



What Makes Us the Same

Senses and Accessibility in
Art and Cultural Activities

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Introduction

When we were editing this publication, my child used to go down the steps from our fifth story apartment each morning with their eyes closed. On each floor I had to tell them when there were only two steps left, so they could jump over them with one leap. First it was fun, but after a few weeks I started to get frustrated when I had to repeat the same thing each morning and the going was slow. Once, when we were running late, I suggested if we could walk down the steps ‘in a normal way’.

As I was getting back to my writing desk from childcare, I realised in shame what I had done. How hypocritical of me to talk about accessibility and multi-sensory experiences as an adult educator, while at the same time doing the complete opposite and preventing the physical exploration of an everyday space that is so important to a child. What did I even mean by ‘normal’? Accessibility and equality are no special arrangements. They are interaction, being seen, humanity. In all situations, always.

There are many valuable guides and guidelines for improving the accessibility of art and cultural activities. The purpose of this publication is to add to those guides, and to promote the work on accessibility by giving a voice to the people doing the work and with concrete examples from the field. This publication is not meant as a guidebook as such, but it can guide the reader into seeing the world and their place in it in a new way.

One perspective that is common to all the articles in this publication are the senses of human

beings. How they work, what is their scope, and what are their limitations are crucial questions when evaluating the accessibility of art and cultural activities. The writers share their experiences as instructors and experts by experience. The publication is meant primarily for instructors and teachers working with people of different ages in art and cultural activities. But since accessibility, equality, and agency are issues penetrating our entire society, the articles contain food for thought and dialogue for all readers who work with people in all sorts of activities.

The exercises that accompany the articles are meant to give the time and space for all people to be equal, conscious beings. The exercises can be done alone or with one’s activity group. Some exercises can also be used as tools for teachers and instructors to develop and evaluate their own working methods.

In this publication, the term accessibility is used as defined by the Culture for All service, which means that it includes strategies, plans, the accessibility of communication, social reach, pricing, accessibility of the physical space, accessibility through different senses, supporting and understanding, and regional accessibility. ●

In Helsinki, January 2023

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On the Writers of this Publication

Noora Västinén is a dancer, teacher of inclusive dance, and an expert in applied and inclusive art. She dances and moves about using a wheelchair. In her work, she wishes to encourage and support everyone wishing to participate in the creation and enjoyment of arts and culture.

Anne Sjöroos is the production manager of Ursa Minor, a co-operative society focussing on performing arts in sign language, as well as a cultural jack-of-all-trades with a strong background in sign language culture production. Her productions range from theatre to media.

Maarit Hedman is an artist and art pedagogue. She has continued painting despite going blind, utilising touch and multisensory methods.

Julianna Brandt-Smal is a performance poet and a disability activist. In her art and being, she deals with the little stimulating observations on everyday life and the importance of a powerful voice of one's own.

Jarmo Skön is a versatile artist/art educator, who uses many art forms in his work, most notably theatre, dance, and circus, in an applicable and focus group centred way. His work deals with encounters through art that highlight inclusion and equality.

Satu Järvinen, MEd, is an expert in education and a dance-animateur. She works as a freelancer in the field of art education, and in different artistic and scientific projects.

Faisa Qasim is the project manager for the Mentoring for Future project, author, script writer, photographer, and a wide-ranging expert on positive psychology. Other members of the Mentoring for Future project have also collaborated with her article. The project provides a mentoring programme for young people from immigrant backgrounds, and it gives them information on career choices, as well as encourages them to take concrete steps towards pursuing their dreams by offering information and identifiable role models.



On Dance Classes for Young People with Impaired Vision

Noora Västinen

Group activities are important working environments for people of all ages. When engaged in an activity, people get a chance to learn – in addition to activity-specific skills, dexterity, and appreciating the arts – different social skills as well. It may be challenging for disabled people, or people who need special support for some other reason, to participate due to a variety of factors, which puts the feeling of being a part of something and the skills learned from it in danger.

I am an expert on applied and inclusive art, a dancer, and an instructor of inclusive dance using the methods of dance improvisation and Dance Ability.

Organising dance activities for special groups requires methodical dedication with attention to minute details. A large part of planning and addressing safety issues is to think about accessibility. According to the Pirkanmaa regional cultural welfare plan 2017, ‘accessibility is considering the different needs of different people and promoting equality when planning and producing services. Accessibility comes from e.g. unobstructed pathways, spreading understanding, and removing the physical, social, and economic factors that prevent participation. Good accessibility enables everyone to participate and enjoy cultural activities.’

How to Create a Safer Space?

When a person is building up the courage to try a new hobby, what might hold them back boils down to nervousness and questions of safety. The instructor is also thinking about safety but including the perspective of responsibility.

Safety is an issue that can be addressed from many points of view. On one hand, it can be seen as the safety of the space; on the other hand, it can be seen as a personal experience, or as a combination of both (Niemelä, 2000). Safety can also be seen as a feature of the physical working environment, the actions and visible behaviour of people in it, as well as a person’s experience and awareness of it. Referencing Niemelä’s thoughts

on safe space, I categorise safe space – in the context of the dance class and teaching – using the following three interconnected categories:

1. Physical space – accessibility of the space
2. Social space – atmosphere – acceptance and understanding
3. Individual private space – growing confidence on oneself and one’s skills

The prerequisite for a dance workshop or for planning and teaching dance classes is that the instructors have enough information on the participants. Having enough information helps the instructors, for example, consider factors related to safety, the participants’ need for support, and how well suited the space and materials are for the class.

In my experience, the instructor or teacher of special groups can easily feel under pressure for being expected to know everything and to do the right thing in every situation that they encounter. At the same time, I feel that openness and asking direct, respectful questions are never insulting; on the contrary, as they open the possibility for mutual learning and dialogue.

The instructor should not get stuck on the possible diagnoses or limitations of participants. It is more important to focus on what connects us and what kinds of exercises can be done together. When planning, instructors can also focus on how to apply different exercises to a particular group.

Physical Space

Establishing the safety of the physical space begins at making sure the space is accessible: in other words, thinking about how one enters the space and how one moves about there. How, for example, can the doors be opened, are they heavy, or are they opened by motion detectors? Are there stairs or steps on the way – if yes, are there lifts or ramps available? How high up are the lift buttons? How large is the space when considering the number of participants in a dance class and their possible assistive equip-

ment? How large are the lavatories? Is the space echoing? Can the echo be reduced? Is there furniture that takes up space? Are there sharp corners or objects one could bump into and hurt oneself? How could these injuries be avoided? And this is just a few examples. The Culture for All service has gathered a comprehensive information package on accessibility for all workers and producers in the cultural field.

Creating a sense of safety together with visually impaired participants begins at the start of the class with getting familiar with the space. It begins at the entrance, going from one end to the other while counting steps, and getting a sense of the size of the space and remarking where the middle is. The instructor is simultaneously describing what the space looks like and where the possible furniture or other obstacles are. The space can also be visualised by feeling the different wall textures and naming them, for example, window wall, ballet barre wall, and entrance wall.

It is a good idea to create a clear structure right from the beginning for the class or the full-day workshop which then continues in a roughly similar way throughout the season. With special groups, the need for clear structures and repeating routines is heightened. When the participants know roughly what happens, when it happens, and how long it takes, it makes it easier for them to focus and relax for the exercises.

Social Space – Atmosphere – Acceptance and Understanding

In a physical dance space, such as a dance studio, there are walls, a ceiling, and a floor, possibly a ballet barre, PA equipment, a piano and lighting fixtures. We can experience all that with our different senses, and all of it has already been constructed. In my opinion, similarly to the physical space, the social space must also be constructed, but that is something to which each of us, each participant, can contribute. The physical space is more permanent. The social space is constantly changing depending on who is participating, what are the emotions that

day, where all of us are coming from, and what kind of day or week it has been. Constructing the social space together brings us more in contact with ourselves, each other, and the dance that is about to begin.

One visually impaired young participant in one of my dance classes pointed out how the participant's own positive body image and social courage weigh on the decision whether to join a group activity. According to them, other contributing factors were the feeling of social safety in the group and, for example, how familiar they already were with the instructors or other participants: 'Perhaps it would lower the bar to participate in general dance classes if there were a couple of encouraging sentences on the organiser's website saying that all types of bodies are welcome, and that the instructors are competent in addressing the needs of special groups to such and such an extent.'

Starting Circle

After getting familiar with the space, we form the starting circle. In my dance classes, I always start the session with the circle with all my groups. For me, the circle as a form symbolises equality, as no one is in front of or behind anyone else, and everyone has a chance to be seen and heard. The circle is a place where trust is formed within the group, and it is a place where everyone has the time and the space to share things about themselves. I always encourage the participants to share if there is something important that other participants should know when they dance and move with them: are there, for example, body parts that are sore or sensitive that should be minded? Are there parts where they do not like to be touched? What is their balance like when they move, or anything else that's relevant.

The participants can also share how they are feeling: tired, energetic, nervous etc. Then I, as an instructor, can encourage people to accept all their feelings, and that no one needs to feel anything else for anyone else. This kind of encouragement creates an atmosphere of acceptance and is the foundation for trust and libera-



tion. If a participant uses aids to move, such as a wheelchair, it is good to verbalise it and demonstrate how the wheelchair moves and how the participant wishes others to move with them and their wheelchair.

When working with special groups, I invite the assistants of participants to join the starting circle as well, so they have a chance to introduce themselves. Although the assistants may not otherwise join the exercises, I feel it is important for the participants to notice all the people in the room.

The Significance of the Assistant when Taking Part in a Group Activity

One of the key factors for persons with disabilities or special needs in participating in group activities is the number of assistants and how they can offer support in both physical and social interactions.

Assistants can be either the personal assistants of participants or, alternatively, general assistants. Although a participant might only need physical help and support in, for example, moving, the presence and aid of an assistant automatically affects the social space as well. Therefore, I consider it important that if there is a personal assistant involved, they are aware of their role during the guided part of the exercise: do they take part in the exercise, are they observing from the side, or are they in a completely different room but still available for the participant?

In some cases, the activity or passivity or the participants is affected greatly by whether the personal assistants are family members or not. A family member, such as a mother, can create a sense of safety as a personal assistant, but at the same time the mother can – consciously or unconsciously – be overprotective and in so do-

ing limit their child's activity. The parent might think and do too much for their child, and the child, although they might be an adult, cannot practice their independent decision making and creativity.

The Inner Space of the Individual – Growing Confidence on Oneself and One's Skills

When the dance studio, the physical space, has been mapped and introduced, and a relaxed and trusting atmosphere has been created inside the group, the social space, all the useless nervousness and stress can be removed, and energy can be redirected towards developing skills, playing, creativity, and exploring the inner worlds and resources of the participants themselves.

One visually impaired young person in my dance class described to me how trust and a relaxed state of mind enabled them to feel and study their own sensitivity and boundaries, as well as finding connection with others: 'When there is that type of trust, there is no fear of doing something "wrong". Interaction with others does not always require words or eye contact. A strong connection and understanding can also be found through movement and touch. I had powerful experiences of listening to others' body movements and being heard myself, confronting others as equals, where statuses, bodily abilities and other external factors became meaningless.' ●

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Exercises

Exercise 1

A safe space can be defined by three aspects: physical space, social space, and the person's inner space. Explore your own physical safe space.

Study the space where you are with different parts of your body either by yourself or with your group. Go to a corner and yell, test the acoustics – what do you hear in different spots? Is it the space cold or hot? Are the textures soft, rough, or smooth? What is your safest place in this space?

Exercise 2

The article refers to feedback from a participant: 'Perhaps it would lower the bar to participate in general dance classes if the organiser's website contained one or two supportive phrases on how all kinds of bodies are welcome, and that the instructors are trained to address special needs in such and such a way.' Study the word choices and language used in the communication of your activity with a critical eye. How could you, through communication, create a space where everyone could feel welcome?

Exercise 3

Imagine a situation where you are a new participant in an activity group which includes both people with different kinds of impaired vision and people who can see. Your task is to introduce yourself by describing yourself and your appearance to the group. Avoid mentioning, for example, your age, profession, or education. Describe yourself in as tangible a manner as possible.



Is There Art Without Senses?

Satu Järvinen & Jarmo Skön (Tampereen taidekasvatus ry)

Jarmo: Good morning, Satu! How wonderful to be able to take a moment to discuss art, senses and accessibility with you.

Satu: Likewise, Jarmo! It's truly an interesting subject and intimately connected to everything we both do in our work, isn't that right?

Jarmo: Yes, those three words are overarching themes for each day at work. It's a great opportunity to get to reflect on those themes together.

Satu: Let's start with a little exercise: Jarmo, close your eyes and tell me what you're sensing right now.

Jarmo: What I'm sensing is: I smell fresh coffee... my feet are slightly cold... I hear the distant noise of traffic and the screeching of a train in the background. What are you sensing, Satu?

Satu: I taste the delicate aroma of tea in my mouth and hear the humming of appliances around me. I'm sitting in a somewhat uncomfortable position in my chair, better fix it!

Jarmo: Thank you, those are interesting observations, to which I could relate thanks to your description. Satu, you're a professional dance pedagogue and an education researcher, and you've danced yourself for a long time and are specialised in the method of dance-animateuring.

Satu: Yes. I've also participated in developing environmental animateuring, which is a method to address environmental issues and personal environment relationship, based on art and sensory feedback. You, Jarmo, are an instructor of theatrical expression, and you have specialised in applying art with diverse groups, such as disabled people, immigrants, and the elderly. You too have specialised in dance-animateuring and have studied social circus and drama education. Your work is heavily based on the pedagogy of recognition developed by Raisa Foster, PhD.

Jarmo: Yes, that's a major part of who I am as an art educator. Today we've decided to focus on discussing the significance of senses in

art through our own experiences. We will also be talking about the role of the instructor and the pedagogy of recognition as a starting point in our work. As experts in performing arts, we focus on reflecting issues particularly from the viewpoints of dance and theatre.

Experiences and Senses in the Performing Arts

Jarmo: To start things off, we should probably talk a little bit about the significance of senses in performing arts. Theatre is an art form heavily based on personal experiences. Art is being created as the actor explores and analyses their own personal experience of their character and the story of the play. Through this inner exploration the actor can interpret the role in a unique way that they then share with the audience. Although I'm talking about experience, I might as well be talking about senses through which that experience is created. Senses and individual sensory experiences guide the actor strongly on stage. They have all or some of their senses at their disposal: sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste, balance, proprioception, kinaesthesia, and even intuition. This means that senses affect us as artists. They are universal, they connect all kinds of people, while at the same time they are a resource that stems from the individuality of each person. In my work as a theatre director and instructor, I do not wish to divide people based on their individuality. Some might need more support than others to participate and work. It is my duty as an instructor to find how every person's potential is maximised. Everyone has the right to both experience and actively make art.

As we approach art from the perspective of accessibility, we must think about the point of view of the artist who needs special support in more detail. Not everyone can, for example, read, they may have trouble with spatial perception, or they may communicate in some other way than speaking. In these cases, exercises involving other senses form the core of making art instead of speech. The sensory experienc-

es that arise from the exercises help the actors draw their own map of actions: where do I stand or sit, what do I do, what do I see and what do I hear. What kinds of impulses does the space give to what I do? What about the other actors? This map of actions drawn by sensory data helps the actor repeat their actions when rehearsing, which is essential for the theatrical experience. So, in a way, sensory data leads to learning.

Satu: In dance-animateuring and dance, too, senses are a natural starting point. That's where we often begin when we dance. Focusing on our senses and openly observing them forces us to embrace the moment and the space with the people and the things in it. So, in a way, our thoughts return to our bodies and our own surroundings, when often they can be preoccupied by, for example, unfinished tasks or today's shopping list.

Perhaps the difference with theatre is that in the method of dance-animateuring, the goal often is to find one's sense of self instead of acting out different roles. This sense of self is crystallised when doing dance exercises together, or perhaps when dancing on a stage. Senses can produce raw, unfiltered data that reinforces staying in the present.

When we're dancing in groups, we process all our senses at once, or alternatively one after the other so that we consciously focus on specific senses and sensory experiences. Sight is often easily approachable, so occasionally I guide the participants to start with looking at things. We can observe things that are far away, things that are near, and memorise them. This can also be a starting point for movement. Most often I start with my groups eyes closed, so that one's gaze and the awareness of being looked at doesn't define what we're doing.

In the future, I'd like to try to explore the sense of smell in more detail with my groups. I'm particularly interested in how smell is tied to memory: what memories can, for example, the smell of cinnamon bring back, and how this memory could be translated into movement.

Jarmo: That's a great idea, and smell and taste could be utilised when making theatre, too. Perhaps I could use them when exploring the themes of a play with the group. It could provide fresh insights into the actors' work. I must say that it's delightful to notice that you used the word 'explore' when describing your work. This is an important point of view for me as well, since as explorers, all the participants are experts and working together becomes more equal.

I'm still thinking about how to use the senses of smell and taste in theatre and drama. As an example, I did a project with a special needs class where we studied the stories of Kalevala through process drama. Among other things, we tasted lingonberries, and smelled spruce branches and tar. These sensory experiences of taste and smell helped make the unreal world of Kalevala more vivid to the participants as we were exploring it together. Do you think it's correct to say that the information one absorbs through senses is more tangible because it feels real?

Satu: Information received through senses becomes real to the receiver always in the situation and moment when the person is present. Being open and receptive makes it possible for art to be born.

Jarmo: Yes, creating art - whether it's dance or theatre - pulls us away from our everyday roles and errands. Using our senses, we can focus on something that is within ourselves, in our interaction, or in our surroundings.

In a way, art is all about sensing things. But is sensing things art? As we established earlier, senses define the individual way of making art for each of us. Perhaps it's about drawing lines: can we, as individual artists, or collaborative groups, decide what to include in our art.

Satu: Is there art without senses? Either you look at it, feel it, listen to it, smell it, or taste it, but if one is without senses, can they experience art? So, is there art without senses?



Limitation – or a New Point of View

Jarmo: Good question, I don't think there is! However, regarding accessibility, we must remember that there are people who have reduced function or a total lack of one of their senses. On the other hand, there are people on the autistic spectrum who may have one sense that dominates all others, and this affects their whole way of being. What happens then and how should one act as an instructor?

What's been great to see in my work in a concrete way is how when a person lacks one sense, the other senses are heightened, and whole new ways of doing things are discovered. We should strive for seeing beyond traditional modes of thinking and place more emphasis on interaction. For example, I've had the chance to witness a blind young person doing aerial acrobatics on a swinging trapeze with their mother, communicating through verbal messages, and relying on their sense of balance, proprioception, and kinaesthesia. Or when I've danced in the lobby of Tampere-talo with an autistic boy who usually abhors touching, in close physical

proximity, relying on the shared tactile experience and intuition.

Speaking as an instructor, I can then say that everything is possible, since it's all about keeping an open mind, and having an atmosphere of trust and the willingness to experiment. And if art is about sensing things, then limitations become possibilities to discover new perspectives into art.

Satu: The differences in how you see things are significant. If you see art as virtuosic, dance becomes something that not everyone can participate in due to, say, flexibility. But could we see it in such a way that everyone can dance and can create art, and the way to approach it is through, for example, senses and different creative exercises.

The Pedagogy of Recognition in Dance-animateuring

Jarmo: As I already mentioned earlier, we all have a unique way of being, which means that everyone can create art in a unique way. Perhaps now would be a good time to explain in more de-

tail the method of dance-animateuring and its relationship with senses and accessibility – after all, it is a subject close to both our hearts. This method developed by Raisa Foster is based on an artistic-pedagogical model of hers, the pedagogy of recognition, which we both use as a framework in our daily work. It aims at the recognition of the self and the other. In this model, our individuality is, by default, a basic constant. When it is combined with making art, it provides one’s artistry with limitless possibilities.

Satu: Yes, the pedagogy of recognition introduced by Foster (2012) in her dissertation recaps the themes that have come up in our discussion. Its three phases are recognition as identification, self-recognition, and mutual recognition. What is meant by identification is acknowledging that there is no single, absolute truth. It is about jumping in with an open mind to examine different phenomena and letting oneself be carried away by the process. In other words, the shift is from knowing to recognizing. Dance-animateuring, based on the pedagogy of recognition, does not involve a ready-made dance choreography, a particular technique, or the grand vision of an instructor that the group must execute. Instead, it is a dialogical process in which, through different sensory and improvisatory exercises, one can discover something new about oneself, others, and the world. Since there is no established ideal to achieve, and the practice is based on everyone’s own way of moving, dance-animateuring is suitable for everyone.

Jarmo: For me, one of the most significant revelations regarding senses in Foster’s framework was how the pedagogy of recognition and dance-animateuring are not focused on one’s self-esteem, but instead they rely on self-awareness and its exploration. When making art and paying attention to ourselves, we learn to identify aspects of ourselves that we may have never noticed before. All the layers within us are thus equal, there is no good or bad in them.

Satu: By self-recognition, we mean that instead of developing a good self-esteem we fo-

cus on developing self-awareness instead. At its best, art can help us discover the narrative and mutable quality of our identity. It helps us to accept both ourselves and others as they are.

Structures and the Accessibility of Art

Satu: Recognition as identification is a very important starting point for questions such as the accessibility of art. We must first consider the different structures and norms of society, and whether we’re unintentionally creating art only for a certain group of people. And whether we, for example, use words that define the art as marginal: is the art ‘special art’, i.e., made by someone who deviates from the norm.

Jarmo: Considering accessibility in art, we in the business must be aware that we’re tearing down traditional views on art. In my opinion, the arts are limiting themselves at the moment with their norms and routines. It has been said that art should be multifaceted and relevant, but we cannot raise future generations to experience and create art in new ways if our society doesn’t allow this diversity to shine. The cliché, ‘art belongs to all’, is then nothing but lip service. The diversity of human nature is still largely invisible.

The challenge is that all art – including art made as a hobby – is strongly based on the laws of supply and demand. The entertainment value of art often takes a more prominent role. That narrows down the supply, as it’s the more ‘selling’ forms of art that get the spotlight. At the same time, instances of art accessibility, such as so-called special art or inclusive art, are left marginalised and invisible. It’s still extremely rare if a person not accepted by society’s norms is lauded as an artist. In fact, I wouldn’t even use the words special art, I’d rather talk about new art.

Perhaps senses could be a good way to open a dialogue in this case as well, whether we could see ourselves through them as equal artists, members of the audience, as people. Years ago, I read about the concept of third space by Homi Bhabha, where the central idea is that culture

is never permanent or original, but it is formed through interaction between individuals or other cultures. In this interaction, together with senses, a 'third space' is born, through which something new can be discovered together. The same takes place in performances when interacting with a crowd who share the 'third space' with the performers through everyone's senses. At the same time, the performers sense the audience, sharing their art with them.

Challenges for Instructors

Satu: As we're discussing art and accessibility, it's also important to discuss the possible risks involved. What are your thoughts?

Jarmo: Yes, the skill of staying in contact with one's art on one hand, and one's resilience regarding the group on the other, are at the centre of what it means to be an instructor. When rehearsing performance art with different special groups, or any group for that matter, it's important to remember that the actor and their role must be distinguished. There are many therapeutic layers to making art, especially with a sensory approach, and it can get side-tracked. It's the director's responsibility in the theatre to make sure the point is to create art and share an activity, not therapy. This requires being clear and drawing boundaries. But the director should be prepared to accept that experiences and emotions may surface while creating art. They must have the skills to guide the group back into the fiction and the narrative, away from oneself.

In drama education, we use the term aesthetic doubling to refer to two layers of reality, the realistic and the fictitious being present simultaneously. I think this is also a good way to visualise the work of the actor to, for example, a disabled actor. It makes the different layers of what an actor does in a theatre at least a little more concrete. It's extremely important that these two layers are not mixed while working.

Satu: These kinds of situations crop up from time to time with my groups as well. As we work on dance projects, we often aim for a 'self' – not

a role, but a search for one's own feelings and sensations. You have to be careful particularly with adults, so that each participant is responsible for how much they share of themselves. When dealing with a special group, the instructor must be even more sensitive about how to approach these things. Roleplay might be a good way to start exploring these issues.

Jarmo: The things surfacing from us through creative work might be surprising for all of us, since our senses can set free something that we are not prepared for rationally. It might bring back things, experiences, and memories that we may have hidden in our bodies and are lying dormant. This is why clearly defined boundaries are important. Everyone must know what the goal is. At the same time, it takes some weight off the instructor's shoulders when things are agreed upon beforehand.

In drama education, we also use the term 'agreement of drama' to describe a detailed framework for the activity to which everyone commits. I always try have one in one form or another before beginning. It takes courage from the instructor as well to set up limits, to know when you've gone too far and what is meaningful use of time and what isn't. With people with special needs, the need for clarity becomes more important – to make everyone understand although verbalising one's own experiences can be difficult.

Satu: I've also appropriated the agreement of drama for dance, so that with each new group an agreement of dance is made, and it's such a great and concrete tool with which to start and to limit the themes that the group will deal with.

Jarmo: Many times, it seems that when talking about making art using senses, people mean freeing themselves of limitations and getting to look at things in a new way. It can also mean that some participants can't set up their protective barriers and, immersing themselves, can't control where they end up. Guidance and other verbal and non-verbal communication from the instructor can also be misinterpreted, or the role of the instructor can become unclear to the par-

ticipants. This is when the instructor must intervene and put into words what is the purpose. We should always keep in mind that the art educator is not a therapist, and art therapy is not the same as art that has a 'therapeutic' layer.

So, I wish that every art educator would reflect on their own sensitivity and their resilience. As my teacher of applied theatre always used to say, the instructor should always keep their feelers up. Sensitive guidance begins at planning. It's also good to remember to proceed calmly and that the instructor always remains in control of the situation. The instructor is responsible for the 'space' they open for the artistic activity, and what is allowed and possible there. We, as artists and art educators, are not there to solve anyone's problems – we have invited people with us to make art.

Senses as a Way to a more Equal Co-Existence

Jarmo: One more thing since there is also an activist trying to save the world in me. If senses are at the core of art and humanity, isn't it so that senses work in us as catalysts for empathy? Creating art together gives us shared sensory experiences. Even though all experiences are individual and even contradictory when compared

side by side, all sensory feedback is received in the same environment through art.

This shared space in which senses hold a key role, creates a bond between the participants where it's possible to regard other people from a new point of view. This could act as a way to a more equal co-existence, as everyone is equally present through their senses. So, through sensory art experiences we can raise our capacity for empathy.

Satu: Definitely! It's impossible to define borders or impose values on people based on senses. There is no hard coded hierarchy in the knowledge, information, and experiences gained through senses. If we confront people with 'rationality', different features might be highlighted. A disabled person can be confronted through, for example, their diagnosis or some other definition, which of course is not productive from the perspective of artistic experiences.

Jarmo: So, let's put faith in the possibilities of senses, as by utilising them in the right way we can create a more accessible and equal world for all!

Satu: Hear, hear. Thank you for this conversation!

Jarmo: Thanks to you too. ●

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Exercises

Exercise 1

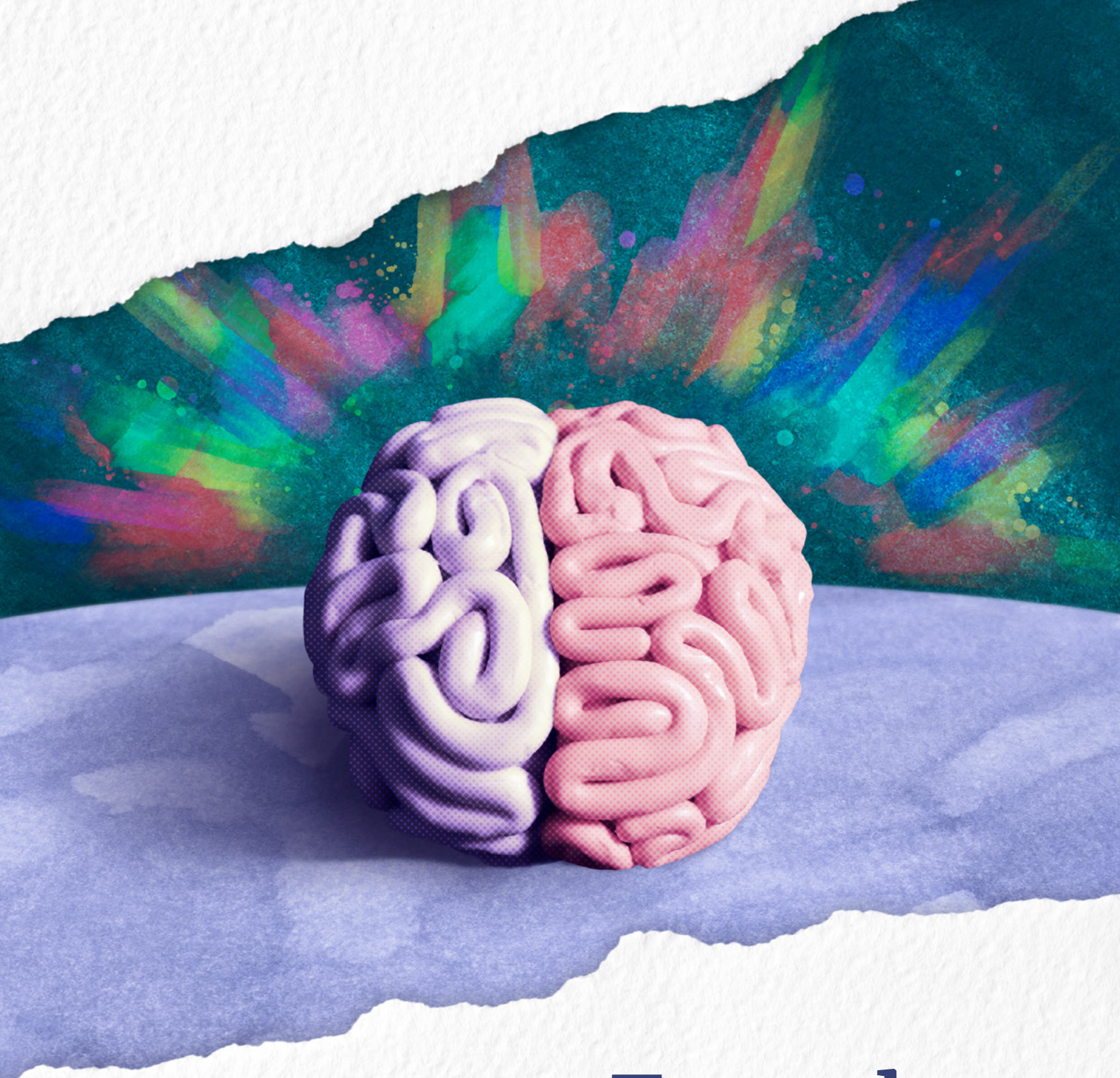
Relax, stay still, and take a few breaths. What are you sensing right now? How do your surroundings affect what you do? How do you feel in this space? What does the space encourage you to do?

Exercise 2

Reflect on your sense of taste and sensations of touch. Bring something for your group to eat and drink that has different textures. Pair these into tasting and emotional pairs. Taste them. What kinds of emotions do the flavours make you feel? Share your experiences with the group. Taste the flavours together, if possible. What kinds of emotions do they make others feel?

Exercise 3

Consider whether you could utilise different taste experiences in your group or activity. How could they affect how the participants experience the activity?



Towards a Multisensory Experience

Maarit Hedman

I am a visual artist and an art pedagogue. These two things still define my personality and my life, although I lost my vision over twenty years ago. I have a rare subtype of MS called NMO which has destroyed my optic nerves. My left eye is completely blind. With my right eye, I can distinguish light and darkness, as well as strong contrasts through a haze of grey fog. My world is one that is misty, out of focus, and tinted with grey. It is like watching the world around me through a frosted window. My world has no colours, but they remain vivid inside me. When I could still see, I graduated as a Master of Fine Arts and worked as a painter. This has provided me with the foundations for working as an artist and an art teacher today.

The Prison of the Visual

The world around us is a constantly changing visual kaleidoscope. It fills our minds and grabs our attention with a constant stream of new things, forever reforming itself. Our visual sense is very dominating, and our other senses tend to get overshadowed.

As I started to lose my vision, my other senses took on a larger role. Losing a sense is always a major crisis, and so it was for me. At first, I thought I could never paint again and could not work as an art teacher anymore. It felt utterly impossible. I am a very visual person. Much of my memory also depended on my sight. Suddenly I was in a situation where I could not enjoy all the beautiful things, not to mention being able to locate things easily and quickly with just a glance. I could not even enjoy food at first, since I could not see what it looked like. I realised how much even the sense of taste was connected to sight.

Tactile Brushes

One summer day at our summer cottage turned out to be a pivotal moment in my artistry. The elements of nature around me penetrated all my senses in such an overwhelming way that I had to start painting. I had tried painting a few times,

but that only made me depressed and frustrated. I could not even tell if there was paint on my brush unless I touched it. Despite this, I set up my painting kit and put the liquid-like gouaches in their jars with the help of my husband. As I was trying to grasp something I needed, I accidentally put my finger in a colour jar. This moment turned into an image lodged in my memory. I can still feel the sensations of the moment. With my finger in the cool paint, I suddenly realised I had my own tactile brushes, my fingers! It was as if a heavy cork had come off the top of my head as I realised this. I started to paint with my fingers, which I continue to do to this day. I had found a way to make painting accessible to me. I began my journey towards a multisensory experience, and that journey continues to this day. My fingers tell me the consistency, direction and emerging form of the colour, and the texture of the surface. Nowadays, I work mainly with acrylic paints, as they suit the way I paint. They dry fast and painting can be quite quick if I wish. Acrylic paints can be applied in thinner or thicker layers, they can be mixed with a non-slippery cover, and they are water-soluble. I use primary colours when painting. I mix the other shades myself. This way I get a feel for the shade I have mixed. In addition to primary colours my palette includes black and white, as well as silver and gold.

A Multisensory Colour Experience

When I had gotten back in touch with my own art, I also rediscovered the teacher in me. Of course, I was a different teacher from what I was when I still could see. I learned this in a concrete way during the first course I thought since I became blind. I taught a course on colours for visually impaired students, some of which had been blind from birth. I had to abandon all the helpful teaching materials that had been created previously. The contact with colours had to be established through other senses. No materials were available for this. I developed a colour wheel you could touch, where the primary and secondary colours felt different in their

temperature. There were, for example, cool satin fabrics, warm fleece fabrics and a more neutral cotton fabric.

On one course, we used to start the day always with a colour picnic. We sat in a circle on the floor, and there were different objects in the middle of the circle that set the tone for the sensory themes of the day. There were things to smell, to touch, and sometimes even to taste that referred to different colours, for example green herbs and red berries.

Sometimes I had picked music that could depict a certain colour and we moved to it. For orange and red, I brought music that felt flame-like and inspired swaying and twirling. This in turn recalled the warmth of fire and its different shades of colour. At the same time, emotions and memories began to surface: Midsummer bonfires, roaring fireplaces, candles during Christmas time. In a moment, a bridge was formed across different senses, creating a connection with memories and emotions and forming a multisensory colour experience. One thing that was particularly memorable was when a student who was blind from birth shared their impression of the colour red. To them, it was the sticky sensation of strawberry ice cream melting in their hands.

From Impossible to Possible

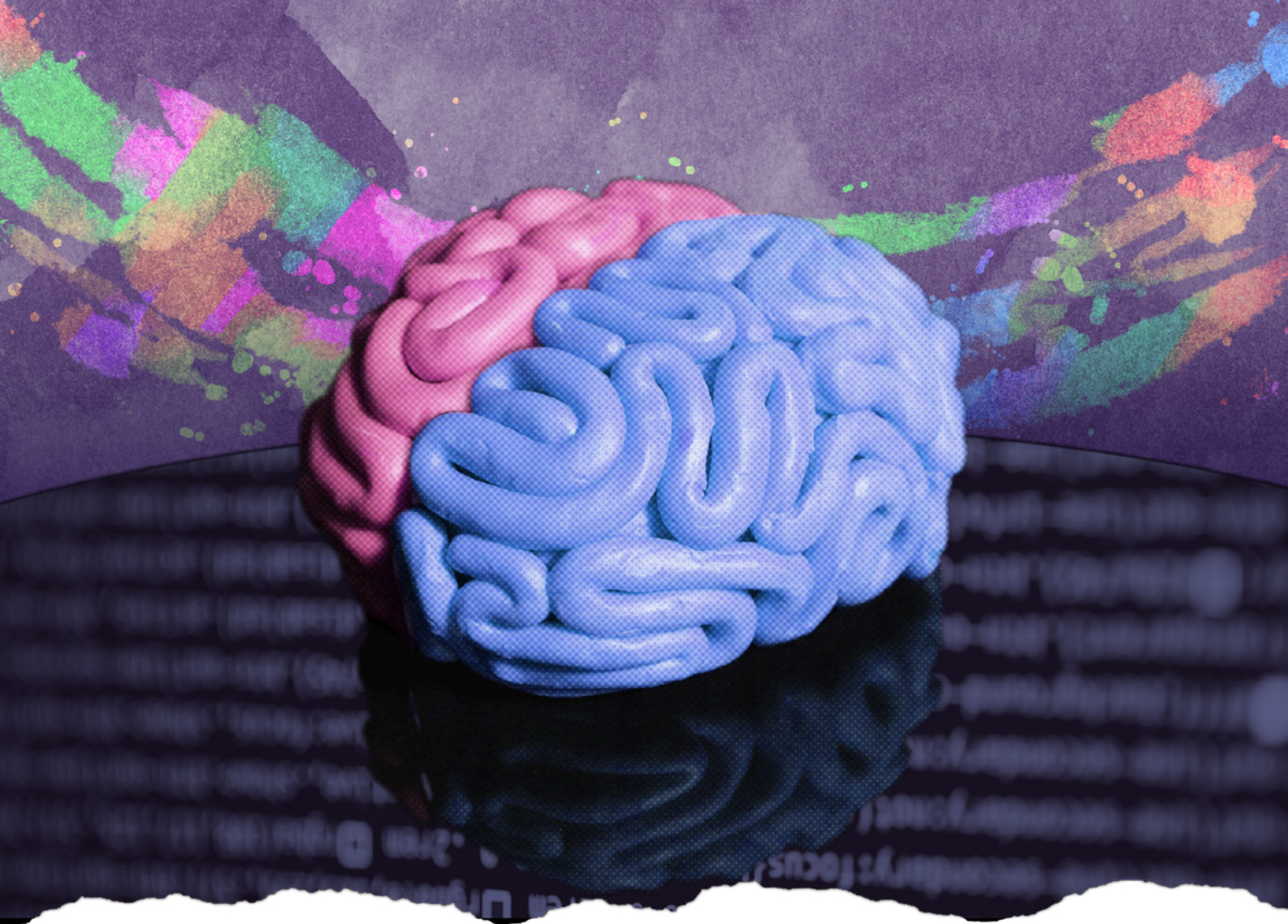
When teaching now, I also need an assistant who can see. It has been important to me to have assistants who have a degree in fine arts, and with whom I can collaborate seamlessly. I have taught many kinds of art courses and workshops for all age groups, and for both people who can see and for participants with different sensory limitations. One of the most inspiring teaching and learning experiences was an art workshop I taught for participants who were both deaf and blind. One would imagine that this kind of course would be impossible due to the many limitations. I had my assistant who described to me all the visual things. Nearly every participant had their own interpreter who communicated with them in either sign language,

or tactile signing if they were completely blind. In this workshop, too, we approached colour in a multisensory way. Acrylic paints were distinguished by using fine sand as a non-slippery cover, and by adding drops of scented liquids to them. Drops of lemon juice for yellow, orange juice for orange, cool menthol for blue. When I went round guiding the participants, my assistant first had to describe to me what was going on in the painting. After this I gave instructions on, for example, how to mix a certain shade of colour or how to produce a certain brushstroke.

Mostly the instructions were tactile signed to the participant from hand to hand. My assistant also drew on my back to describe the paintings in progress. Drawing on the participants' backs was also used to describe the paintings. This workshop was a brilliant example on how the nearly impossible could be made possible and the end product was a marvellous colour adventure! For years, I taught a painting course where some participants were visually impaired, and some could see. The strength of the group was the interaction and sharing of experiences from diverse backgrounds. People who had been blind from birth shared their feelings and impressions raised by the painting process, while seeing participants described the paintings and thus added to the impression. In many of my courses, seeing participants were also able to try painting with their eyes blindfolded. The experience was often liberating and brought a new depth to their expression. I have also had art sessions with people with amnesia. A multisensory way of working, with an emphasis on memorable experiences, was an essential approach with them, too. Different scents, tactile sensations, or, for example, a familiar button, piece of wallpaper, or music could unlock their minds, releasing a torrent of memories.

From Description to Experience

Description has become an important part of the way I work. It enables one to enjoy art. When I paint, I constantly create the picture in my mind as well. During the process, an impres-



sion is formed of the piece. This impression is further enhanced by descriptions of it by people who can see. After going blind, my paintings have often incorporated poems that I have written. These poems help to explain the feelings and impressions I went through while painting. Words and pictures complement each other and help the viewer connect with the painting. In my own art exhibitions, I have used, in addition to verbal descriptions and poems, also music, sound design, movement, and dance to describe my pieces. All this has helped open the world of my paintings to both people with sensory limitations and ordinary exhibition visitors.

Guided tours to art museums with audio description are very important in making art accessible. Through description, the piece is born again in the mind of the visitor. The experience is always different, depending on who is describing the piece and on the visitor's mood.

The experience is different for all of us at various times. The most important thing is that art somehow touches the person experiencing it, brings up emotions, memories, and memorable sensory experiences.

Intuition Bridging Impressions

When sight is no longer available, a new kind of passage is opened to the inner world. I have noticed how the inner voice, intuition, has grown more significant. Sometimes I wonder if intuition is our sixth sense. Or is intuition a bridge connecting different sensory areas, enabling a multisensory experience? I have had several experiences of transferring knowledge without me being able to explain in any way how it happened. During one exhibition project, I collaborated with a musician. They played the kantele in my workspace as I was painting. We inspired each other in a dialogue of music and picture.

Many times, they were thinking of a certain shade of colour while improvising and let their playing channel that. After a while, when they came to look at my painting, that shade had appeared on the canvas. This was bewildering.

A very dear art project to me was 'Katseen takana' ('Behind the Eyes'), which was a collaboration with the photographer Leena Louhivaara. In this project, the experiences and interpretations of a certain place, by one who could see and one who had lost their vision, were brought together. One pair of pieces was born as Leena photographed me on the smooth cliffs of an archipelago. The cliffs were full of stripes that looked like liquid had been poured across them. My own sensory experiences of the place were transferred into my painting. We were surprised to find running colours reminiscent of the stripes on the cliffs in my quite large painting. As I was painting, it had always been very important to me to retain the running colours that filled the inter lower section of the painting. No one had described the cliffs to me on the photo shoot. I believe that we absorb so much more information of different kinds than we are aware of all the time.

On the Fountain of Creativity

In my own work, the process of painting itself is central. The feelings, memories, and sensory experiences that it brings up guide the way I work. The multisensory experience is always

different, and sometimes even a surprising adventure within the inner space. The inner space often feels like it is the core of life, which is only thinly covered by external things. In a multisensory creative process, we are constantly on the verge of something new and yet undiscovered. Something is being created in the inner space and it crystallises as a piece that exists outside us.

There is a legend about Sibelius that he often carried with him a small box filled with moss gathered from the woods near his dear home in Ainola. All he had to do was take a sniff of the moss, and the sensory experiences of his home woods came flooding wherever he was. He could hear the song of cranes and swans, feel the forest earth under his feet, and sense the energy of nature. The sensory experiences helped him tune his senses to the composing process.

I believe that the experience of a creative process is the same regardless of sensory limitations. The deaf Beethoven could hear the music in his mind, and a physically disabled person can create a dance choreography. The creative potential of humans is enormous and largely unstudied. The joy of realisation in a creative process as something new and unique is born is always a miraculous event. Something emerges from nothing, something novel and undiscovered. Somewhere in that space, a fountain of creativity is welling up. It grants us its renewing waters as we open our senses to it. ●

Exercises

Exercise 1

In their article, the writer who became blind describes how all the visual ways in which to experience art had to be replaced by methods that utilise other senses. These included the seeing assistant describing the pieces verbally or drawing them on their back. Describe a painting to someone by drawing it on their back. What is the composition like, what types of strokes and brushwork are used? Describe the intensity of the brushwork by varying your pressure on their back. You can also describe the elements of the painting by the direction of your strokes, and with different tapping or whisking motions, or with rhythm.

Exercise 2

Play Chinese Whispers in your group but with movement. One person starts a short sequence of movements which another person watches. The rest keep their eyes closed. The one who saw the movement repeats it to the next person. The sequence can also be described verbally in a whisper. Finally, you can watch or describe the original sequence together. Think about how it changed. Why did the message change, and at which points did it happen?

Exercise 3

Think about the sense of smell. Do you have any powerful sensory experiences related to smell? Share your memories related to smells. Could they be used as a basis for brainstorming a performance or a work of art?



Deaf Artists Build Their Toolkit during Childhood

Anne Sjöroos

Accessibility means that everyone has an equal chance at working within the field of culture. How does being deaf then affect participating in culture and the arts? Is it a deficiency and an obstacle to fully participating? Or is it a positive attribute that requires support in the form of activities in the person's native language?

I graduated with a degree in Cultural Management from Metropolia University of Applied Sciences in 2012 with high hopes. I was the only deaf sign language user in my class, and I studied for five years with the help of a sign language interpreter, but on the terms of the hearing. Perhaps that was the reason I wrote my thesis on how a theatre experience could be accessible and equal to all – despite not everyone having the same senses or using the same language. After all, during my studies, I had seen numerous theatre productions which I could not appreciate as much as my hearing student friends could. In all honesty, I could not come up with a single solution to this accessibility issue.

Perhaps because there is no single solution. Inclusion is a wonderful thing as far as accessibility is concerned, but it does not offer a solution for everyone. We are all individuals with unique needs, demands, and prerequisites for experiencing culture. Even if a hundred people watch the same theatre production, each person interprets it in their own way. We can only try to aim as close as possible, but the rest is up to the audience.

After graduating I worked for some well-established organisations. Working for them, I did not feel I could improve their cultural accessibility or inclusion, nor create something new, or experiment practically on how inclusion could be best achieved.

Therefore, I dreamed of starting my own company: a large sign language cultural facility to which all deaf artists of the world could come and feel at home there. They could work on their own terms, with their own identity, and in their own native language. They could get the support

of the community for carving their own path as an artist. They could make the Finnish field of culture equal through their own example.

Carving the Path of the Artist Begins during Childhood

In 2015, I had received enough encouragement and faith from my future colleagues Noora Karjalainen and Helena Torboli to establish the cooperative society Ursa Minor. Right from the start, the founding principle of Ursa Minor has been that the future will be inclusive. Sign languages are seen as no different from other languages, and sign language art is appreciated.

Sign language artists can carve a strong and coherent path all the way from early childhood on to being a professional artist, they can work and develop their artistry, and they are seen as an important part of the ecosystem of Finnish art. As a result of art and culture in our own language, we become equal.

Since inclusion belongs to everyone, and we come in many shapes and sizes, we can only speak from our own experience. At Ursa Minor, we are sign language users, so we can describe the experience of inclusion particularly from the perspective of a sign language user.

At first, we focused on adult artists and how to employ them and offer collaborative projects, but at some point, we realised that deaf people and children who use sign language had no artistic or cultural activities in their own language. When we organised single-day workshops or theatre events for children, the feedback was clear: people wanted more such activities on a regular basis. No one offered anything similar.

This was the beginning of one of the cornerstones of Ursa Minor: Laku.

Establishing Laku

Laku, in Finnish, is an abbreviation of 'children's cultural activities in sign language'. At first, we organised Laku workshops where children got a taste of different artistic and cultural activities, such as visual arts, theatre, film, and photography.

Gradually Laku was so established that the term ‘workshop’ could no longer apply. We began collaborating with Pitäjämäki primary school, the students of which include those who use sign language. In the spring and autumn terms we organised two activities each where the children had the chance to try a new cultural activity and get guidance in their own language. At first there were a couple of meetings, then six, and eventually the activities took all autumn or spring. Now there are activities every autumn/spring with 15 meetings per activity.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Laku went online, where it suddenly became nation-wide, as children regardless of where they lived or went to school could access Laku activities online.

Now, Laku is a part of the Finnish model for leisure activities project started by the city of Helsinki. Theatre has become an all-but established part of Laku activities, as it is by far the most popular cultural activity among children who use sign language. And no wonder: it enables one to express themselves fully in their own language.

Rich Sign Language Identity

The more established Laku became, the greater its significance grew. We found a way to offer a valuable arts and culture activity to deaf people and children who use sign language, in their own language. This enables people to carve their own artistic path from the start, while having their linguistic identity at the forefront. This is

not accomplished on the terms of the majority, the hearing, as these terms do not often fit well with a sign language identity.

When a deaf child is placed in the same group with hearing children for a creative activity, often with the help of a sign language interpreter, they do not get the building blocks with which to construct their own artistic identity in sign language. They do not know how to realise or grow this identity as they cannot get the right tools for it from instructors who can hear. I argue that in this case, the child will most likely at some point experience deafness as an obstacle and a deficiency that hinders their activity. This may lead to ending an otherwise stimulating hobby. The inner artist of the child never gets to flourish.

This is not the case when the instructors themselves are artists whose native language is sign language, as they are at Laku. Here the instructor is not only a model for language identity, but also a model for how to carve the path of an artist. The goal of Laku is to cement a strong foundation for a path that carries them through life. This is how these children will become artists who leave their mark on the Finnish cultural landscape, making it an equal space for everyone, and demonstrating that there is no one right way of being an artist, but instead it belongs to all. Deafness becomes something to be treasured. It becomes a positive attribute that requires an environment that supports activities in a native language. ●

Exercises

Exercise 1

Think about the sense of hearing. In your group or activity, what things are dependent on hearing?

Exercise 2

Have you or anyone you know heard from someone that their physical attributes are a limitation or that they prevent an activity? Reflect on the impact and consequences of such a message.

Exercise 3

‘In inclusive thinking, we focus primarily on abilities and resources, and any differences or deviation in abilities are seen as features, not as weaknesses or reasons for ostracising. The opposite of inclusion is segregation, where special groups receive separate services based on their differences and challenges’. Discuss in which cases segregation is called for, or where it could be a better option than inclusion. Share your thoughts with the group.



A Disabled Artist?

Julianna Brandt-Smal

A Disabled Artist

An empty space.

And intuition.

I'm in that empty space.

And guided by intuition.

Although it often feels like it's precisely the empty space that makes people focus on me.

Me, who by all norms regulations sections of law meaningful and meaningless inner messages in peoples' minds shouldn't be in that empty space.

The empty space.

Focuses its eyes on me, and yet.

I enjoy performing. How mischievous?

How ludicrous?

We need something to guide us. I'm pondering.

What is artistry? What is the artistry inside me?

How do I apply meaning to it? How do others apply meaning to it?

Are we the same or are we different?

Why are so many eyes on me? Why do I either face so many expectations, or no expectations at all?

Disabled, but she doesn't look like one. What does not looking disabled have to do with how expectations are formed?

Disability and artistry, disabled artistry, sacrilege.

I don't like it. Remember, disability isn't an adjective, it's an identity. I don't identify as a disabled artist, only as an artist.

People try to brand me in different ways.

Like look. Look at the disabled artist now doing her disabled art in her disabled way.

But it's not like that, it's definitely not like that.

I only wish

To do things in peace,

to be in that empty space in peace, channelling art from within me and into me, and to focus on my intuition instead of people's looks that demand and question the disabled artist now that she's here, now that she's really here.

When she overcame all obstacles and made it here. Oh how lovely how enormous and what a privilege it is that, with me being here, the celebration of art, the equity of art, the representativeness of art can now tick a box.

After all, we've achieved the goals for equality.

Because here, in a hub of diversity, as a diverse person.

Oh how inclusive oh how lovely is a disabled artist.

And, she made it here and our spaces are safe.

For you, oh disabled artist, although you don't look like how a disabled person is often pictured, but perhaps that's precisely the reason this is even greater.

This is even more interesting.

This will reach an even wider audience.

Oh disabled artist.

How lovely that you're here and in such a fun-loving mood, and we bow to you.

Thank you thank you for being here

so we get to admire your disabled art.



Internalised Ableism

I just composed a piece of improvised poetry. It just came from my brain, and in fact, I wish to improvise this entire text, because that's how I compose my poems anyway, by improvising. Something that comes raw directly from within me, doesn't need to be matured or crafted or revised, but is complete and valuable as it is.

In this essay or text, I wish to stop for a minute to address the expectations a disabled artist faces from others, as well as from internalised ableism, and I refer to my own experiences.

Firstly, as you can see from my poem, I'm particularly interested in the way art made by marginalised groups is perceived. What I mean is that art made by a woman with an immigrant background is not seen as merely art, but always as art made by a woman with an immigrant background. It's always assumed that a trans-person creates art from their own perspective, channelling their process of sex reas-

signment or something else, somehow addressing the diversity of sex and gender in their work.

I often feel that as a disabled artist I'm expected to address disability, that people want me to somehow open the experiences of a person born with disabilities.

'How does it feel when the world has always been like this for you. Have you ever wanted to be free of your disability? Weren't you, Julianna, annoyed with the training wheels on your bicycle? Do your feet hurt? Why does your foot turn inward like that when you walk? Why is your hip twisted? Does it ever untwist? When the physiotherapist used to move you in front of the mirror when you were little, and even though you stood straight as an arrow like the good little schoolgirl you were, why did it feel like you were still twisted in knots.'

And that conflict is interesting, and to tell you the truth, that's what I'd like to talk about, precisely what that conflict is and how to portray

that conflict in art. But why don't I? Why do I rarely create poems about disability? Why do I often create poems about everything else and only implicitly talk about disability?

So, I'm a performance poet. What I find particularly important is my stage presence. I get inspired by the audience, by being on stage, by the microphone, by my trembling hands and trembling voice, by the flow I hear in my voice.

And all that is super important to me. That's why I'm recording this for the first time, I've never recorded at home before, and in some funny way it feels like recording a poetry gig. And actually, that's something I've done a bit.

So, for me, being an artist in fact means out-doing myself. It's not about audience worship or performing for the audience. At the end of the day, I do performance poetry for myself, even though the audience plays a crucial part. And what does that crucial part of the audience have to do with performance poetry and in what way does it tickle my senses?

When I'm on stage, I get very self-conscious. That's when I actually want everybody to look at me. I even crave their attention. It's interesting, because when I was growing up, I was extremely shy and even timid.

But now, I have moments when I crave being watched and listened to, and I crave attention. At the same time, the few steps I take to the stage – and unfortunately the stage is often ornamented by stairs or a platform of some kind that makes it difficult for me – I often get, through proprioception and sensory input, even more aware of the fact that here, right here, walks a disabled artist, and I feel that then my stiff legs stiffen even more, and I think that everyone is looking at me in a funny way like 'Ok, she's got some decent poetry, but why is she walking that way on stage?' Or if a friend helps me up on the stage, I fear the audience is wondering if that's part of the performance.

And at the same time, I'm aware of the fact that probably all this I'm telling you now is at least ninety-seven and a half percent internalised ableism. And what does that have to do

with art? What does it have to do with my art – that's it, that's it. How do I move about on stage, or how I don't move? I feel that the spasticity caused by my congenital cerebral palsy nails me on my spot. There's the mic stand, there's under-160-centimetres-tall me, there's the phone or notebook of poems in one hand. There's the microphone, there's the gaze of the audience, there's me gazing at the audience. There are so many concurrent and simultaneous situations I need to handle, and it's all about art, and it's also all about what kinds of expectations I set for my own performance, how well I can balance all the themes and little bits that go with it.

I often feel like I have two different ways of being an artist, a performance artist working in a space. I feel it's precisely that I get stuck, my movements are spastic, I move in a slow, robotic kind of way, without the cool robot dance swagger. You know what I mean, the disco kind.

At the same time, I've always said that I make clumsiness cute. It's kind of like flirting for me. It's somehow characteristic to me, like a trademark. And I'm proud of it. Then again, I'm very nervous. In a poem, I once wrote that my nervous system is too nervous, and this was in reference to my cerebral palsy.

I feel like if someone would film my performances, and people have, I would always be doing a whisking motion with my hand. I would gesticulate with my hands. Which, in a Finnish context, is undoubtedly somehow interesting or different, but I do gesticulate a lot, and some might see it as lively, which is how I see it. But then I also notice that I would see even that as a type of disability. Like, 'oh, she's nervous. She can't even hold back those nervous ticks.' And then again, so what if I can't?

Because I'm glad of it, maybe it's part of the story. Maybe it's a part of me, and it's a part of me and the performance.

Tokenism

In short, by internalised ableism we mean all those internalised ways in which the usually oppressive society looks at you and which you

yourself have, in a way, accepted as a part of you. For example, as I pointed out, it's very easy for me to see myself through what you might call disability lenses. Because that's the way society looks at me, so as someone with a congenital disability, my childhood has been medicalised through and through.

And all the time there's that painful friction of, okay, being a disabled person in a world of non-disabled people, and as a disabled person facing the expectations of non-disabled people, but also facing the expectations of other disabled people. That's what I find interesting. That's why I talk about how it affects the kind of art I create. Thematically it doesn't affect it all. But actually, when I deconstruct the way I exist in a space, how I create art in a space, into its atom-sized components, as you may have noticed from the text above, I'm sort of processing it subconsciously through my disability lenses.

Now, finally, I'd like to talk about how art created by disabled people is perceived, and how I think there's something toxically tokenistic about it. You may ask, 'what's tokenism?', and I can tell you that I'm not very good at defining things, but for me, tokenism means seemingly promoting, let's say, equality and diversity. Let's include, for example, a person of colour into a work community because it looks good on the outside, it makes good PR and paints a beautiful picture of us as a work community. But the actual, bigger acts of equality and equity are left out. And everything is just a sort of facade.

I often feel that my disability has been decorated by this kind of idea of tokenism.

In my art, I do have to consider whether the reason I'm asked to play a gig is because I'm a bloody good performance poet, or because I'm disabled. Although I have to admit that not an awful lot of people know I'm disabled, because, as I said, I rarely address it in my poetry. Because I just don't find it interesting in that moment, because I don't find it interesting in that moment to create poetry about it, as I've said, in an explicit and visible way.

I often feel like I don't tick the disabled artist box because my art isn't disability art in any way, which is not to say disability art isn't super important. It definitely is. Art is an amazing tool for addressing social issues and fixing them, giving them attention, visibility, and a platform. But. For me, art is important for art's sake. I believe it has value in itself, not as an instrument of politics. So I want to create poetry about everything beside it. I want to create poems about a bird I saw that had a broken wing, about a fox I came across that looked oddly grey. I want to create poems about tree bark peeling off and revealing a red colour underneath, wondering if it could be used to paint something on paper. I want to create poems about how I feel anxious today, how I feel anxious in a good way today, and seeing hare tracks in the snow and wondering if the hare had its young with it.

Maybe the fact that I don't do disability art is somehow surprising to some people. Maybe for me, this is a way to fight the kind of silent tokenism of 'hey, I'm here today, I happen to be disabled, I happen to be an artist, but these layers, these sections and worlds don't overlap today, so I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I still make some bloody terrific art.'

And I'd like to pause here, and I'd like that you, dear reader, would pause here as well. What kind of internalised goals and expectations are you considering when you encounter a disabled person creating art. Do you assume that you have to know that the artist is disabled? Curiosity is normal. I'm a very curious person, too.

Do you assume that they somehow address disability, or embodiment, or ableism, or otherness in their art? And what if they don't? What if you don't find those keywords, what do you expect to find?

And what if it's not like that? How does it make you feel? How does it feel in all your senses? How does it feel inside you? Are you disappointed? Surprised? Do you catch yourself in this point of view, thinking, convincing your-

self that, after all, disabled people often make disability art?

And when you consider all these questions, remember to be kind to yourself. We can't always help our assumptions, but it's important to recognise them, and just as important as re-

cognising the assumptions, it's important to recognise that no one – not with their art, with the content of their art, with the presence of their art, with the identity of their art – owes us anything. ●

Exercises

Exercise 1

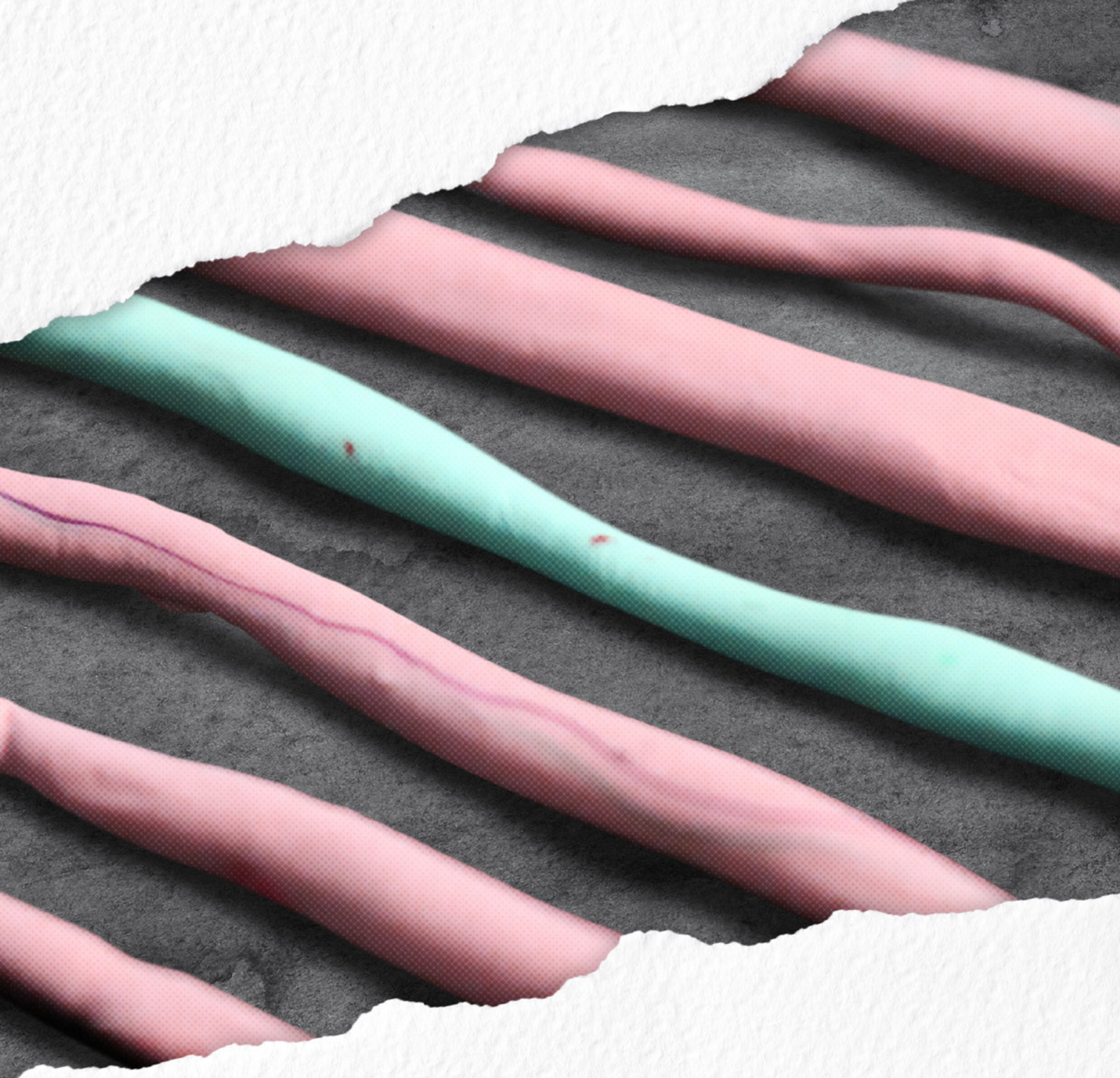
Reflect on what you are like in situations where you must present or perform something. What factors most define your actions? Is it your emotional state, audience's attention, the desire to perform, a chance to win, a desire to be part of a group activity, the importance of the matter you are presenting, or something else?

Exercise 2

Reflect on the ways to use movement, voice, and presence in a group activity. Can you find ways to support your confidence and sense of security in a group activity? For example, speaking quietly or loudly, repeating a small movement, physical proximity to other people, or holding an object?

Exercise 3

Write or compose a poem about an issue related to equality and accessibility that is important to you. Alternatively, you can assemble sentences and words from cut-up newspapers. Present it to someone or record it for yourself.



Representation Matters

**Faisa Qasim and active members of
the Mentoring for Future project**

Representation means being seen. It means that many kinds of people are widely seen in society and its different strands. However, there are several degrees of representation, and just being seen is not enough. Voices of people from different backgrounds, different ethnicities, and different minorities must be heard. Minorities should be allowed to be active, independent agents. They must be able to see people like themselves in media and culture as active creators.

When talking about representation and its meaning, we must listen to the minorities themselves to avoid the pitfalls of defining things from a position of power (Rinne & Wass, 2017). The more we see true diversity in media, culture, and society, the more we give a platform to people to be who they are. People have the right to want and hope for different things, to build themselves a fuller identity in their own terms. Representation must be total, so we not only see minorities in pictures – but also as creators and content producers (Rask, 2021).

As Agents in a Society

Studies provide humanity with new information that enables us to shift our perspectives. This trickles down directly to our culture, our ways of working, and our attitudes. In studies on minorities, the diversity of researchers matters, since although there are standards of objectivity, we are all human and thus can be unconsciously biased. It would also be important to compile statistics based on ethnicity in Finland. Now an entire group of people is missing from the data as ethnicity is not a factor in statistics. People who are born in Finland and speak Finnish as their first language, but whose parents are immigrants and who are visibly part of a minority, are seen only as Finnish in statistics, regardless of their ethnic background. According to Elone (2020), due to the lack of ethnicity statistics, it is impossible to study, for example, what is the visibility of ethnic groups in Finn-

ish media compared to their actual sizes. (Elone, 2020 ja Ruskeat Tytöt, 2022).

We are defined by our own experiences of society, and we must actively steer clear of the prejudices and attitudes formed by them. For example, the view of an equal society as experienced by a white Western person is skewed, since they have not had to experience the structural racism of the societal system. Thus, it is important that minorities who suffer from structural racism get a chance to do all the things the ‘majority’ can do. It is important to highlight who is telling what about whom, so that the imagery, statistics, and data are not distorted by an outsider’s way of looking and get trampled under the dominating culture – as unfortunately has been the case throughout history. (Rinne & Wass, 2017 ja Elone, 2020)

A Voice of One’s Own

It is important that, for example, representatives of immigrant minorities get to represent themselves and speak about their issues. Who else could know about their experience? On the other hand, representatives of minorities should also have the freedom to be presented not just as part of a minority. People are many things, and identity is not limited to one characteristic. One person cannot represent an entire minority, as there is a lot of difference and differing thoughts within a minority group. The key to true representation does not lie in homogenous presentation. Here the content and the creators of culture become crucial. (Rask, 2021)

As a person from an ethnic minority sees others like themselves in cultural products as diverse and differing agents, their ideas of their own possibilities in life are automatically widened (Qasim, 2022).

It does more harm than good to insist that minorities only talk about the same issues and take a stance on them, rather than giving them the chance to just be people with their different characteristics and interests. This is often combined with the free educational work that

the members of minorities are often forced to do for the benefit of the majority. Those born with privileges should be prepared to find out for themselves, and when asking for education from minorities, they should be compensated for their time, knowledge, and the minority stress caused by the education.

Diversity of Representation

In early 2022, Faisa Qasim and Salaado Qasim organised a photography exhibition *Suuria unelmia – tarinoita suomalaisista* (Dreaming Big – Stories of Finns). The exhibition gave the spotlight to people from Finnish minorities who have become established in positions in the Finnish society. It included, for example, politicians, an actor, an author, a reporter, an athlete, and a psychotherapist. In reviews of the exhibition, the significance of representation was highlighted, particularly the diversity of representation. ‘The stories of the exhibition gave light to the significance of diverse and positive representation and broadened the horizons of what Finnishness is. Many stories showed the power of setting an example,’ organiser Salaado Qasim said of the exhibition.

Also, the stories that accompanied the photographs highlighted the importance of examples in young people’s lives. When you see people like you doing different things, the world becomes more open and the spectrum of options wider in their lives.

Our society is largely portraying only one kind of humanity as the role model in Western society. This portrayal is very white and narrow, and it can be confining and even hazardous. Of course, it works for some people, as they can see themselves in this traditional portrayal. What is toxic about it is the position of power in the imagery. This means that many, for example people with immigrant backgrounds, do not fit this mould and suffer under its yoke, or instead live trying to pursue consciously or unconsciously. The narrowness of the imagery causes, at its worst, direct threat. When people do not see enough diversity in media and cultur-

al imagery, they do not understand it when they come across it. This leads to fear and even violence towards different minority groups. (Syys-taival, 2020)

Identification Gives Strength to Dream Big

An excellent example of the diversity of representation is the children’s book *Anisa tahtoo kierrättää* (Anisa Wants to Recycle, 2022) by Salaado Qasim. The focus of the book is not the usual racism connected with ethnic minorities or the promotion of multiculturalism that is often demanded of them. In the book, Anisa gets to just be Anisa – her background and potential minority stress are not highlighted as themes. Instead, the protagonist has an interest in recycling, and that is what the story is about. In its illustrations, brown children and families are presented naturally. As just people.

The book both shows an important representation to brown children, as well as shows different people doing different things for all children to see, which is valuable. This is a way to undo the supremacy of whiteness in our society. It is crucial for the improvement of our society that the dominant group does not pigeon-hole minorities in just certain roles, since that plays a part in not letting these groups break free of negative representation.

Another important book example on widening representation is a work based on the *Suuria unelmia* exhibition, *Suuria unelmia – tarinoita suomalaisista, jotka muuttivat maailmaa* (Stories of Finns Who Changed the World), written by Salaado Qasim, Faisa Qasim, and Roosa Oksanen. The book drives home the point of needing diversity in representation: ‘There are endless ways to follow your own path, and each story is equally valuable. Therefore, each person needs support in finding their dreams and making them come true – as well as inspiring role models who show that anything is possible,’ the introduction of the book states.

Just the fact that the book’s title includes the word ‘Finns’ is crucial to representation. In the

book, influencers share their different stories and life paths with the reader – and they are all Finns. This kind of experience of identification is invaluable to people who have not previously had access to a similar level of representation in the current cultural atmosphere.

Shadia Rask (2021) writes in her essay, *Representaatiolla on merkitystä – näillä keinoilla lisää työyhteisösi moninaisuutta* (Representation matters – Here’s how you can enhance the diversity in your work community): “Representation has to do with identification and being seen. Particularly in childhood and youth, we are constructing our identities and modeling ourselves after people who we think are like us. It is tremendously harmful if there are no

role models or the people to identify with are found only in narrow and stereotypical roles” (Rask 2021). The photography exhibition mentioned above was aimed at young people in the capital city region and addressed this need. People cannot become what they have not been able to see (Syystaival, 2020).

Our society is in a state of flux, and outdated imagery and attitudes must be broken to enhance the wellbeing of people and a sense of belonging. We are not alike, and we are not here alone. Mutual respect and understanding, as well as identifying discriminatory historical constructs and demanding their change, are ways to push society towards a more equal future. ●

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Wheel of power and Privilege

Wheel of power and privilege (the next page) is derived from several sources.

<https://ccrweb.ca/en/anti-oppression>

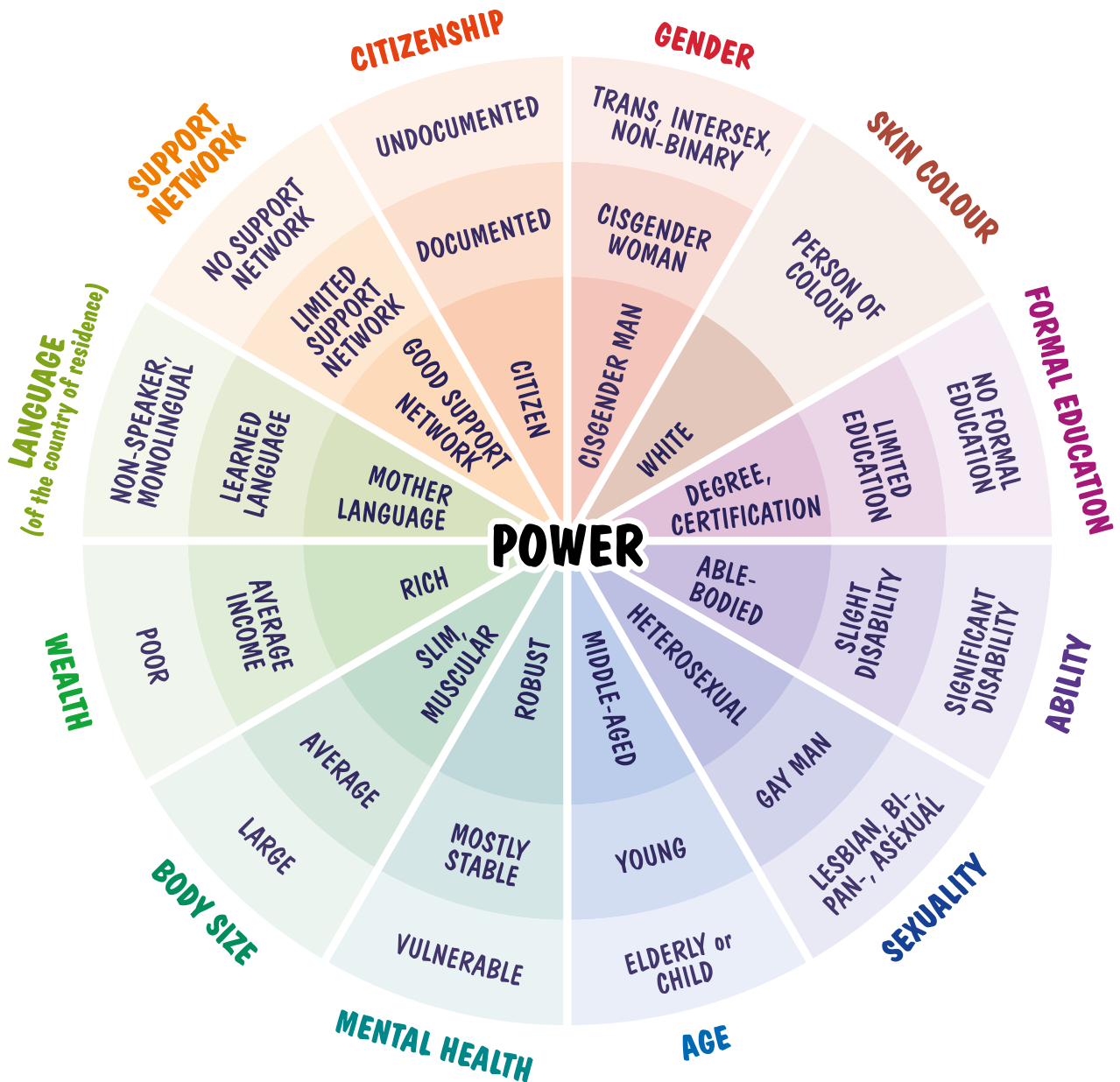
https://www.thisshowyoucan.com/post/_wheel_of_power_and_privilege

<https://julkaisut.haaga-helia.fi/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/05/etuoikeuskeha-tekstiin-1024x647.jpg>

Exercises

Exercise 1

Look up the concept of the wheel of power and privilege below. Notice that the wheel of power and privilege does not illustrate the desired situation but is a continuously changing illustration of the unequal distribution of individual power and prosperity in different situations. Think about where you would fit on the different categories of the wheel of power and privilege. Where do the members of your group fit? How might this affect your group and how it is promoting equality? What are your special strengths, and how could you improve them? Could your work aim at breaking the inequality illustrated in the wheel of power and privilege?



Exercise 2

Think and try to remember if you've ever encountered ways of performing in art or cultural activities that made you confused or want to resist or question what you just saw/experienced? For example, witnessing an activity or a role the values of which you did not share. Discuss and share your experiences.

Group exercise

Try this exercise on the experience of being seen with your group. Introduce yourselves in the manners described below. Do people notice you if you don't say anything or don't make eye contact? What does it feel like being ignored? You can vary the exercise endlessly. Discuss the emotions the exercise made you feel.

- The group watches as you calmly walk in front of them, look at them for a while, tell them your name, and then calmly leave.
- The group watches as you walk in front of them, look at them silently for a while, and then leave.
- The group watches as you walk in front of them, but you don't make eye contact. What if you come to introduce yourself but the group leaves instead, or starts yelling their own names?

Advanced exercise

The principles of a safer space are meant to enable open and respectful actions and discussions that promote equality. The principles of a safer space are often written down, but they can just as well be illustrated creatively, for example, through the means of art. The important thing is that all the participants are aware of the principles and are committed to follow them. Does your group or organisation have principles of a safer space? If not, come up with ones together with everyone. If you already have guidelines for a safer space, go through them together and see if they require updating, and discuss how the guidelines are put into action now. The instructor makes sure the conversation does not become personal, but the guideline is created and discussed with focus on the subject matter.

Education as a Constructor of Social and Cultural Sustainability for the 21st century (Sus21)

This module has been created as one of the outputs of Erasmus+ project called “Education as a Constructor of Social and Cultural Sustainability for the 21st century”. The two-year long project started in 2020, and it had six partner organizations from four European Countries, representing different field of adult education in different educational traditions.



The idea of the project was to create applicable and interesting education modules for adult education field, concerning different aspects of social and cultural sustainability. The project was in close connection to the widely accepted and adopted concept of life-long learning and continuous education: education should be available for all people regardless of age, gender, home country or economic status. The importance of life-long learning is emphasized in the UN document “Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (2015); Social sustainability means equality for all, gender equality, health and education. So-

cially sustainable development means that the conditions for well-being are passed down from one generation to the next. It aims to reduce inequalities in well-being, health and inclusion.

The main idea of the project was to bring out the thoughts of eco-social education through the goals of the Agenda 2030. The partners have chosen and shared among themselves the goals that are most conducive to social and cultural sustainable development. Each partner has created and built a toolkit of one or a few goals with material, methods and exercises.

All the toolkits from the different goals of the Agenda 2030 have been introduced below briefly. You can find all the toolkits and information about the project itself from the website: <https://sus21.eu>

Adult Education Promoting Sustainable Development

University of Eastern Finland (UEF)

Sustainable development is a topic occupying the minds of more and more adult educators in today’s world. But do we actually know the ways in which sustainability is connected to everyday life, educational policy, or citizenship? The training modules of the online course “Adult education promoting sustainable development”, showcase the different aspects of social sustainability in the contemporary world. The course is open to all, regardless of place or time, as an open online course. Using adult education as a tool, we can work on achieving sustainable goals.

Link to course:

<https://digicampus.fi/enrol/index.php?id=3782>

Responsible Consumption and Production. Avoid Food Waste!

Autokreacja Foundation

This Intellectual Output is linked to the Agenda 2030 Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. In the EU, an estimated 20 per cent of food is lost or wasted with a grave impact on the global economy, society and environment. The activities will focus on building adult participants motivation for taking action in solving common issues, increase their confidence as citizens, while enhancing employability skills using entrepreneurship as an activator.

Health and Inclusion for Social Sustainability

CPIA 1 Brescia

“Health and inclusion for social sustainability” includes a collection of activities carried out by some teachers of the Adult Educational Provincial Center 1 Brescia (CPIA 1 Brescia), with groups of students aged 16 to 60, Italians and immigrants from Asia, Africa and Europe, with different levels of proficiency in Italian as a second language. The aim is to promote the SDG 3 of the Agenda 2030 “Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages”, to increase the ability to acquire and understand health-relevant information and to make informed choices in favour of one’s own psycho-fiscal well-being and of the community. All these aspects are presented in the video-story you find below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZ6Icw-p6uT4&t=3s>

Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women

SYNTHESIS Center

The main objective of this module is to empower women and girls and strengthen their voice and participation in the society, while building the knowledge, skills and competences necessary to support gender equality, and women empowerment though focusing on women. Also, it raises awareness on the opportunities that women need to shape their future by knowing their social and economic rights. All these objectives will support combating discrimination and injustice against women and girls. The module has the shape of a PDF document. In the first pages of the PDF you will find an introductory video that will help you get into the topic easily.

Hyvinvointi ja kestävyys – Kuinka rakentaa kestävää työkulttuuria

University of Trieste (UniTs)

This publication focuses on well-being in a working environment. It represents a key theme for promoting a sustainable working environment and the health and well-being of people. The main objective of this publication is to generate transformation and improvement in the work context, working on two different levels: individual and organizational. It consists of a questionnaire to manage a self-assessment that can support employers and employees to jointly generate a better work context and organizational climate, identifying resources (internal and external to one’s own work context) and removing the criticalities that hinder it. It also contains a guideline to analyze the data results and deciding on the strategy to be adopted.

Kansalaisfoorumi, 2023



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