



Implementation Protocol

Classroom Drama Intervention



This project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 754849.

How to cite this document

Spaas, C., de Smet, S., Primdahl, N.L., Skovdal, M., Soye, E., Watters, C., & De Haene, L. (2021). RefugeesWellSchool implementation protocol: Classroom drama intervention. Leuven, Ghent: KU Leuven, Ghent University.

Acknowledgements

This work has been carried out as part of the RefugeesWellSchool project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 754849.



Related resources and materials

Website: www.refugeeswellschool.eu

Classroom Drama Therapy Manual: Plurality Theater team Érit (2010). *Plurality Theatre: Training Manual, Creative Expression Workshops*. Montreal: Team for transcultural research and intervention.

The manual is available in [French](#), and in [English](#).

Contact details

Ilse Derluyn, RefugeesWellSchool coordinator & principal investigator (UGent), ilse.derluyn@ugent.be

Lucia De Haene, Classroom Drama in Belgium (KU Leuven), Lucia.dehaene@kuleuven.be

Morten Skovdal, Classroom Drama in Denmark (University of Copenhagen), m.skovdal@sund.ku.dk

Charles Watters, Classroom Drama in the UK (University of Sussex), C.Watters@sussex.ac.uk



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET



Contents

Introduction	2
The Classroom Drama (CD) intervention	3
Preparation	4
Preparing for CD with schools	4
Preparing for CD with teachers	5
Preparing for CD with adolescents and their parents	6
Preparing for CD with creative teams	6
Organization	7
Implementation of the intervention	7
Timing of the CD sessions in a school day	7
Adolescents' dispositions to engage in affective expression	9
Uninterrupted, neutral environments	10
Group stability	10
Group size	11
Pre-existing positive relationships in class	11
Drama therapists' experience with migration and multilingualism	12
Teachers' attitudes toward the intervention	12
Literature	13
APPENDIX: Classroom Drama – Teachers Guide	14

Introduction

This implementation protocol serves as a guidebook to **complement the Classroom Drama intervention manual**, available on the RefugeesWellSchool website (www.refugeeswellschool.eu) and in its original French version via www.sherpa-recherche.com.

The **RefugeesWellSchool project (RWS)** sought to measure the **impact** of five interventions on refugee and migrant newcomers' psychosocial well-being, the Classroom Drama intervention being one of them. The project also sought to identify **contextual variables** impacting or interacting with the implementation process and/or outcomes of the intervention.

This implementation protocol brings together some of the overarching and valuable **lessons we learned** throughout the implementation of the Classroom Drama intervention within the scope of the RWS project. It should **aid professionals who wish to implement the intervention**, as well as support problem solving in the face of challenges they might face throughout the implementation of the intervention.

The information presented in this implementation protocol stems from our experiences implementing the Classroom Drama intervention within the context of **secondary (reception) education for refugees and migrants in Belgium, Denmark and the United Kingdom**. Implementation took place in a total of 31 classes, between the spring of 2019 and June 2020. Thereby, it's important to note that in Belgium intervention implementation was interrupted due to **the outbreak of COVID-19** and the associated lockdown measures, including the switch to remote learning for all students involved in our research project. Although we attempted to digitally engage participating adolescents with the intervention during the lockdown period, it concerns too preliminary an undertaking to report on here. Therefore, the information presented in this implementation protocol derives from our in-person sessions with adolescents, and assumes a complete, in-person implementation of the Classroom Drama intervention.

The Classroom Drama (CD) intervention

The CD program is a nine to twelve-week drama workshop (minimum two school hours or 75 minutes/week) in which refugee and migrant adolescents in multi-ethnic schools work around the construction of group stories. These group activities support the construction of identity and meaning, aiming to establish bridges between past and present and to engage with themes of migration, exclusion, identity and cultural adaptation in host societies. The intervention is based on Boal's forum and Fox' playback theatre and was developed and previously studied at McGill Transcultural Psychiatry. It targets refugee and migrant adolescents' well-being, as well as the quality of classroom relations, and is carried out by an external creative team entering the school context. The creative team works together closely with the classroom teacher(s), who are meant to be present at all time during the intervention.

Both nine and twelve-week interventions have previously been researched. Within the context of RWS we adhered to a **nine week implementation**, which seemed to allow for **alliance-building** between the creative team and adolescents, as well as for a **meaningful engagement** with important themes in **adolescents' life-experiences** and central **classroom relational dynamics**.

With regard to the **duration of each session**, our experiences implementing CD within RWS underscored the necessity of adhering to the intended session duration of **minimum 75 minutes**. Shorter sessions, as we were, due to school-related factors, bound to implement the UK, proved to complicate the intervention process to a great extent. In Belgium and Denmark a session lasted 90 minutes, which appeared to comfortably allow time for **an attuned engagement with the intervention goals, adolescents' well-being and classroom dynamics** throughout each session. In one Danish school, we were forced to plan for two sessions to follow each other in one day. This turned out to be over-tiring and too intense, complicating intervention processes. A session duration exceeding two school hours thus also is not advisable.

Original implementations of the intervention within the Canadian context were carried out by two to six-member teams of creative and drama therapists, as well as actors of different cultural backgrounds. The different implementations of CD within RWS showed that working with teams

of **at least two members**, schooled and **experienced in the domain of drama therapy**, optionally indeed with **culturally diverse backgrounds**, is advisable.

Time and time again, **collaboration with classroom teachers** proved to be **essential**. This was underscored by the implementation of CD in Canada, in Belgium, Denmark and the UK within the framework of RWS, as well as within the context of a pilot-project preceding RWS in the Belgian context. Within the context of RWS, we developed a short 'CD teacher guide' with the aim of supporting teachers in working alongside the creative team during the CD sessions (see: Appendix 1). Furthermore, every implementation of CD should **schedule extra opportunities for exchange between the creative team and classroom teachers** in preparation of or in the aftermath of the weekly sessions (see also: Preparation).

Preparation

The CD intervention requires careful preparation with all parties involved in the intervention.

This concerns:

- (i) Schools
- (ii) Teachers
- (iii) Adolescents and their parents
- (iv) Creative teams

Preparing for CD with schools

Based on our experiences in RWS, we advise to engage in a **broad preparatory trajectory with all members of the school** in which CD is implemented, on all school levels (directors, coordinators, care staff, teachers...). The goals of such a preparatory trajectory are at least three-fold:

- Building a **positive working alliance** between the intervention team and the school team, that allows for safe and open communication throughout the implementation of the intervention
- Create space for **questions and concerns** voiced by school staff with regard to the intervention

- Ensure **mandate and support** for the intervention exists within the whole school team, not just on the level of the school board

Concretely, this preparation ideally covers the general **goals of intervention** (see: CD manual), shared **selection of participating classes**, shared **planning of the intervention sessions**, talking over the **intended content of the different sessions** (see: CD manual) and the **role of teachers** in it. It should thus furthermore leave enough room to address possible questions and concerns voiced by school staff with regard to the intervention.

Also, when preparing with schools, strive for shared insight into local **referral networks for mental health care services**, in case the intervention reveals an adolescent to be in need of further or more specialized mental health care. Although rarely needed, it is good to have this information and a plan in place.

Preparing for CD with teachers

Planning for the intervention, it is especially advisable to **meet with teachers** before starting the implementation of CD, and do this **repeatedly**. During those meetings you move from a general introduction of the intervention and its goals, to a more **in-depth exploration** of the theoretical underpinnings of the **intervention** (see: CD manual), the **role of the teachers** alongside the creative teams (see: Appendix 1), as well as a thorough exchange with teachers on all the **practical matters** surrounding the invention (planning of the sessions, choosing the right classroom to conduct the sessions, organize preparatory meetings with the team of therapists).

Teachers who participated in RWS underscored the importance of an **introductory meeting between them, as classroom teachers, and the creative team** before the first CD session. Such a meeting can serve to discuss any questions teachers might still have about the intervention or the concrete content of the upcoming sessions, as well as information on classroom and student characteristics that is important to share with creative teams before the intervention commences. Next to a first, introductory meeting, we also advise to schedule a **weekly window of time for teachers and the creative to touch base**, discuss the ongoing intervention implementation and prepare for the upcoming sessions.

Preparing for CD with adolescents and their parents

In general, **teachers are best placed to prepare with their students for the CD intervention.**

Teachers can explain to adolescents what will happen during the intervention, present them with the timing of the coming sessions and introduce them to the creative team, in real life or, for example, by showing them a picture of the team that will come into the classroom.

Also, we adhere great value to **informing parents about the implementation of the intervention in school.** We propose partnering with school staff to discuss the best ways to reach out to parents, for example by being present at school-parent meetings, and familiarizing parents with the intervention their children will receive. Close partnerships with schools and teachers are important bases of trust to build bridges between parents and the intervention (team).

Preparing for CD with creative teams

When recruiting and selecting members for the creative team, it is helpful to look for professionals with a background in drama therapy, arts therapy, the arts and theatre in general and acquainted with working with refugee and migrant newcomers and/or adolescents. This includes working with multilingual groups, that might consist of adolescents who just started learning the language of the host country. Familiarity with the intervention, Playback theatre or Theatre of the oppressed is helpful, but not necessary, as in any case, all members of the creative team should **familiarize themselves with the intervention manual**, and use this manual as the intervention framework throughout the implementation.

All **members of a creative team** should be encouraged as well as given the opportunity to **meet with each other on a weekly basis** during the implementation of the intervention, to prepare and review their sessions. Creative teams should be encouraged as well as given the opportunity to **meet with classroom teachers on a weekly basis** during the implementation of the intervention, to discuss the ongoing intervention implementation and prepare for upcoming sessions.

Additionally, if feasible, it can be useful to plan **supervision sessions (1 before, 1 during and 1 after the intervention implementation)** between the intervention organizer and all members of the creative team, or between different creative teams (if more than one). This can

facilitate timely and in-depth engagement with intervention themes, or recurring issues that are difficult to solve within creative teams, between creative teams and teachers.

Organization

All information on **intervention materials** required can be found in the CD manual.

In terms of **intervention space**, it is advisable to opt for a sufficiently spacious room in which adolescents can feel free to express themselves, to move around and move around furniture. It can be that the intervention space is in fact adolescents' regular classroom. In that case, the CD manual also provides inspiration for **activities and rituals guiding the transition from the classroom as a learning environment to the classroom as an intervention space** and back.

The CD manual furthermore contains all of the information for creative teams to **design the sessions**. It provides guidelines on the five-fold structure every session should adhere to, as well as ample examples of themes and theatrical exercises that can make-up the building blocks of the different sessions.

Implementation of the intervention

Participants to the RWS study pointed at several **contextual features that impacted their experience and engagement** with the CD sessions. We summarize the most important ones below, coupled by concrete tips on how to deal with them, as they might carry importance when implementing CD in the future.

Timing of the CD sessions in a school day.

A particular contextual dynamic that has been pointed to by adolescents and teachers alike is the timing of the insertion of classroom drama workshops into a regular school day. This was seen as important as emotional resonances of the session may be present into the school-related and social functioning of adolescents after session closure. Planning of the session in the earlier parts of a school day was experienced by adolescents as leaving them with continuing emotional responses or thoughts regarding the creative session. Teachers, on their side, talked about how they felt responsible to support adolescents in making the transition from a classroom drama session into the regular school activities afterwards. For example, they initiated further conversations with the class group that touched upon the themes of the creative session. While

the creative sessions include a clear emphasis on ensuring closure and, hence, on installing safe boundaries for affective expression, participants' experiences equally indicate the potential role of providing a certain empathic bridge between what is shared during the creative session and the regular interaction within the class group, hereby potentially extending the role of classroom interactions as a containing context.

- A solid collaboration between teachers and the creative team is the basis for a shared attunement to the needs of adolescents and the class group both during and after the intervention. Adolescents' needs in terms of emotional support following the sessions should be a central and recurring topic of discussion between classroom teachers and the creative team.
- Different measures can be helpful in emotionally supporting students in the aftermath of a session. First and most importantly, it is helpful to ask the adolescents themselves what they feel they need to transition from the workshop to the lessons. For example, it can be helpful to take some time to readdress what adolescents may be struggling with, either individually (one-on-one with the teacher or one of the therapists) or in groups. Scheduling sessions at the beginning of the week also allows for more follow-up during the rest of the week. This is not so much the case when the sessions take place on Friday and the adolescents start their weekend afterwards.
- Consider not only adolescents, but teachers as well, could be needing something extra to be able to transition from the workshop to the lessons. Perhaps teachers find that they were deeply moved by the stories shared or interactions that occurred, and they might need some time to reflect. Or perhaps teachers are a little overwhelmed themselves, also then it is advisable to consider their emotions and what they need to transition comfortably from the workshop to the lessons.

Adolescents' dispositions to engage in affective expression

Not all adolescents felt immediately at ease to engage in affective expression. This hesitation seemed to be due to several reasons. Some adolescents thought that including creative activities in the school curriculum reduced time for schoolwork, indicating adolescents' strong focus on performing positively in language acquisition and learning in being newcomers to their host societies. Some adolescents equally noted cultural barriers to emotional expression, implying the role of cultural notions regarding personal disclosure or stigma revolving around an open emphasis on psychosocial well-being and vulnerability. Several adolescents reflected on their understanding that an orientation on past experiences is less helpful than focusing on future perspectives. Finally, adolescents' hesitation may also be explained by their fear to lose control over painful emotions. This was highlighted by adolescents expressing difficulties in coping with negative feelings evoked by CD even after session ended.

- These insights into the barriers to affective expression experienced by adolescents might be helpful to keep in mind when implementing CD. They may serve to understand potential hesitations felt by participating adolescents, to open up a dialogue with adolescents about their hesitations, but also to respect boundaries drawn by adolescents.
- A dialogue with adolescents about their felt hesitations can make room to actively explore the nature of these hesitations, to validate hesitations and recognize the way hesitations can be powerful and adaptive instead of problematic (e.g., protection from memories that are too painful, protection of others, safeguarding a meaningful orientation towards the future...).

Uninterrupted, neutral environments

In ensuring safety, participants pointed to the importance of being in an environment that would remain uninterrupted during sessions.

- Choosing a suitable intervention environment should be on the agenda when planning for the sessions with the school teams and teachers.

Group stability

An important contextual feature considered by participants in different implementation sites was group stability. Fluctuation in class composition was identified as a major obstacle to relational safety. In these newcomer classes, students are coming into or leaving their classes continuously, leaving little opportunity for a class group to create and sustain stability. Changes in group stability have been indicated by participants as potentially counteracting a safe space for creative and symbolic expression. On the other hand, a stable group may act as vehicle of emotional containment delineating a space of joint engagement in sharing migration stories and expressing solidarity.

- It can be useful to keep class group stability in mind when planning for CD, for example by planning CD in a period of the school year in which classes are generally expected to change the least. In case changes in the group's composition are unavoidable (which is often the case in reception education), be mindful to consider and perhaps have the creative team address the effect of changes in group composition on adolescents' felt relational safety throughout the intervention.

Group size

Implementing Classroom Drama in the Belgian, Danish and UK context, we learned that group size is ideally limited to a maximum of fifteen students, to facilitate students' engagement with the intervention processes and each other.

- In case of classes with more than fifteen students, it can be considered making two smaller 'intervention groups'. However, doing this should always be accompanied by a thorough reflection on possible strategies to maintain and foster social cohesion on the level of the class as a whole, overarching the processes taking place in the smaller intervention groups. This is important as to not unwillingly create a divide between two groups of students that are essentially part of the same class.

Pre-existing positive relationships in class

Participants accounted for the negative impact of unsafe or conflicting peer relationships prior to the start of the intervention, foreclosing the development of safe relational interaction during the workshops.

- Reflection on existing classroom relational dynamics can occur before the intervention commences, at the time of the introductions between the creative team and classroom teachers and thus before the first session.
- Challenging classroom dynamics during the sessions can also be the subject of intermediate discussions between teachers and the creative team.
- If challenging dynamics continue to exist and seemingly undermine CD sessions, creative teams can consider making these dynamics themselves the subject of CD sessions for the duration it takes to work with the class group towards constructive ways of working together in the intervention. Although this way of working may divert somewhat from the central intervention structure and working methods, it can be the case that this kind of alternative relational work is needed before continuing with the intervention as planned. This too can contribute to strengthening social ties between and well-being of participating adolescents.

Drama therapists' experience with migration and multilingualism

Participants found it important that drama therapists are acquainted with and have experience with working with refugee and migrant newcomers. This includes working with multilingual groups, that might consist of adolescents who just started learning the language of the host country. Teachers alerted to the potential pitfalls of drama therapists not yet being experienced with less verbal modalities of instruction and motivating students.

- It is advisable to recruit based on experience in creative teams of working with: (refugee and migrant) adolescents, in multilingual contexts and openness to exploring ways of (non-verbal) communication in contexts where creative team members do not share a spoken language with adolescents.

Teachers' attitudes toward the intervention

Findings somewhat indicated how teachers' hesitations or negative attitude regarding the intervention may impede the construction of a safe intervention space.

- Make room to discuss teachers' attitudes towards the intervention, their potential hesitations or doubts when preparing with them for the implementation.
- The creative team can similarly address any questions/hesitations/doubts teachers might feel in the introductory meeting.
- When the intervention is ongoing, the weekly exchange between teachers and the creative team is an excellent forum to explore teachers' attitudes towards the intervention, and engage in a shared discussion on teachers' felt needs with regard to the intervention and ongoing intervention processes.

Literature

Equipe Théâtre Pluralité d'Erit (2010). *Théâtre pluralité : Manuel de formation Ateliers d'expression créatrice*. Montreal: L'Equipe de Recherche et d'Intervention Transculturelles.

Rousseau, C., Beauregard, C., Daignault, K., Petrakos, H., Thombs, B. D., Steele, R., ... Botbol, M. (2014). A cluster randomized-controlled trial of a classroom-based drama workshop program to improve mental health outcomes among immigrant and refugee youth in special classes. *PLoS One*, 9(8), 1–9.

Rousseau, C., Benoit, M., Gauthier, M., Lacroix, L., Alain, N., Rojas, V., ... Bourassa, D. (2007). Classroom drama therapy program for immigrant and refugee adolescents: A pilot study. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 12(3), 451–465.

Rousseau, C., Singh, A., Lacroix, L., Bagilishya, D., & Measham, T. (2004). Creative expression workshops for immigrant and refugee children. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 43(2), 235–238.

APPENDIX: Classroom Drama – Teachers Guide

Introduction

Soon, a team of drama therapists will be supervising Classroom Drama theater workshops in your classroom for 9 weeks. This guide tries to inform and support you as a teacher, so you know what to expect, what your role as a teacher will be and where to find support if you feel you need it. First, the guide provides a general introduction to the intervention and to the existing literature on the well-being of young refugees and migrants. Then, the goals and the practical course of the intervention are explained. In a third part, we try to describe very concretely what your role as a teacher in this intervention entails.

The "Classroom Drama" intervention was developed at McGill University in Canada. The intervention consists of a series of workshops, which aim to promote adaptation and well-being among refugee and migrant adolescents. The workshops allow adolescents to share their everyday and personal experiences, with their peers and teachers as meaningful witnesses. They also allow adolescents, in interaction with their story and the stories and reactions of important others, to search for new meanings for their experiences.

The workshops aim to support adolescent developmental tasks, identity formation in particular, and more specifically for young refugees and migrants: the development of an identity at the intersection of past and present, of different cultures, one's own language and that of the host country, of "there" and "here". The workshops aim to promote the well-being of adolescents by reducing stress related to experiences of (forced) migration, reducing interpersonal and intergroup tensions and conflicts, and strengthening individual and collective self-confidence. This way, the workshops may also indirectly contribute to better school performance.

Processes of (forced) migration

The Classroom Drama intervention is specifically designed for working with young people from refugee and migration backgrounds within the school context. In reflecting on the impact of flight and migration on the psychological well-being of young people, researchers classically distinguish **three phases in the migration process within which children, adolescents and families are confronted with potentially traumatic experiences**¹. For example, pre-flight conditions may be characterized by political instability, by violence and war, economic instability, poverty and deprivation. Flight includes the abandonment of a country, a home, of family, friends and possessions. Children, youth and families potentially find themselves in dangerous situations, in the hands of human traffickers, traveling for weeks or months, vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Family separation, where children and youth become separated from caregivers, is also common. On arrival in the host country, families usually do not immediately find the hoped-for, regained stability. They stay in reception centers, go through asylum procedures with uncertain outcomes, and a complex process of integration into the new society follows. Often, we tend to think that pre-flight experiences of war or traumatic experiences under way have the greatest negative impact on the well-being of refugee and migrant adolescents. However, research shows that **stressors in the host country** (e.g., uncertain future prospects, cultural uprooting, experiences of discrimination, difficult financial conditions...) weigh at least as heavily, and sometimes even more heavily, on the mental health of adolescents². Especially the **cumulative impact of stressors** over time poses the greatest risk to the development and well-being of children, youth and families, often with negative consequences for school participation and performance.

Research shows that **children, adolescents and families are usually resilient** and find ways adapt to their new lives, to resiliently intertwine new experiences that form in the host country with their roots and history, their culture and country of origin³. Only a minority of young people need specialized help with this.

¹ See for example: Lustig, S. L., Kia-Keating, M., Grant Knight, W., Geltman, P., Ellis, H., David Kinzie, J., & Saxe, G. N. (2004). Review of Child and Adolescent Refugee Mental Health. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 43, 24–36.

² See for example: Miller, K. E., & Rasmussen, A. (2010). War exposure, daily stressors, and mental health in conflict and post-conflict settings: Bridging the divide between trauma-focused and psychosocial frameworks. *Social Science & Medicine*, 70(1), 7–16.

³ See for example: Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary Magic Resilience Processes in Development. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 227–238.

Dealing with stressors takes place for adolescents at **a crossroads in their development**, where they face the complex task of shaping their identity on the bridge between their past and present, their home and host country, their school and family context. Within the structures of our society, there is much we can do to foster young people's natural resilience, promote their development and adaptation, and contain potential risks to their development. Research shows that it can be very meaningful to reach out preventively to refugee and migrant adolescents, situated in everyday and safe contexts, to look for connections that can strengthen continuity in their life stories and thus also promote well-being.

The **school context is an excellent place to offer adolescents (and families), for whom the threshold to mental healthcare is often high, support⁴**. The school is a context that can offer **safety, security and stability** to adolescents, often following a period of instability in the home country, underway and upon arrival in Belgium. The school is furthermore a place where adolescents come into contact with the host society and more broadly, a context of diverse, intercultural encounters and exchange. This allows for **intercultural dialogue**, in which adolescents can begin to shape their identity, through relationship with their peers and their teachers. We also know that the schooling trajectories of adolescents with a history of (forced) migration are of great significance to their families. An education, for example, offers the possibility of realizing the hopes and dreams that helped shape the decision to flee or migrate. Finally, within the school, valuable connections can also be made with adolescents' broader familial context. For all these reasons, researchers and policymakers point to the importance of schools as an accessible context for preventive intervention, aimed at the psychosocial well-being and future of refugee and migrant adolescents.

⁴ See for example: Rousseau, C., & Guzder, J. (2008). School-Based Prevention Programs for Refugee Children. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 17(3), 533–549.

The Classroom Drama Workshops

Objectives

The purpose of the Classroom Drama workshops is to create a space for adolescents to tell their story, to share their experiences with others, through **symbolic representation**. In doing so, the workshops wish to support the following processes:

- Processing of meaning-making of life-experiences
- Processes of mourning linked to the history of forced migration (loss, family separation, social and cultural uprooting...)
- Processes related to current school difficulties
- The development of multiple identities
- Making room for differences, without perpetuating feelings of exclusion

Working through theater allows adolescents to look at their story with a certain **emotional distance**. Theater is a means by which adolescents can create **metaphors** for their personal, family and collective experiences. It also allows working through the non-verbal. This is very important for adolescents who experience difficulties in the language of the host country or who have limited understanding of it. It allows adolescents to create **new meanings** in stories and experiences. Theater techniques also allow to **hold positive alongside difficult things**, to look at different paths side by side, in a safe environment. This can sometimes lead to new, unexpected solutions. In the ability to hold positive and negative, as well as different identities side by side, we see a key to transforming experiences.

The safe environment that the therapists and teacher provide the adolescents with allows them to interact with their stories and experiences in a creative way. In the playing itself, through theater, experiences and emotions can be held in a way that is bearable and not overwhelming for adolescents.

In this way, the workshops want to create a space for adolescents where they can talk about themselves, engage in conversations with each other, with adults as witnesses. They provide a place where adolescents can feel seen, respected, accepted and encouraged.

What not to expect

It is important to note that the sessions are **not therapy**. They are intended as a creative methodology to work preventively with adolescents in school. The sessions are also **not meant as a means to screen adolescents for psychological difficulties**, although it can become clear through the sessions that some adolescents could benefit from some form of additional support or mental healthcare. It can be useful to have a referral network in place, should the need for extra care arise. The sessions **do not lead to a theater performance**.

Practical information

The workshops are led by a **creative team**, who will work **side-by-side with you**, the classroom teacher. The workshops take place weekly and last two school hours. They always adhere to the same structure and in this way offer young people a fixed, safe and predictable framework.

Each workshop consists of **five parts**:

- An **opening ritual** (5 minutes): the creative team facilitates the transition between the classroom, school context and the context in which theater can take place.
- A safe and fun **warm-up exercise** to generate energy and motivation (10 minutes).
- **Improvisational exercise** with non-verbal materials (15 minutes). Throughout these exercises, the adolescents are given time, among other things, to become familiar with the material, to find their way in the group, to start sharing fragments of their experiences with others, to learn to express themselves in a non-verbal way...
- **Re-enacting the stories** (45 minutes): this is the core of the intervention, which the other exercises lead up to. The adolescents share stories and these stories are reenacted for them, with them and the teacher as an audience, by the fellow

students and the creative team. This technique is called "Playback theater" and was developed by Jonathan Fox (2000). To get a quick idea of what this is like and what it can mean, you can watch this short TED Talk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-UtiROcm6E>.

- **Closing ritual** (5-10 minutes): a session is closed ritually and carefully with the adolescents, after which the usual lessons can restart.

The creative team designs the sessions. They choose in advance the exercises, ways and techniques to work with the class. Throughout the weeks, the exercises, based on increasing trust in a growing collaborative relationship, will become more complex and/or more concretely address themes related to adolescents' experiences of (forced) migration. Together with the creative team we try to make sure that you, as a teacher, are always informed about the content of the next session. If you still feel inadequately informed about the team's plan for your class, please do not hesitate to contact them/us.

Your role as a teacher

A creative team may be coming into your classroom, but no one knows your students better than you do. Even apart from this intervention, teachers have an incredibly meaningful role of teachers in the school trajectories and lives of refugee and migrant adolescents. Students trust you, you are a safe haven in a country where everything else is new and often unpredictable. You are much more closely connected to the students than the creative team carrying out the intervention, and although they will lead the workshops, real change can only happen within the interaction of students with you and with each other. It is therefore important that you **attend all sessions**. As a teacher, you have an important role in the success of this intervention and in promoting its longer-term effects. We would like to summarize this role in four key words: **FACILITATING, REGULATING, LISTENING, and REACTING**.

However, before we elaborate on these four key words, we want to reflect on the fact that research and teachers tell us that teachers sometimes experience certain hesitations in speaking to refugee and migrant students about their psychological well-being. Teachers

tell us that they are afraid that they do not have enough expertise to discuss this with their students. They fear that very intense or complex stories could be brought up. Teachers fear that their students could get overwhelmed, and that they, as teachers lack the skills to offer an appropriate response to this intensity and complexity. They think they are better off leaving this task to psychologists, psychiatrists or therapists. Maybe this does not apply to you, but we still want to emphasize how strongly we believe in what you, as a teacher, can do for the psychological well-being of these adolescents. Like we said before, the majority of refugee and migrant adolescents does not need professional help to carry on with their lives after migration. Sometimes professional help will be appropriate and then ideally it takes shape in collaboration with experienced services, but recovery after difficult life events always begins with the restoration of safety, of stability and with making connection. A safe classroom environment and your ability as a teacher to provide warmth, to create safe relationships, to listen to and hold stories in an open, non-judgmental way, provide rich soil in which young people can replant their roots. It is this trust that we want to impart above all else. On the following pages we would like to elaborate on some concrete tips, tailored to the intervention that will take place in your classroom.

Facilitating

You work shoulder-to-shoulder with the creative team, throughout all sessions. The members of the creative team lead the workshop, but you assist them in how best to deal with your class: how to address the students, who might need an extra explanation, who can interpret for another student, who will speak out quickly, who needs to be encouraged to speak out, how to get the class to be quiet and what not to do if you want to avoid chaos in the classroom... For all this information the creative team relies on you.

Before the intervention begins, it is advisable to have a short talk with your class to prepare them for the sessions to come. For example, you can tell them a creative team will be coming to class, that theater techniques will be used, that the sessions will be weekly and when they will take place. You can put up a schedule with the dates of the sessions in the classroom so that adolescents can refer to it if they need to.

Regulating

Adolescents may consider you a safe haven, your relationship with them a base for finding the courage to engage with the group and with the creative team. When, during a workshop, things should become somewhat more difficult, your relationship with adolescents is very important.

In the first place, even in the presence of the creative team, you can **let adolescents feel that you are available if they need you**. It is by no means necessary that you remain silent or in the background when the creative team is working with the students. Contrary, it can be very meaningful for adolescents to feel that you are nearby when they interact with the creative team and with the exercises they introduce.

In addition, you know your students best and it is therefore helpful if you are attentive to signals that can tell you something about how adolescents are doing during the workshops. We know that the nature of the intervention and the way it is designed, offers adolescents a helpful framework and support. So, it is good to have confidence in the exercises, the intervention process and the group in the first place. The group, the structure of the intervention and theater exercises offer adolescents support when they might experience difficult emotions. Of course, the creative team also pays attention to the well-being of adolescents during the workshop. But, if you still have concerns, you may certainly approach adolescents, listen to what is going on, and check whether he or she needs anything from you or from the creative team. When adolescents seem upset, try to **offer safety**. You can do this by remaining calm yourself and making sure the adolescent calms down. Try to **tune into the adolescents' feelings** ('can you tell me what is happening now/what just happened?'). **Find out what adolescents need** to calm down and be able to continue with the workshops or lessons afterwards (e.g. going outside, a comforting touch, confirmation or comfort from you or from the group). When you feel yourself hesitating to intervene, ask the adolescent for permission (e.g. 'do you mind if I sit with you, you seem a bit upset'). If you are hesitant to intervene or to interrupt a process specific to the intervention, feel free to ask the creative team if it is okay to intervene.

Adolescents each have their own way of reacting to difficult situations. You probably know very well who in your class tends to shut down, for whom it may help to go outside for a while, or **who might react in a more externalizing manner** (getting angry, yelling, cursing...). When an adolescent exhibits behavior that goes against the classroom rules or behavior that upsets other students, provide

clear boundaries and a safe place for the adolescents to calm down. Give him/her time to calm down and agree with the creative team who will approach the adolescent when he/she has calmed down a bit.

Once the adolescent has calmed down, it may be good to find out if he/she wants to tell something about what happened. If the adolescent feels that it is too difficult to share something about this, it is ok to leave it like that. After all, it could be that the adolescent was taken aback by his/her own behavior or that the behavior was triggered by themes that touch on difficult experiences from his/her life history and that it is protective for the adolescent not to revisit this. In case this happens, leave it like that and merely check with the adolescent whether he/she wants to rejoin the session and what he/she needs to be able to do so (e.g. short message to the others or just rejoining the group unseen, starting together for a moment or joining a classmate/friend...).

Listening and responding

As mentioned before, it is important that you, as a teacher, attend every session. Research underscores how, for refugee and migrant adolescents, schools and the relation with their teachers are a safe haven. During the workshops, **adolescents will share stories**. Sometimes these are their own stories or parts of their own story, sometimes their stories concern things at a greater distance from their own life story. In any case, the intervention assumes that the stories adolescents choose to share are meaningful. They are stories that contain something important that wants to be shared, stories that touch the adolescents, stories that they feel connected to, or stories that can set something in motion. In telling these stories, it is important to feel that the story is listened to. Witnesses give stories a right to exist and help open up new possibilities. When adolescents feel that the group and that you as a teacher listen to their stories and can help hold on to them, they feel heard, they feel seen. So **your role as a teacher in this intervention is the role of a meaningful witness**, someone who can listen to their stories. During a workshop, do you notice adolescents choosing to share his/her story with you, with the class, or the creative team? Approach him/her, encourage him/her and most importantly, dare to listen. If you feel an adolescent needs you to say something, feel free to stand next to him/her and offer the support you feel he/she needs.

Respect the adolescents' pace in telling (pieces of) his/her story. The stories of refugee and migrant adolescents can refer to difficult life events or traumatic life-experiences. They are therefore often also vulnerable stories, and difficult to share. The popular idea that it is good and helpful to "just share everything and get it off your chest" is not true. We know this from research and therapy

with trauma victims. Telling too much or too soon can be overwhelming and/or cause a loss of control, thereby (unintentionally) traumatizing trauma victims a second time.

Adolescents can have very good reasons to keep their stories to themselves, to hide pieces of their stories, or to be very selective in choosing people and places to share aspects of stories. It is important to respect these good reasons, since they protect adolescents, and not to force adolescents to share (more) if he/she is not ready to do so. Therefore, accept everything: the pieces of stories that are told and the pieces that are not or cannot be told.

Perhaps you will find that the **stories of adolescents move you**. Stories can touch you, they can evoke emotional responses in you as a teacher. Try to use these feelings as a starting point to connect with adolescents. This can be very powerful. For example, you can say the following when you hear something that you yourself find sad: "What you are telling me touches you. I feel how difficult this must be for you. I think it is really meaningful that you are sharing this with us" or, if a young person shows dissatisfaction and you find this difficult because you only have his best interests at heart: "What you say is difficult for me, because I'm really doing my best to help you, but I hear that you may need something else from me, is that right? Can we search together for what this is?" Although we know that language forms a significant barrier, with these examples we mainly want to illustrate how important it is to allow your own feelings and use them in search of a connection with the experience of adolescents. If you don't do this and for example just say 'that makes me sad/angry', the young person might shut down or hesitate to tell you something next time because he/she is afraid of making you sad or angry. Again, this is where you can provide the most safety by listening, **allowing yourself to be touched by stories**, and standing next to adolescents without being overwhelmed. You can give adolescents recognition for their stories, create a space for it in the relationship between you and in the classroom, openly, welcoming and without judgment.

It can also be important for adolescents to know that you will continue to carry his/her story with you **after the workshops**. Some adolescents may feel the need to speak to you again about the stories they shared in the workshops. You may then certainly make room to listen to them again. Other adolescents prefer not to come back to the stories they shared. It is important to respect this as well. You can, however, find safe ways to let all adolescents know and feel you carry their stories with you, that their stories mean

something to you. It remains meaningful for adolescents to know that you have witnessed and heard their story, that you now know them better and that you hold on to their stories as you continue to work with them.

What is true for adolescents is also true for you as a teacher. If during the session you feel that something really touches or moves you or that you are overwhelmed, look for a good way to catch your breath (e.g. follow the workshop at a distance for a moment, go outside, have a short talk with the creative team). Take the time you need to calm down and regain your strength, before you rejoin the workshop.

Take good care of your own emotions and boundaries.

Further support

Do you have questions? Doubts? Concerns about a student? Do you feel the need to vent after a session? Taking this up with the creative team can be very helpful. You can consult them with questions about the intervention, the content of the sessions, the course of the sessions or things that happen during the sessions. It is truly most valuable if you shape the intervention together with the creative team. Before the start of the intervention, it is advisable to have a **referral network** in place, in case additional mental healthcare seems needed for one or some of the adolescents.