

Training improvisation techniques
to act against emotional and verbal violence

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ACTitude

improv theatre

Newsletter

**DRAMATIC ARTS AND
WELLNESS**

#4

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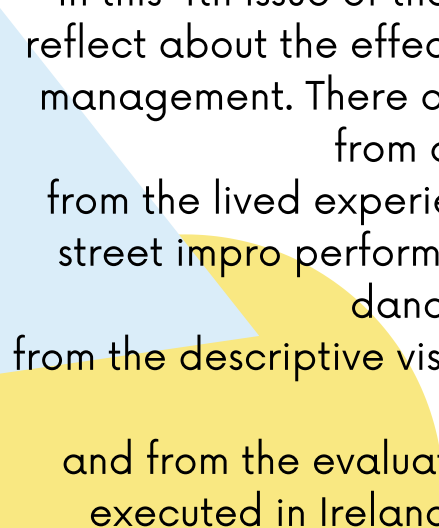
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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARÍA CARRACEDO
INT R A S FOUNDATION (SPAIN)

We are closed to the end of our project. During this months we have created and tested a course of impro techniques addressed to MH professionals. We have also managed to organise impro events in the streets of Crete (Greece) and Toro (Spain) which constituted themselves a great success of ACTitude methods, because people with MH issues, suffering violence and stigma everyday have faced their fears and went out in the street and acted, without a script, exposed to the eyes of everyone. They achieved to do such a brave act thanks to the training followed during the ACT IT OUT! course.



In this 4th issue of the ACTitude newsletter we invite you to reflect about the effects of arts in wellbeing and in emotional management. There different texts approach us to this topic from different perspectives:

- from the lived experience of the arts of a participant in the street impro performance in Toro (Spain) telling us how he danced with the emotions;
- from the descriptive vision of an organizer of the impro event in Crete;
- and from the evaluator's perspective of an drama project executed in Ireland with similar aims as ACTitude ones.

Enjoy the reading!

THE DANCE OF THE EMOTIONS

By ProLar (Toro, Spain)



The dance of emotions began in white, without scars, with a pure face, to which we had to give life and form. I stood in front of it and as I stared at it I connected with that duality that we all have.

I felt that the face of my mask should represent half of my negative emotions and half of my positive emotions. Through tears and laughter, black and red stars, night and day.

The rehearsals were difficult because they stirred you up, but satisfying because they made you exercise your mind.

For me, it was hard because as I began to walk down the path of life, represented by a white line on the floor, and where at the end the mask was, I imagined someone who had died tragically and that mask represented our whole life together.

When I heard each emotion my body spoke the first one was; joy and I hugged her, hate and I covered my ears avoiding all the bad things that we also lived, sadness and I covered my eyes so that nobody could see my pain, tenderness and I raised my arms in search of the caress that I miss so much, in those moments I felt and I was moved, I managed for an instant to return to dance our last waltz.

When I wanted to realise it, we were walking in front of an audience that was looking at us astonished, and I was looking at them behind my mask, the one that represented a whole life shared with her and with my mental illness, I have nothing to hide because none of us are free from suffering a heartbreak, a loss or a depression.

Seeing them there in front of me made me feel that I was ready to continue moving forward in my daily battle.

To be able to show our work and our experiences to a society that often forgets that we also suffer, we also laugh, we also fall in love and share, this moved me so much that I couldn't help crying. I think I achieved a catharsis as the experts say.

Catharsis or not, I want to repeat that dance.



IMPRO in CRETE

By Michaela Antoniou
(NKUA, Greece)

The street event was carried out on 1 September in a highly touristic area of Crete, Stavros – it is the famous beach from the Zorbas film.

We performed in that area especially because it is touristic and attracts a variety of people. We worked with children and youngsters in order to make the event more family friendly – it is indicative that a young boy of 12 who suffered from a mental illness joined the performance after his mother's proposal/intervention.

Tourists from all over Greece, indigenous people and a number of EU tourists viewed the event and discussed with us about the project. In general, the intimacy of the event enabled people to talk to us and exchange opinions.

The basic idea of the event was to aim for explicit and direct communication, which is why we choose to actually perform on the street rather than on a square or another area. The aim was to provoke the public's empathy for issues of emotional and verbal violence versus "the different". We positioned our action on a crossroad which was also looked upon by a number of nearby cafes. The performers sang a cappella and a cajon kept the rhythm. Papers with emotions and specific situations inscribed on them guided the improvisational actions, driven from the case-scenarios of ACTitude. The event lasted 15 minutes and was presented twice with an hour gap between the two performances in order to communicate with more people.



The impact of arts in changing behaviour

NIAHM CLOURY - SMASHING TIMES, IRELAND

Expressive art is a tool to explore, develop and practice creativity as a means to wellness.

The relationship between engagement with the creative arts and health outcomes, specifically the health effects of music engagement, visual arts therapy, movement-based creative expression, expressive writing, drama workshops and other creative means is an area that merits exploration and discussion. Although there is evidence that art-based interventions are effective in reducing adverse physiological and psychological outcomes, the extent to which these interventions enhance health status is largely unknown. However, in Ireland, Smashing Times have recently conducted a Formal Evaluation of their Mental Health Project "Acting for the Future". The aim of the project was to promote active healthy lifestyles and positive mental health among youngsters through creative processes and to work with partners and stakeholders to develop learning in relation to the importance of looking after your mental health.

The five pillars of evaluation were therefore:

- student well-being,
- connectedness,
- stigma attitudes,
- mental health seeking confidence
- emotion regulation strategies

Questionnaires there for work completed prior and post to the workshop .

What do the young people report before they take part in the workshop?

The questionnaire scores for the young people prior to taking part in the workshop give us a good snapshot as to the well-being of young people across Ireland. Overall, the young people's scores prior to the workshop suggest that young people are doing well in life. They are feeling connected, they are confident about seeking help for their mental health, and they do not hold many negative attitudes towards people with mental health difficulties. In contrast young people are not feeling as confident in managing their own emotions.

Changes due to the workshop

The changes that occurred due to the workshop were determined by comparing the average scores for all participants before the workshops to the average scores for all participants after the workshops. Because the responses were completely anonymous it was not possible to examine changes for each individual, only for the group as a whole. Also, it is likely that some participants only completed the questions before or after the workshop. However, with large numbers this should not impact the overall results very much.

What did change and what didn't?

Nearly all of the domains showed improvements from before the workshop to after the workshop. The largest change was for mental health seeking confidence, with good changes on emotional regulation for self and for others. Smaller, but statistically significant changes were found for stigma attitudes and wellbeing. There were no significant changes for connectedness. However, it must be noted how high the scores were to start with.



Conclusions

The workshops were mostly successful in meeting their aims. Most of the things we hoped changed did significantly change. This included students' wellbeing, their stigma attitudes, their mental health help seeking confidence, their confidence in their ability to manage their own emotions and their ability to manage the emotions of others. We think that connectedness didn't significantly increase because it was very high to begin with

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