for a moment and let your thoughts flow slowly, and if one of them wants to stay, just accept it.
>
> [Silent pause: 20–30 seconds]
>
> When you feel that you want to share what you remembered or felt, you can the class about this. You can also keep impressions to yourselves.
>
> Thank you for today's sound journey. Remember – sounds are all around you, and you can notice them, play with them and create something special from them whenever you want, because music has no boundaries.

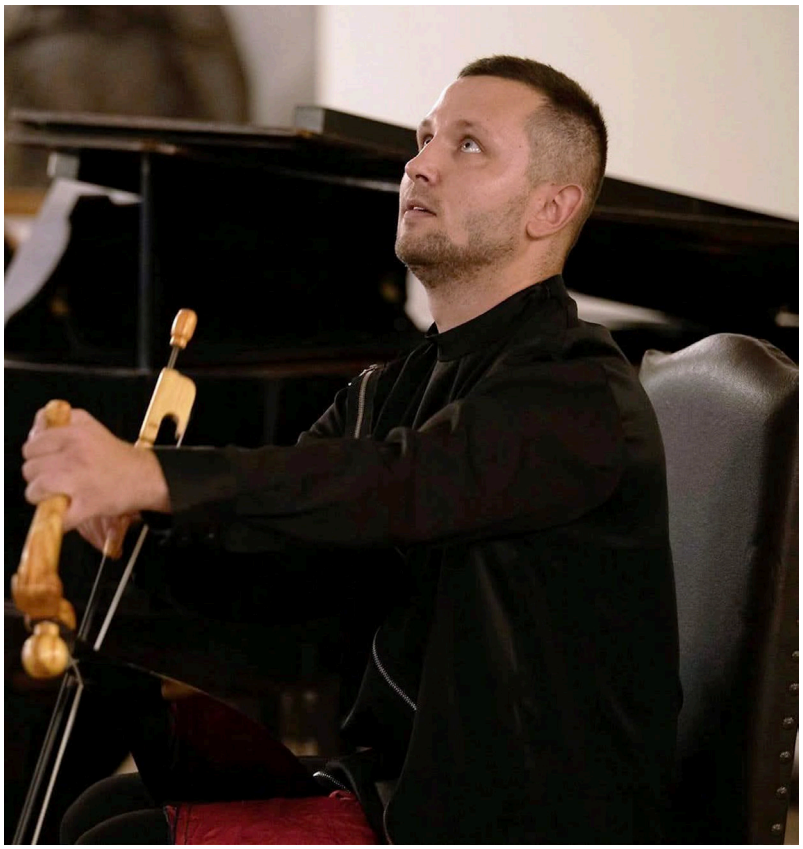


Photo: A. Chojnacka

Kamil Kruk

Composer, music theorist, multi-instrumentalist. He graduated with distinction from the Krzysztof Penderecki Academy of Music in Kraków, where he also obtained the degree of the Doctor of Arts. Winner of numerous awards in composition and scholarship competitions. Currently, he works at the Institute of Music at the Faculty of Arts of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin and at the Oskar Kolberg Music School Complex in Radom. He likes to wander through the forests (especially in Bieszczady), dance Argentine tango and read biographies of artists.

Katarzyna Kanowska

Teacher of the Polish language and literature, theatre teacher, specialist in support of the development of educators in the Teach for Poland foundation, entrepreneur. For years she has been working with the third sector as an expert in education and culture. Author of lesson scenarios based on the methods of theatre pedagogy, author and co-author of methodological publications, books for high school graduates and training webinars. She is the owner of three cats and a dog, and has an abiding passion for the mountains, theatre, and gardening.

THEATRE
‘All the world’s a stage...’

Dominika Bednarczyk-Krzyżowska,

Wojciech Rzehak

Assumptions

Participants: the teacher and students who know each other

15–30 people
Age: 13–19 years
Time: 45 minutes

Goals

During classes, students:

- will develop soft competences in the field of mindfulness and group cooperation, especially in the areas of non-verbal communication and differentiation of the intensity of communication;
- will improve the ability to listen, concentrate and pay attention to the other person; they will also practice reflexes;
- will increase awareness of the possibility of achieving well-being without excessive stimuli (they will develop good habits in order to achieve the effect of stimulation by focusing on the here and now).

Work methods

- Working as a team
- Physical/expression exercise
- Dialogue with students based on experience

Before classes

Space: a room that allows free movement on an area of several / a dozen square meters, equipped with chairs for each participant.

The room equipment can include mattresses on which participants can sit/lie down in the first phase of classes.

What are we going to do?

Show students what you'll be doing and who co-wrote the script of this lesson.

> During the classes, we'll turn the classroom into a real stage. We'll practice mindfulness, reflex and cooperation, using simple acting and movement tasks. We'll try to 'catch a snap', react quickly to commands, and finally we'll create a 'typewriter' in which each of us will have their own important letter. It'll be a time of fun, creativity and discovering each other – without competition, but with a lot of energy and laughter.
>
> The screenplay is co-written by Dominika Bednarczyk-Krzyżowska, an actress of the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Kraków, known for her outstanding roles in *The Forefathers' Eve* and *The Wedding* (both productions directed by Maja Kleczewska), and recently in *Peace* (based on a text by Szczepan Twardoch, directed by Roman Talarczyk).

Process

Mindfulness training (3–5 minutes)

Get the attention of the participants. This is the first phase of the workshop and the success of the project depends on it. According to the fundamental principle of mindfulness, the goal of this phase of classes is to make participants focus their attention on the present moment, aim to consciously experience it.

> Let's have a workshop meeting. Take any place. Sit comfortably, lie down, take the position that suits you best. Let's calm down for a minute, let's throw away everything outside, let's focus on the present moment. Don't say anything, just be.

Participants sit for about 60 seconds (lie down, squat, stand) in their chosen positions, keeping silence, although there may be some

comments, jokes... You can then extend the exercise by several dozen seconds. Remember that the essence of this task is to allow participants to focus on experiencing the moment, and at the same time to make them clear their minds.

Make sure the participants try to focus on themselves and stay focused. You may encounter attempts to interfere with this task; don't react harshly; most participants will certainly become quiet to some extent.

Introduction + 'what will you do?' (maximum 3 minutes)

Remind the workshop participants that these classes aren't a competition, no one will be judged. Explain what you're going to do today. Make sure everyone understands the rules.

> Remember that we don't compete, which means that there are no winners or losers. We're not here to judge one another. The most important thing is experience. You may be wondering what will you be doing. Today, first and foremost, we'll be together and for ourselves. William Shakespeare wrote in his comedy *As You Like It*: 'All the world's a stage, And all the men and women are merely players;
>
> They have their exits and their entrances.' Today, we will make our world a stage where we all will play, getting to know ourselves better. Did you understand my words?

Make sure the participants understand your words. It's important for them to realize that they will have fun, play roles, but not compete with one another.

Action (approximately 30 minutes)

SNAP or focus/mindfulness/reflex (about 4 minutes)

The participants sit in a circle and give each other the so-called 'snap', i.e., a snap of the fingers (the whole exercise can last about 15–20 rounds).

Give a 'snap' to the person you choose, this person must pick it up and pass it on. Since the participants are positioned in a circle, it's best to give the 'snaps' in turn – start with the participant on your left, so that the 'snaps' are passed in a clockwise direction.

Since not everyone can snap their fingers, you can choose another variant of this game. Participants can either give each other an object (e.g., a small rubber ball, but it can even be a shoe) or pretend to

give themselves an object (light, heavy, huge or tiny – whatever the imagination might suggest).

It's important that the delivery of a snap, real or imagined object, is accompanied each time by the person saying the word 'snap'. This element can also cause a lot of laughter – participants can change the intonation or pitch of the voice each time (depending on the type of 'snap' being transmitted).

Once all participants have mastered the essence of the exercise, you can add additional difficulties, i.e., acting tasks, calling each subsequent task associated with a 'snap', e.g.:

Give a 'snap' as if you were giving something:

- delicate, fragile (you then say the word 'snap' gently, tenderly),
- heavy (say the word 'snap' with fatigue, as if you were carrying some heavy load),
- hot (say the word 'snap' with a warning voice, quickly, because it burns),
- smelly (say the word 'snap' with disgust, wrinkling the nose, instantly getting rid of the problem),
- in slow motion (say the word 'snap' stretching the vowel 'a' for a long time).

If participants like the form of the exercise, you can add a modification: let them invent the intention with which they would like to give a 'snap'. They may raise very different proposals and play, e.g.:

- passing one another various objects (small, huge, heavy, fleeting),
- different types of movement (turning, flipping, digging),
- various emotions (joy, relief, love, anger, aversion).

Make sure that everyone has the opportunity to give a 'snap'. You can also appreciate especially innovative, interesting solutions. Remember that for some participants, this exercise is an opportunity to laugh, for others to express their feelings with a loud noise or a shout – in both cases it serves a cleansing function.

WALKING IN A CIRCLE and reacting to the command, or concentration/reflex (about 7–8 minutes)

Participants walk around the room and move in any direction, each at their own pace. They have only one task: to respond to the commands of the animator. Explain that on the code word 'current', everyone makes a flutter movement with their whole body. Give them commands, repeating in the same order:

- stop,
- clap,
- jump,
- squat,
- sit in a chair.

Start with giving the commands slowly, then get faster. At some point, start changing the order of commands, which will force the participants to focus on listening and increase their focus. When they understand what the exercise is about, say the code word 'current', which will make everyone perform a flutter movement of the whole body (it gives the effect of relaxation).

Check the course of the exercise, especially regarding the safety of the participants. Make sure, for example, that sitting on a chair doesn't involve competition, pushing one another. This task works perfectly as a kind of dynamic game with lots of laughter and joy at making mistakes that don't have any negative consequences.

TYPEWRITER or improving concentration, memory performance, sense of rhythm, team play, listening to the partner (about 15 minutes)

Place the participants on chairs in a semicircle, one next to the other. Then, point to the first (extreme) participant and assign them the letter A.

> You are the letter A.

Assign the letter B to the next participant, then the letter C, D and so on. Moving to the subsequent participants, distribute all the letters of the alphabet (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z). Most likely, there will be fewer participants than there are letters in the alphabet, so some people will assign more than one letter.

Choose a sentence – it can be invented by you, it can be a quote from a book, it can be a famous proverb...

> To be, or not to be, that is the question: whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
>
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune...

Ask the participants to repeat them several times (first in the choir, then each to oneself) and remember them well. Then give them sign that the exercise starts.

Participants begin to spell these sentences in such a way that the person who was assigned the letter gets up from the chair and speaks it out loud. At the end of each word, everyone stands up and claps their hands twice.

Important: spelling should be smooth, it should sound like a qualified typist transcribing the text. Pay attention to participants with dyslexia, give them support (you can 'conduct' them to some extent, indicate when they should present their letter).

You can introduce several variants of the exercise, deciding on its duration.

Variant 1: The typewriter is mute. The exercise is the same, but the participants assigned to each letter only stand up, don't speak the letter aloud.

Variant 2: The act of spelling is inscribed into an imaginary situation – it can be very quiet, for example, because a small child sleeps next to it; it can also be extremely fast because the office is about to be closed; it can finally have an irritating slow and monotonous course, because the same text is repeated all along its duration.

Remember that the last sentence of this exercise is:

Dear all, we are finishing the exercise!

Let this be a transition to the modules ending the meeting.

Summary and thanks (7 minutes)

Summarize the classes, ask each participant three feedback questions:

- How do you feel after classes?
- Which part of the classes was most useful to you?
- What do you bring with you from these workshops?

Thank the participants of the workshop, appreciate their effort and creativity.



Photo: Michał Ramus, Teatr im. J. Słowackiego w Krakowie

Dominika Bednarczyk-Krzyżowska

A theatre and film actress associated with the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Kraków where she performed, in, among others: *Breakfast at Tiffany's* directed by Paweł Miśkiewicz; *The Unbreakable Prince*, directed by Andrzej Pawłowski; and *The Magic Mountain*, directed by Barbara Sass. Her creation of Konrad in *The Forefathers' Eve,* directed by Maja Kleczewska, brought her many awards and distinctions. She appeared in numerous television theatre productions. She also starred in Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, Jerzy Stuhr's *The List of Adulteresses*, Małgorzata Szumowska's *Ono* and Adam Guziński's *Memoirs of Summer*.

Wojciech Rzehak

Writer, teacher of the Polish language and culture, educator. Head of the Education Department at the Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Kraków. Since his birth, he has been associated with Kraków; recently, he quite often visits Warsaw, although he would prefer to live somewhere by the sea, on the Hel Peninsula. He graduated from the Polish Philology at the Jagiellonian University and for many years was teaching Polish language and culture – among others in the A Witkowski High School No 5 in Kraków and was Deputy Director of one of the non-public schools. He runs the educational channel *Ponury Polonista* on YouTube.

WORD
Between words

Małgorzata Konieczna, Maja Dobkowska

Assumptions

Participants: the teacher and students who know each other

15–30 people
Age: 13–19 years
Time: 45 minutes

Goals

During classes, students:

- will activate the senses in creative activity;
- will be given space to play and explore, with no particular effect expected;
- will be given permission to speak freely – personally, but without the need for excessive exposure and openness;
- will train flexibility and originality of thinking, freely combining different topics;
- will learn about the assumptions of directions and trends in art, which to a greater or lesser extent are based on randomness, accidentality or lack of full control of the artist (e.g., surrealism, Dadaism, or ready-mades).

Work methods

- Mini-lecture
- Independent artistic and mental work
- Presentation of effects
- Common group reflection

Before classes

Space: arrange the space so that everyone can sit around a common large table. This will help you to achieve:

- a free atmosphere to discuss and talk facilitates showing one other their 'discoveries',
- free access of every participant to a variety of newspapers,
- the result thanks to which this lesson looks different than the others. Its not aimed at the teacher-student message, but to the exchange of thoughts, having fun and being together. Sitting together at the table, we don't judge ourselves, we don't have to meet anyone's expectations, we can behave more freely.

If possible, move the benches together, so that they form one large table or island. This will facilitate the sharing of newspapers and create the atmosphere of an editorial workshop.

Prepare:

- different newspapers in large numbers. It's best to have different types of newspapers. Preparing newspapers of only one type (e.g., advertising brochures) may result in a less interesting course of exercises. There should be at least as many newspapers as there are participants (preferably more). If you managed to arrange a common table, the newspapers can be gathered in the centre of the table. In other arrangements, it's worth arranging a 'warehouse' with newspapers on a free bench,
- paper scissors for each person,
- stick adhesives (at least 1 for 3 people),
- A4 cards, technical pad, coloured A4 sheets, origami paper, blocks of paper with a coloured pattern – in the amount that allows the participants to freely choose the pattern/colour,
- opaque bag or container from which words can easily be drawn,
- audio equipment or speakers to play music,

- all kinds of calm, relaxing music,
- optional: computer with internet access, projector, screen to show examples.

What will you do?

Tell your students what you will do.

> The lesson is about making word collages by freely combining words from newspapers.

Process

Mindfulness training (5 minutes)

Offer the students a warm-up exercise building mindfulness. Ask each person to choose a card of any colour and prepare scissors. Then turn on the music and ask everyone to spontaneously cut out the shape of a cloud in two minutes. It's important to do this task intuitively, i.e., without prior planning, sketching, or precision. It's all about the movement of the scissors and the process of an interesting shape emerging. If students want, they can even close their eyes for the time of cutting and be surprised by the shape of a cloud that will eventually be obtained.

If you want, you can stick the cut out clouds on a common sheet of paper to admire the variety of shapes.

Introduction (5–15 minutes)

Start by introducing simple rules:

Tell students that classes will be based on free play. While there will be some organizing instructions, everyone can do the task in their own way and at their own pace, and what isn't prohibited is allowed.

Remember that what you do isn't aimed at any particular effect; you're supposed to learn a method, which may be helpful in reducing stress, whirling thoughts, or overstimulation.

Promise the class that the results of the work will be presented only by those who express such willingness. What they present won't be evaluated or criticized.

Introduce the author of the scenario:

> What we're going to do today was proposed for you by an artist, Gosia Konieczna,. Gosia's work tool are scissors. She uses them to cut out words from newspapers that she reunites in a perverse and thought-provoking way. Her work seems to appeal to others, because her profile is already followed by 153,000 people. But most importantly, she likes it herself. That's what she talks about it:
>
> 'I remember it was a winter evening, I took scissors in my hand, I started cutting out words from newspapers and composing poems – I wasn't impressed by their content, but it relaxed me a lot. I started to shorten them until I reached two lines. It was a form of self-therapy for me. It relaxes me to this day, it helps me put my thoughts and emotions in order.'

If you have such an option, display the clippings of your choice on the whiteboard or screen.

If you want, tell your students more about the collage method by showing examples on the Internet. You can include:

- context of art (dadaists, surrealists, hat poems, ready-mades, etc.),
- brain context – stimulation of both hemispheres of the brain (the left hemisphere is involved in analysis, composition, structure. The right hemisphere – in intuition, images, colours. Making a collage stimulates balanced brain activity, which supports mental regeneration),
- the context of creativity – questioning the status quo, exploring, speculating, consciously breaking the rules of logic, grammar, etc. – has always been invigorating...

Action (approximately 25 minutes)

Cutting out words (about 10 minutes)

Give students instructions:

> In the newspapers that you have in front of you, look for words or phrases that will intrigue you, please you, or draw your attention. And when you find them, cut them out. Make sure that the pool is diverse and contains different parts of speech (verbs, nouns, adjectives in any grammatical case) and a few slogans. Let each person collect at least 15 clippings on different topics – these can be advertising slogans, article titles, fragments of statements in any graphic form and size.
>
> Have fun with it, words don't have to be dedicated to any topic, let them be words that you like, which, for example, can be associated with something pleasant, whose sound you like, or which call emotions, states and things close to you.

Put the cut out words in a common bag and mix them up.

Word combination (about 10 minutes)

Everyone draws a handful of words from a common bag (if students work in benches, they can also simply exchange words with their neighbour).

From the drawn words, the participants arrange a collage that they like – it can be a short text, a sentence, a story. They only use the words they have drawn.

Invite students to look for non-obvious connections. To break the rules of logic, to search for metaphors. Collages can be funny, strange, untypical, disturbing. The only thing that is unacceptable is insulting someone or a group of people.

A collage made of words/fragments arranged in a literal and understandable message will also be fine – point out that the final shape of the collage is influenced not only by the creativity

and creative openness of students, but also by randomness: students use what accidentally came into their hands. They had an influence on the choice of words they cut themselves, but the collage is already the result of the choices of the whole group, so it can be considered that everyone is in a sort of a way co-author of each collage.

Don't correct students' ideas or criticize them. You can ask about the meaning or how the given student understands the metaphor they created. However, don't do it in an oppressive way. Let yourself be guided only by curiosity! If a student creates with words only clichés, encourage them to bolder searches, but avoid any pressure. Perhaps for this particular person, this seemingly trivial sentence is the expression of something important.

Additional rules:

Participants don't have to use all the words.

They can exchange words with one another. Suggest: 'If you've found an interesting word that doesn't fit your idea, put it in the middle of the table for others.' This builds cooperation instead of competition.

Participants stick their words to a decorative card in a way they choose, thus creating their own, unique collage.

If somebody wants, they can add an image/illustration to their verbal collage.

Presentation (approximately 5 minutes)

People who like, read their collages aloud. If you have enough time, you can also make a presentation in the form of a mini-exhibition.

Summary and thanks (10 minutes)

As part of the summary, it's worth inviting students to share their reflections:

- How do you feel?
- What did this exercise give you?
- What do you take away with you?

You can summarize the lesson by referring to the concept of the flow:

> Creating a collage can lead to the so-called flow – a state of deep focus when the sense of time is lost and the tension disappears. It's a condition that psychologists combine with high satisfaction and relaxation. It's pleasant. [Students can give their examples: when they feel it]. Each of you can enter into this state, although for each one it'll probably be associated with a different type of action. It's worth exploring, looking for your flow and giving yourself time for it. Here, during classes, the time was limited – if you want to continue the adventure with collage, you can take this sentence and try to finish it in any way you want.

Encourage further action

If the lesson was attractive to students, encourage them to have fun playing with words and make materials available for those, who are willing to do so.

Thank your students for their creative time together and a good atmosphere (if that was the case).



Photo: Magdalena Konik-Machulska

Małgorzata Konieczna

Author of the minimalist 'Wycinki w termosie', a collage project initiated in social media (about a million views per month). Lover of the art of expression and the recycling of sense. She created collages for *Przekrój*, *Zwierciadło* and *Pismo*, among others. She cooperates with the *Newsweek Psychologia* magazine; her works were included in a textbook for learning the Polish language published by Nowa Era as a contemporary example of the art of aphorism. She conducts word collage workshops wherever creativity and an open mind are appreciated.

Maja Dobkowska

Educator, trainer, cultural animator, director of amateur theatre and author of books for children. She works at the Małopolska Institute of Culture, and after hours manages her own and other people's creativity. She fulfils herself in projects on the border of education and culture, cooperation with youth and in the beloved program Odyssey of the Mind. An enthusiast of walks in the Wolski Forest and small communities.

PAINTING
Painting with elements: I watch – I choose – I create

Marcin Koleśnik, Katarzyna Kanowska

Assumptions

Participants: students who know each other and the teacher

15–30 people
Age: 13–19 years
Time: 45 minutes

Goals

- Developing skills of active perception and description of phenomena.
- Shaping the attitude of the creative sender – from observation to decision.
- Developing the skills and pleasure of creating from limited and imperfect materials.

During classes, students:

- will learn to consciously observe the surrounding world and describe it using simple, precise language and basic aesthetic concepts;
- they will have the opportunity to go through three stages: observation – decision – creation, to consciously make aesthetic and functional choices, and then experience creation, which is a decision-making process, not just expression. They will thus become active transmitters of the message, not just receivers;
- will experience the pleasure of working with matter and seek creative solutions, learning that aesthetics and message can flow from simplicity and improvisation.

Work methods

- Mindfulness training – exercises of focus and conscious observation.
- Guided conversation – reflective auxiliary questions for the analysis of the imagined element.
- Visualization and imagination – exercises that trigger visual thinking that leads to decision making.
- Creative expression – free testing of various painting tools and techniques in search of creative solutions.

Before classes

Space: ordinary classroom; pictures, photos, teaching boards, etc., on the walls will be an additional asset.

It's worth to protect the benches from dirt (foil, cardboard) and think about access to the sink or provide a container with clean water,

Prepare:

- containers with water, brushes of various thickness, various materials that can be used as painting tools, e.g., yarn, cloth, ribbons, newspapers, sticks, twigs, grasses, strings, painting cards in different formats, but better larger than smaller ones,
- a set of paints,
- alternatively, a printout of annex 3 – 1 copy per 2 persons.

Remember to leave the classroom in order – arrange it with students, assign the role of duty students or people responsible for individual cleaning elements.

What are we going to do?

Show students what you'll be doing and who co-wrote the script of this lesson.

> At the workshops, you'll stimulate your mindfulness and imagination. First, you'll stop for a moment and learn to see

the details in ordinary things, like colours or shapes. Then you'll choose one of the elements – earth, water, fire or air – and see how it can be translated into a painting. From simple materials, you'll create your own creative interpretation, experimenting with texture, colour and form. It's a time for freedom, improvisation and the pleasure of creating without the pressure of judgement.

These activities were created by Marcin Koleśnik, a painter, graduate of the Faculty of Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, who deals with painting, graphics, illustrations, comics and also works in the film industry.

Process

Consider this description as a proposal. If you feel that your students need more time to painting as such, give up the introductory part or shorten it.

You can prepare the classroom together, securing the tables with foil or cardboard can become a part of the action. Same as cleaning up the creative mess.

Mindfulness training (3 minutes)

Allow students to freely take their seats in the room, then ask each person to:

- search for one object in the room, it can be a poster, a painting, a didactic board or even an emblem;
- focus on one element of this object, e.g., on its shape, specific colour;
- slowly follow this element with their eyes: if it's a shape, let them follow the outline, if it's a colour, let them slowly cover with their sight the planes of that colour. Without haste, slowly and carefully, to see all the details and nuances.

Now invite everyone to close their eyes and try to recreate the shape that they followed with their eyes, or the plane covered with the colour they chose; let them treat this mark/shape as a new form in which they can to place anything.

At the end, it's worth to focus for a moment on the object just created in one's mind.

Introduction (3 minutes)

Encourage students to think for a moment: how often do I really stop to notice something? Not just to look, but to see – the shape, the colour, the texture, the emotion that something evokes?

Invite them to a workshop that encourages to look, think and create in a conscious manner.

Announce that you'll act differently than usual: not to 'paint something nicely', but to experience how you can feel something, imagine it, and then create it using simple, sometimes random materials.

What is important will happen between observation and decision – when everyone decides for themselves what they see, how they understand it, and how they want to show it. As a result, every participant can become not only a performer, but also a creator who consciously chooses and experiments.

This process includes a space for mistakes, improvisation and surprises – because this is what real creativity is born from.

Let each person feel the freedom to act; the experience of creation itself is most important, so we don't focus on the effect, but on the pleasure of giving meaning to something. Creating with pleasure and curiosity.

Action (30 minutes)

Guided conversation and exercises that trigger visual thinking and leads to decision making (10 minutes)

The four basic components of which, according to many philosophical traditions, the world is composed are: earth, water, air, and fire; they are called the elements.

Propose the participants to choose, in their mind, one of the elements, using any criterion. You can suggest them some selection criteria, e.g.:

- which element you feel the most – in the emotional or physical way,
- which element(s) accompany(-ies) you every day (e.g., you live by the water, you often hike in the forest),
- which element delights you, causes fear or respect,
- which element reflects your character or temperament,
- which element you find unappreciated and want to know better,
- which element surprises you or makes your imagination work,
- which element best suits your mood today,
- which element you would like to present in your creative work.

After choosing the element, encourage students to imagine what it's like. Questions about form and shape, structure, material, colour, etc., will help. Printed questions (Annex 3 can be distributed for this purpose.

If you feel that this task is difficult for your students, you can display pictures of different elements to facilitate the process of giving them their own forms. Make sure that they are diverse, e.g., earth: peat, sand, cultivated beds, wet rock; fire: spark, candle flame, fire, blaze; water: fog, ocean, drop, snowflake; air: tornado, slight blast, trace of warm breath on a frozen glass, etc.

If you find that your students are more influenced by sounds, you can let them hear the sounds of nature (e.g., rain, fire, wind, sound of waves, crushing of stones, pouring sand, steps on gravel, etc.).

Creative expression (20 minutes)

When students finally see their element, feel it, invite them to creative activity, that is, to transfer it to a card. Let everyone choose any format of the card, tools for painting and paints. Encourage them to try different tools, let them see what effect they will get by holding them in a different hand than usual, or maybe they can just use their hand or fingers as a tool for painting? It's worth trying and not limiting oneself, because it's all about the personal experience of creation. It's good to get as much joy as possible.

Exchange of reflections (5 minutes)

When the students have finished their work, they should look in the classroom for the person who chose the same element. Offer

them to meet and look at each other's work, then let each use two terms describing the other's vision of the element, but avoiding any evaluation, e.g., 'your fire is so soft and high / your water is round and foamy'. Notice how the same idea can be expressed in different ways.

If you don't manage to make a verbal summary, it doesn't matter, the process of painting itself is the goal. Don't worry about the lack of verbal reflection at the end if you saw focus in the process.

Summary and thanks (7 minutes)

Ask the students:

- How do you feel?
- What did it give you?
- What do you take away with you?

Thank your students for their commitment, courage to create, and willingness to look at reality in a different way. What they did today doesn't end with this piece of paper – it may be the beginning of their own journey of observer and creator. Encourage them to practice their creative mindfulness outside the workshop.

You can offer them a simple task:

> In the coming days, find an object, place or phenomenon that you usually pass without much attention (e.g., a tree shadow, a pavement texture, a crack on the wall, a light in the window). Stay with it for a moment. Take a picture of it, describe it in a few words, or draw it as you really see it.
>
> Let this be your little practice of creative looking, for the world is full of things waiting to be seen and provided with meaning.



Photo: Marcin Koleśnik

Marcin Koleśnik

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Katarzyna Kanowska

Teacher of the Polish language and literature, theatre teacher, specialist in support of the development of educators in the Teach for Poland foundation, entrepreneur. For years she has been working with the third sector as an expert in education and culture. Author of lesson scenarios based on the methods of theatre pedagogy, author and co-author of methodological publications, books for high school graduates and training webinars. She is the owner of three cats and a dog, and has an abiding passion for the mountains, theatre, and gardening.

The teacher's reflection card

Date: _____
Scenario: _____
Class: _____

The teacher's reflection card after the lesson

Write a few sentences of reflection, just for yourself.

.....

.....

.....

.....

How do you feel after this lesson? Why?
What affects your well-being?

.....

.....

.....

.....

How do you find conducting this classes? Why?
What influenced this?

.....

.....

.....

.....

What are your observations?

.....

.....

.....

.....

Student reflection card

Date: _____

Scenario: _____

Student reflection card after lesson

Write a few words about how you felt during this lesson.

How do you feel after this lesson?

- great
- good
- just fine
- average
- rather bad
- bad
- terrible
- I don't know

Why?

.....

How do you find participating in these classes?

- great
- good
- average
- just fine
- rather bad
- bad
- terrible
- I don't know

What was helpful?

.....

What made it difficult?

.....

What do you need to rest from the chaos?

.....

Annex 1

Annex 1
Voting record

Do you like to have influence? Together, you will vote on two topics of lessons that will be conducted in the near future.

You have 3 points at your disposal. You can assign them to one scenario or split them into two or three scenarios. However, you can award a total of no more than 3 points.

MAIN THEME OF THE SCENARIO	WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?	POINTS FROM YOU
MOVEMENT	You will learn a few simple ways to relax your body, useful even when sitting in a bench. You'll be squirming and breathing. Thanks to these activities, you'll be able to recognize when you're stressed or tense and learn how to help yourself.	
COLOUR	You'll play with colour: draw shapes and choose colours that will show your emotions. You'll also talk about how different colours can affect your mood.	
SOUND	You'll create your own quasi-instruments from simple materials, and then play them all together. Musical skills aren't required! The most important thing will be the experience and joy of creating together, not the end result.	
THEATRE	You'll have fun, while practising mindfulness, reflex and cooperation, using simple acting and movement tasks. It'll be a time of fun, creativity and discovering each other – without competition, but with a lot of energy and laughter.	
WORD	You'll create word collages, freely combining words from newspapers. The funnier, stranger, and more absurd, the better!	
PAINTING	You'll paint differently than usual: experiment with texture, colour and form. It will be a time for freedom, creative artistic improvisation and the pleasure of creating without the pressure of judgement.	

Annex 2

Annex 2 – to the ‘Movement’ scenario

Points on the body:

1. The ‘karate point’ is located in the middle of the muscular, outer part of the hand, between the end of the wrist and the base of the little finger, the part of the hand that you would use to strike a karate blow.

2. The point at the beginning of the eyebrows, exactly above one of the sides of the nose.

3. The point on the bone located outside the eye.

4. The point on the bone below the eye (about 2.5 cm under the pupil).

5. The point on a small area between the base of the nose and the upper lip.

6. The point halfway between the chin and the tip of the lower lip. (Even if it isn’t located exactly on the chin, we call it this way because its description is thus more understandable.)

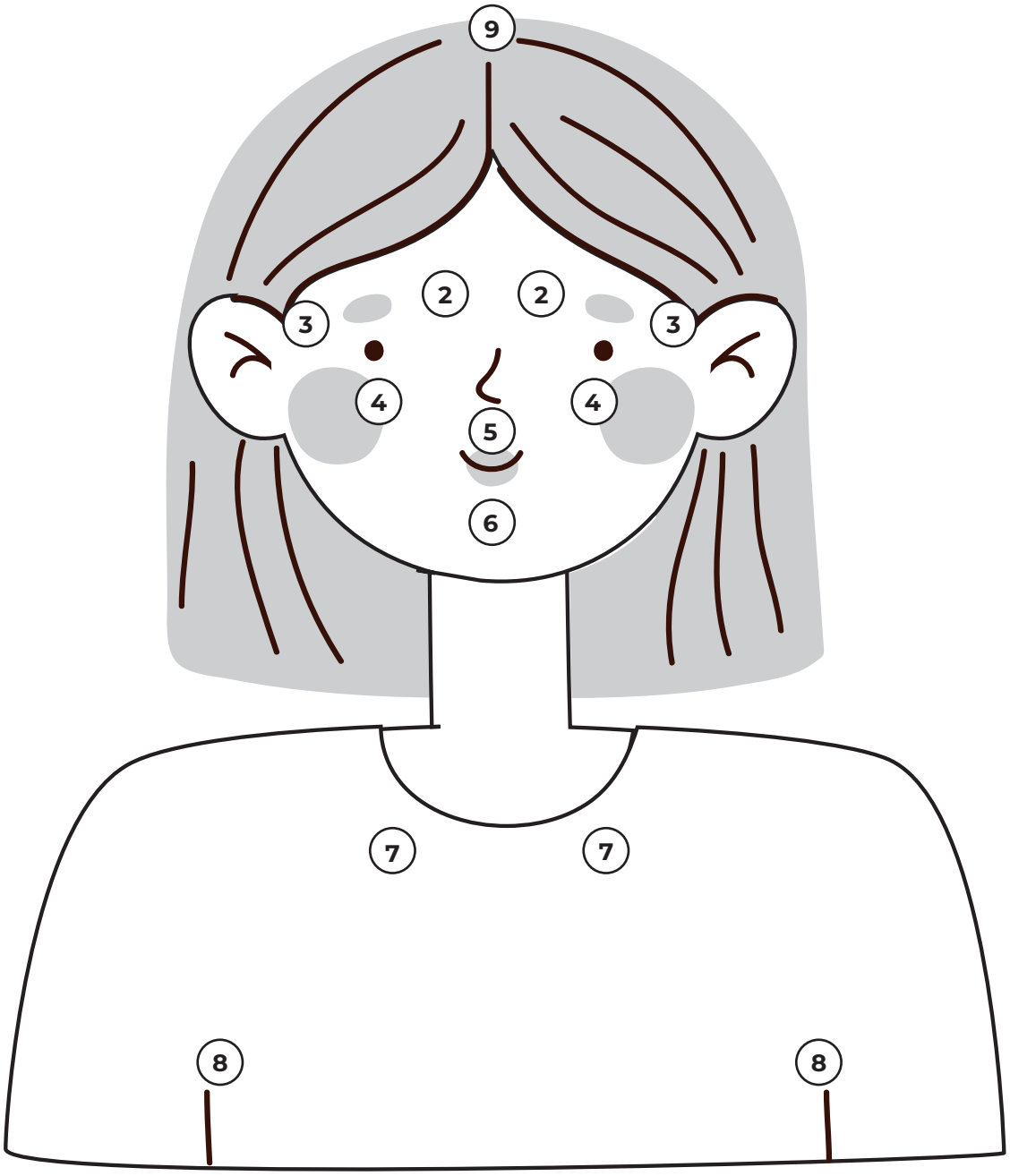
7. The point where the collarbone and rib join.

8. The point located on the side of the body, about 10 cm below the armpit.

9. The point on the top of the head – located exactly on the top of the skull.

How to calm down when emotions are high?

1. Tap on the magic points!
2. Instructions – tap each point 5 times with two fingers (index and middle).
3. You can do this standing or sitting.



Annex 3

Annex 3 – to the ‘Painting’ scenario

What form and shape does your element have?

- is its structure simple or complex?
- is the form symmetrical or asymmetrical?
- is the mould visually heavy or light?
- how does the shape change when viewed from different angles?

Check out its lines and rhythm now:

- are the lines calm or dynamic?
- is the dominant rhythm repetitive or irregular?
- do you see the direction of movement in the lines (horizontal, vertical, diagonal)?
- do the lines create contrast or harmony with the whole form?

Explore its boundaries and the space it occupies:

- does it have a clear beginning and end?
- are the boundaries rigid or fluid, or maybe they are fuzzy?
- is the mould open (it invites inside) or closed (it separates itself)?
- does it take up a lot of visual space or does it seem delicate, fleeting?

What colour is it?:

- are the colours pastel-like, intense, neutral?
- do the colours work together or do they ‘clash’?
- do you see clear colour contrasts or rather subtle transitions?
- what emotions are aroused by these colours – peace, energy, tension?

Now check the texture and material:

- does it look smooth or rough?
- does it suggest heat or cold?
- does it encourage touch or rather scare away?

What impression does your element make?:

- does it seem static or full of movement?
- how would you describe it in one word – calm, dramatic, soft, harsh?
- what emotion do you associate with it?
- does it resemble something familiar, such as nature, architecture, everyday objects?

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