FIVE

Creative participatory approaches, methods and tools

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Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UN, 1989) gives every child a right to participate and be heard. To be seen and heard is essential to all humans. To be given a voice can help the child to find his or her language for self-expression. Children in protective systems need trusting and lasting relationships with adults who care for them. Therefore, professionals must adapt their processes and language to the inner world of children so that their thoughts and feelings can be spontaneously expressed (Wieder, 2017). In this context, the success of our engagement with children depends, in part, on our understanding and appreciation of the unique skills, talents and capabilities of each child. They live in a world of tangible realities and often express their experiences through play (Landreth, 2012). Adults attempting to understand children's lives and experiences often encounter asymmetries not only relating to age but also

to communicative abilities. To overcome these, increasingly innovative approaches have been adopted (Butschi and Hedderich, 2021) and in this chapter we introduce a number of activities that can be used with young children in child welfare and child protection contexts.

The joy of participatory practice

A positive and trusted environment is joyful. The desire to do something together or to be with a special person is conveyed through inviting body language, smiling and making space for the invited person. If the invitation is overlooked, it leads to disappointment, but if it is accepted, joy becomes a part of the subsequent interaction: 'Performing joy is an initiative to joint play and a discreet questioning "Are you with me?" mirroring the idea of joy as a practice in children's peer relations' (Karjalainen, 2020, p 1659). Closely aligned to experiences of joy in participatory practices with children are ones of playfulness. Playfulness is an attitude or way of being, as opposed to a structured form of play. As such, it can be expressed outside a specific play-based intervention and, we argue, it needs to be the mindset of all practitioners seeking to engage children in participatory ways. As such, playfulness is a foundational professional disposition in participatory spaces and overcomes concerns that professionals in such spaces need to have therapeutic trainings. This is not the case. What is needed is a playful approach to participation, as noted in the example of Andreas and a professional named Clara in Box 5.1.

Box 5.1: Professional playfulness with children

Andreas, two years old, and Clara, the professional working with him, are pushing toy cars on the floor, past each other and up and down a small hill they have made. Then they park the cars, backing them into place one by one. Clara finds a figure and puts it in the parking lot. While moving the figure she is saying: 'Coffee, coffee, come and buy coffee.' Andreas looks

at the professional, picks a figure and comes to buy coffee. Then they drive the cars again and park. Spontaneously, Andreas takes another figure and says: 'Ice cream, ice cream, come and buy ice cream.' The two of them burst out laughing.

The play, in the example of Andreas and Clara, occurs within the context of the available toy cars and figures. The development of the play depends on joyful interaction between the pair, which is linked to their ability to create new situations and introduce new elements, while the ending remains open. The experience of interaction in play is equally shared by all involved. The power balance between Clara and Andreas is levelled out because both the child's and the adult's initiatives and participation must be positively accepted by their play partner to create the necessary intersubjective relationship (Husen, 2022). Through play, children learn to: respect themselves and that their feelings are acceptable; express their feelings responsibly and assume responsibility for themselves; be creative and resourceful in confronting problems; have self-control and self-direction; and make choices and be responsible for their choices (Landreth, 2012, pp 87–89).

Broad approaches to creative and participatory engagement

The use of creative approaches in social intervention practices has gained significant relevance not only in relation to their impact on children's emotional, cognitive and social growth but also as tools that enhance the effectiveness of professionals' communication. Through the application of various methods, children express their feelings and thoughts nonverbally, promoting their participation (Robinson, 2006; Smith and Pellegrini, 2013; Lillard et al, 2013; Goldberg, 2017). Creative methods are based on inventive and imaginative processes. They can serve as constructivist tools to help participants

describe, analyse and make sense of their experiences (Veale, 2005). There are several creative approaches, which can be classified as follows.

Art-based creative approaches are often connected with art-based therapy, which utilises visual arts to help children express their emotions and enhance psychological wellbeing. Engagement in artistic activities fosters cognitive and motor skills, creativity and problem-solving abilities (Coholic, Eys and Lougheed, 2012). It provides a particularly beneficial outlet for children who struggle to verbalise their thoughts, feelings and complex emotions, facilitating emotional release and understanding (Malchiodi, 2013). Moreover, it is effective in helping children recover from trauma by providing a safe space to explore and process their experiences (Bosgraaf et al, 2020).

Play-based creative approaches are usually connected with play therapy, which uses play to help children communicate, express feelings and solve problems. The nondirective nature of play therapy fosters a strong therapeutic alliance between the child and the therapist (Landreth, 2012). It is a child-centred approach that uses toys, games and imaginative play. Play allows children to naturally and engagingly process emotions and experiences (Bratton et al, 2005). It has been effective in addressing behavioural issues by providing a safe space for children to express and resolve conflicts (Ray et al, 2005).

Storytelling and dramatisation-based creative approaches use role-playing, storytelling and theatrical techniques to help children explore their emotions, improve their social skills and boost their self-esteem. Theatre provides children with a dynamic way to express their inner thoughts and feelings, promoting greater self-awareness (Jones, 2007). Through role play, children learn empathy, perspective-taking and social problem-solving skills (Corbett et al, 2016), enhancing their confidence (Lee, 2015).

Similarly, storytelling involves using narrative techniques to help children make sense of their experiences, develop their reading and writing skills, and enhance their imagination. Storytelling enriches vocabulary and comprehension skills,

promoting overall language development (Isbell et al, 2004). It stimulates imagination and creative thinking, encouraging children to explore different perspectives and ideas (Jones and Pimienta, 2020). Sharing stories from diverse cultures fosters cultural awareness and empathy (Collins and Cooper, 1997).

Music and movement-based creative approaches are often associated with music therapy. Music and the adapted use of musical elements for nonmusical purposes have a profound impact on social and emotional development, improving social skills (Williams, Dingle and Clift, 2018; Glew, Simonds and Williams, 2021), communication (Geretsegger et al, 2014) and regulation, helping children manage their emotions, reduce their anxiety and improve their mood (Bieleninik et al, 2017; Mayer-Benarous et al, 2021). Such activities include singing, dancing and playing instruments.

Currently, there is advocacy for integrated approaches or the combination of multiple creative methods to enhance effectiveness and address children's needs in a holistic manner (Malchiodi, 2008; Oaklander, 2006). In this chapter, we aim to answer the following questions: do creative methods make it possible to place children in active roles within the social intervention process? What are the implications of using creative methods in professional practice? Can creative methods reduce the complex relationship between questions of power, control, responsibility and social intervention? What follows is an outline of various methods and tools that can be used by professionals working with children, explaining some of the advantages of their use, illustrated by some examples to serve as a guide.

Tools and methods in detail

The relationship between a professional and a child relies on the ability to comprehend the child's communication and foster an environment that encourages free expression. Choosing tools that facilitate clear understanding for professionals and enable children to explore real-life themes

and creative expression through play helps establish effective communication (Landreth, 2012).

Sandplay therapy (see Figure 5.1) is a specific form of play therapy (Russo, Verman and Wolbert, 2006). This technique has been extensively used in assessment and therapeutic work, allowing for the creation of three-dimensional scenes using a variety of figures (Dale and Wagner, 2003; Hong, 2010). Margaret Lowenfeld was the first person to develop the World Technique, often known as 'sandplay', in the late 1920s due to her frustration with the limitations of traditional talk therapy in the psychoanalytic tradition. She named it the World Technique because 'World' was the word a child had used to describe what they had created with the sand and toys.

Sandplay provides a space for children to express their thoughts, feelings and reflect upon them (Lowenfeld, 1979, 1991, 2004). However, Dora Kalff significantly expanded this approach, emphasing the importance of attending to client interests and collaborating to provide activities for emotional release and various forms of therapeutic artistic expression (such as painting and clay sculpting) as a supplement to sandtray work (Kalff, 2003; Pearson and Wilson, 2019). The technique requires a sandbox of about 500 square inches and a diverse assortment of figures and objects for play. These should include people, animals, vehicles, buildings and vegetation to create various scenarios and contexts, as well as magical items and characters (see Figure 5.1). Children are free to construct as they wish, to choose figures and to use them to let the figures engage in their own fantasy (Kalff, 2003; Russo et al, 2006; Roesler, 2019).

The process of engaging in sandplay is often accompanied by three stages, as described by Allan and Berry (1993, cited in Russo et al, 2006). These stages (chaos, struggle and resolution) unfold over multiple sandplay sessions. Chaos reflects emotional turmoil in the client's life and may be characterised by placing many objects in the tray without apparent structure. This stage may occur during the first sandplay session or continue

over several sessions, depending on the intensity of distressing emotions present. In the struggle stage, battles initially occur without a winner, but may gradually organise until a hero emerges, symbolising the mastery of good over evil. Finally, in the resolution stage, life returns to normalcy with a balance among the figures or the placement of figures in their appropriate habitats. It is during this stage that the client may demonstrate a sense of wholeness, fulfilment or integration of previously chaotic emotions (cited in Russo et al, 2006, pp 230–231).[1]

Toys and materials for the playroom: Professor Garry Landreth is internationally recognised for his writings and work with children. He offers a range of games and materials that allow children to fully express and explore their personalities and inner emotional world.[2]

Puppets are useful pedagogical tools with a longstanding relationship in early childhood education, playing a cherished role in children's learning and development (Karaolis, 2023).

Figure 5.1: A home therapeutic sand tray for individual use over time

Source: Photo by Elin Hassel Iversen

A puppet is defined as a movable inanimate object or figure controlled by strings or rods, or by placing the hand inside its body (Ahlcrona, 2012; Belfiore, 2013). It is a mobile doll manipulated by the puppeteer. The body movements provide visual impressions; a puppet conveys emotions and thoughts through movements, such as its hands and head. A puppeteer can also give voice to the puppet. In the hands of a puppeteer, a puppet is an inanimate object that comes to life (Kröger and Nupponen, 2019). There are various types, from finger puppets to hand puppets, glove puppets, rod puppets and shadow puppets. The expressiveness and dramatisation of puppets have not only entertained people but have also been used for education, information (Belfiore, 2013) and working with children with disabilities (Syabila and Irvan, 2023).

The use of puppets has proliferated in educational contexts. The Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA) https://www.unima.org/en/ is the oldest international theatre organisation in the world and provides a platform to exchange and share between people who practise puppetry (amateur or professional), work on this art (researcher, historians.) and/or are passionate about this art. Kröger and Nupponen (2019) demonstrate that the benefits of puppets are linked to: (1) generating communication; (2) supporting a positive classroom climate; (3) enhancing creativity; (4) fostering cooperation and integration into a group; and (5) changing attitudes.

Råde (2021) provides a comprehensive literature review on puppets in therapeutic contexts. It indicates that the first documented use of puppets with children in a therapeutic context was in 1936, when puppet shows were used to address behavioural issues. Puppets have also been used in hospital settings to help children cope with illness, verbalise feelings and learn about diseases. Puppets have also been utilised in group and family therapy. This review also suggests, based on other studies, how to choose puppets. The child-centred approach of play therapy, which emphasises a nondirective, trustworthy, and close relationship with the child, shares

similarities with the child's perspective in modern early childhood education and care pedagogy (Råde, 2021, p 25).

The puppet is an object that comes to life being led by the puppeteer. In the communication, the puppet becomes the common third (Husen, 2022) and the puppeteer makes an indirect conversation through the puppet which has a name, a personality, a voice, nonverbal language and feelings. The puppeteer is using a hand puppet and must keep his or her head's position the same as the puppet when playing to make the illusion of a living character. The puppet is positioned between the child and the puppeteer so that the puppeteer can focus on the puppets head positions when playing and see the child behind the puppet.

Box 5.2: Puppets in practice

The puppeteer lifts the puppet: his body language is shy. The puppet looks at the child through his fingers. When the child looks back, the puppet looks down. Then the puppet looks at the child again and says: 'Hi', looks down again, lifts his head and says 'I am Aron'. Then the puppet looks at the puppeteer and she says: 'I am Linda', and when the puppet looks back at the child again the child says: 'Harry, my name is Harry'.

Aron:	You go to school?
Harry:	Yes.
Aron:	Me too, I am five years old.
Harry:	I am five years old too.
Aron:	(Happy) We are the same. (Pause) Do you like school?
Harry:	Not so much …
Aron:	(Careful) Are there bullies in your school too?
Harry:	Yes.
Aron:	(Afraid) They try to scare us, what can we do?
Harry:	I have stopped going to school.
Aron:	(Desperate) Then they win. (Pause) (Unsure) Is that right, that they can decide if we go to school or not?
Harry:	No, but … (pause)
Aron:	One time, (lowers his voice, whispers) I peed in my pants because I was so afraid.
Harry:	Did you tell the teacher? (Conversation continues)

After the introduction and presentation, the puppeteer addresses the problem. Now it is two boys equally talking. Aron the puppet can shift his personal feelings all the time, and if he plays a personal low status (Johnstone, 1987), he might lead Harry to take a personal high status and thereby hand over the lead of problem solving to Harry. Aron can say something funny if he likes. He can be in need of comforting. He can ask questions, and he can comfort Harry. It is important that Harry feels comfortable in the situation and the puppeteer sums up afterwards what the next problem-solving step is.

In another example, a puppet show takes place in a shoebox to help children consider complicated themes (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3). The puppeteer performs a short show of 5–10 minutes in a shoebox using puppets made of paper which are glued to sticks. After the show, the puppeteer and the therapist have a conversation with the child about the characters' experiences in the play and how they managed to

Figure 5.2: Teater Fusentast: performing in a box

Source: Photo by Ole Tolstad

Figure 5.3: Teater Fusentast: inside the box

Source: Photo from Teater Fusentast

solve the problems that arose. This child-centred approach using basic materials (shoebox, paper and pencils) helps some children visualise and work on their own story together with the therapist. Transferring feelings to the paper puppets might give the space for mediation and reflection.

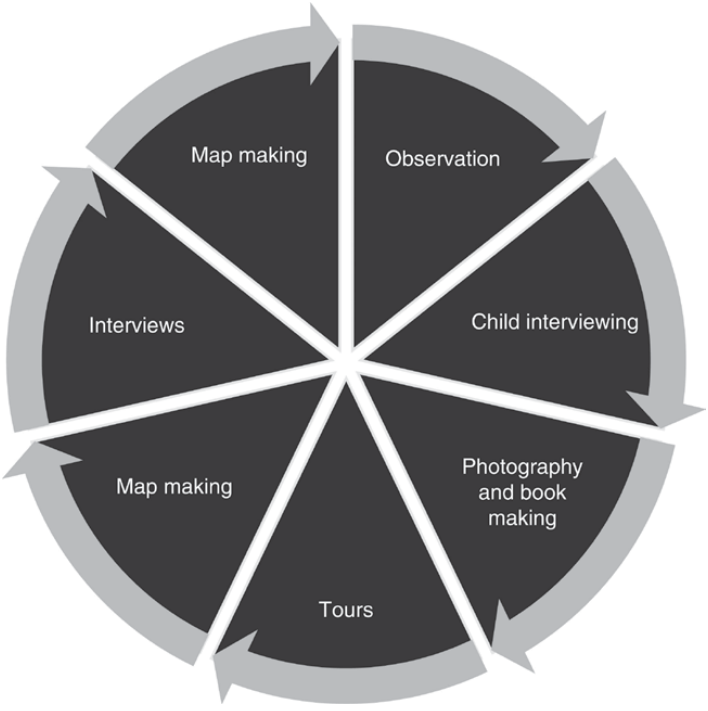
The Mosaic technique (using photo documentation and photovoice) was developed during a research study to include the 'voice of the child' in an evaluation of a multi-agency network of services for children and families, but subsequent discussions with practitioners through conferences and

workshops have led to its use by early years practitioners (Clark, 2005). The idea behind the Mosaic approach is that professionals collect data through a wide range of means. These are what Clark and Moss consider 'individual tiles'. It is then the professionals' task to put these individual pieces together to form one big picture, just like many little tiles are formed into one big mosaic.

Clark and Moss's (2011) presentation of individual tiles in their book ranges from children's conferences and children's use of cameras, role plays, tours and mapping to conversations with relevant adults and caregivers. The individual tools or methods were chosen to enable young children to explore their experiences of being in an early childhood institution through talking, walking, making and reviewing. These forms of expression were chosen to be closely aligned with how young children might choose to communicate with friends and family (Clark and Moss, 2011). Clark (2005) refers to the methodological 'pieces' of the Mosaic approach (see Figure 5.4, adapted from Clark 2005, p 14). The development of the mosaic is based on three steps: stage 1 involves children and adults gathering documentation; stage 2 involves staff/adults and children piecing together information for dialogue, reflection and interpretation; and stage 3 involves deciding on continuity and change. Different methods are used, as illustrated in Figure 5.4.

These are the foundational tools; however, one is encouraged to explore other types of tools to complement each child's interests. It is important to note that applying a single method only gives the researcher one listening tool, so integrating methods from both stage 1 and stage 2 provides a complete 'pictured' documentation of the child's response and representation of his or her voice (Tan, 2019, p 69); stage 3 emphasises the applied nature of this approach to research with participants and is in keeping with adopting a participatory paradigm. Dialogue, reflection and interpretation have remained key features of working this way, but we have highlighted the relationship between listening and change.

Figure 5.4: Methodological 'pieces' of the Mosaic approach



This acts as a reminder that listening is more than a tick-box activity to meet policy objectives (Clark and Moss, 2011).

Image theatre is a subset of forum theatre, a theatrical method developed by the Brazilian theatre artist, author and educator Augusto Boal, who saw theatre as a powerful tool for social change. In forum theatre performances, also called 'rehearsals for reality', various forms of oppression between people and society are highlighted, and the audience is always involved in creating the performances. Image theatre involves participants working together using their bodies to create still images or tableaux that depict feelings, situations and relationships (see Figures 5.5 and 5.6). These images

Figure 5.5: Image theatre work session at Ørland kulturskole, Norway

Source: Photo by Elin Hassel Iversen

Figure 5.6: Children in theatre

Source: Photo by Elin Hassel Iversen

can be processed in various ways. Interpersonal situations, such as violence, family life or friendship, are often well suited for this method.

There are several ways of working with image theatre. A facilitator, known as the 'joker', invites some of the participants to form a circle and from there each participant, without talking, steps into the centre and creates a sculpture that represents their impression of the theme that shall be worked on. When all participants have shown their still images one by one, the 'joker' asks the audience for alternative interpretations, and audience members step into the circle and show their impressions:

> As objects reflect the light that strikes them, so images in an organised ensemble reflect the emotions of the observer, her ideas, memories, imagination, desires … The whole method of Theatre of the Oppressed … is based on the multiple mirror of the gaze of others – a number of people looking at the same image, and offering their feelings, what is evoked for them, what their imaginations throw up around that image. This multiple reflection will reveal to the person who made the image its hidden aspects. (Boal, 2002, p 175)

In the first dynamisation, the 'joker' instructs everyone to come on stage and strike their poses simultaneously: 'As each participant connects with the image-making process, they are at-one-and-the-same-time agents and observers. By contributing to the image, they are simultaneously commenting on it' (Grant, 2017, p 192). From seeing all the subjective poses together, the image becomes objective, and what everybody is thinking is shown: 'The individual presentation of images gave us a "psychological" representation, now we are given a "social" vision; that is, we are shown how this particular theme influences or affects this particular community' (Boal, 2002, pp 177–178).

In the second dynamisation, the participants, at the 'joker's' signal, interact with each other's poses, creating a collective vision. In the third dynamisation, the 'joker' asks the participants to change their status from victim to oppressor (for example, from beggar to giver of alms). This stage allows participants to perform from their own subjective perspectives, portraying themselves and their perceived enemies.

The 'joker' asks a volunteer to illustrate the image made by the group by silently moving the bodies into other positions. When the image is finished, the 'joker' consults the group and the group collaborates to give information about changes to the 'joker', who moves the bodies into the places the group wants and then freezes the new image.

Drawing and painting: children's drawings are increasingly being used as a means of researching children's experiences because they give rise to possibilities for insight into children's individual experiences (Veale, 2005) and express emotions (Malchiodi, 2003; Stiles et al, 2010). The importance of using the artistic process in communication with children is fundamental in art therapy. The artistic process can provide another language, nonverbal or symbolic, through which they can unconsciously express feelings, desires, fears and core fantasies from their inner selves (Case and Dalley, 1990). It can be used as an emotion regulation technique (Brechet et al, 2020) and can be also used as an intentional teaching strategy to support children's development of executive function (EF) skills (Sonter and Jones, 2018). Case, Dalley and Reddick (2023) provide a wide array of techniques and theoretical perspectives on art therapy, with significant sections dedicated to using drawing in therapeutic settings with children (see Figures 5.7 and 5.8). The authors claim that the image is of great significance in the symbolic representation of inner experience – the emphasis on unconscious communication, the feelings, anxieties and concerns that surface through the artwork.

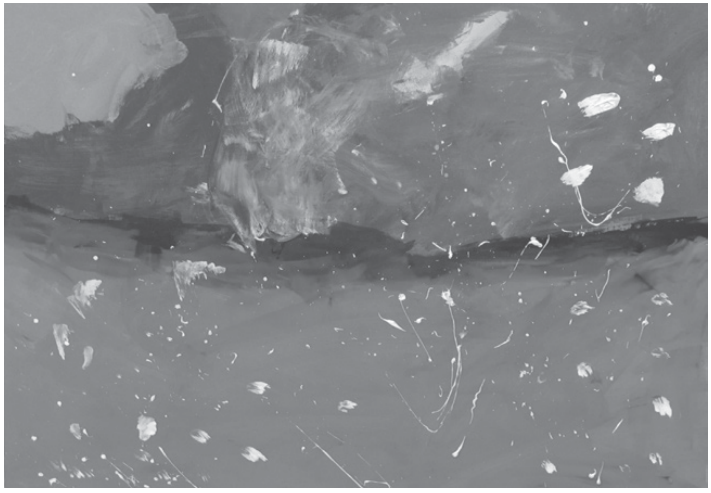
Moreover, Thrana et al (2023) explore how children's participation in a painting workshop can provide a space

Figure 5.7: Peacepainting

Source: Photo by Elin Hassel Iversen

for communication and social interaction in their home environment. The findings mainly show that the framework of the painting workshop, the peacepainting methodology and the social community among the participants enabled the children to engage in creative work and interaction.

Figure 5.8: Half water and half lava



Source: Photo by Elin Hassel Iversen

To illustrate the impact of the painting workshop and the process for the children, Thrana et al (2023, p 323) have developed a model (see Figure 5.9) which highlights the change processes based on Wenger's three modes of belonging (alignment, imagination and mutual engagement). Practitioners might find this helpful in considering their own practice.

Recommendations for practice

Creative working methods can be implemented in the form of project work, where working with a theme aims to create an arena for exploration, curiosity and understanding. Children's interests and involvement must have a central place, and they should be able to influence pedagogical choices. Project work is a process-oriented activity that follows the dynamics that arise between the children and the theme or phenomenon on which they are focused. There is a close relationship between the actions and explorations of the adults and the children,

Figure 5.9: Change processes in painting workshops

Source: Adapted from Thrana et al (2023)

which are mutually dependent on each other (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, nd).

A project can be carried out in many ways. A guideline in the light of children's rights as outlined in the UNCRC, its principles combined with the social pedagogy theory of 'the common third' could look like this:

- *Getting started* – Team up with your colleagues for a creative methods talk, ensuring you schedule time for planning and follow-up reflections. The relational key for you and the child/children is to have fun together doing some creative work. Through this interaction, you will learn about the child's preferences and interests, and he or she will learn about you. 'When two or more people share an experience or work on a task together, something emerges that is not part of them and their mutual interrelationships. It is something outside of them, something external: I call it "the common third"' (Husen, 2022).
- *Framing the work* – Create a plan that outlines the time frame for the creative work. List the necessary equipment and organise the workflow. Ensure you have a suitable space and enough room for the activities. As much as possible, involve the child/children in the planning process. Being part of the planning, deciding on the activity or shopping for materials makes them feel involved and fosters a sense of belonging.
- *Working* – Welcome the child or children and explain what you will be doing, providing them with the necessary equipment and a short introduction talk. See yourself as a facilitator and take any initiative from the children seriously. Be open to following the child's lead. This approach is crucial for respecting the child's creativity. It also empowers the child to be an inventor in their own life. If the child gets stuck, offer immediate help. Encourage responsibility by involving them in tidying up and cleaning the workspace.

- *Exhibition* – Recognise the children's work with an exhibition. Organising an event together is very satisfying. Invite an audience and assign the children different hosting duties. If possible, provide refreshments. It would be wonderful if a child could welcome the audience, further boosting their confidence and sense of achievement.

Final comments

In this chapter, several methods and tools based on existing literature have been described. These methods are designed for professionals working with children who aim to create an environment where children can safely be heard and seen. The methods stimulate creativity and serve as helpful tools for building children's courage and action competence. Children must have the opportunity to explore and develop their communication skills in joyful and creative surroundings so that they better can make suggestions and decisions that will benefit them in the future. The report prepared by the PANDA project on methods and tools for collaborative work with young children, and its subsequent publication (Juul et al, 2023), documents additional methods and tools that further promote collaborative work with children.

Notes

[1] A comprehensive list of videos, resources and publications can be found at: Dr. Margaret Lowenfeld Trust. The World Technique (https://lowenfeld.org/the-world-technique/) and Transpersonal Sand Play Centre (http://sandplay.net/).

[2] Some recommendations based on his work that can help practitioners in their professional practice can be found on the Reacch website (see https://reacch.eu/media-library/).

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