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Ogmios

Good Practice Guide

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What is Ogmios?

OGMIUS addresses the training needs of learning disabled (LD) theatre makers and the non-learning disabled practitioners who work with them in France, Sweden and the UK. This is in response to a need, across Europe, for effective alternative vocational professional training, towards enhanced employability for LD people who are consistently excluded from mainstream training provision. OGMIUS is a partnership between three theatre companies - Mind the Gap, Moomsteatern and Compagnie de l'Oiseau-Mouche - who have each been making professional, internationally touring theatre with LD theatre makers for over 30 years.

Six Trainings in Dance, Music, multi-lingual text, éducateurs practice, recruitment and selection of artists, and closely shared observation of rehearsal will all contribute to the Partners' long-term aim of defining key competences to further strengthen OGMIUS partners' creative working methods with LD artists.



Compagnie de l'Oiseau Mouche

Roubaix, France

A permanent troupe of twenty-three professional actors.

Created in 1978, twenty professional learning-disabled actors are now part of Compagnie de l'Oiseau-Mouche. The level and quality of the shows have enabled a touring activity so far unreachable for disabled artists in France. Compagnie de l'Oiseau-Mouche is the first organisation in France to support people with learning disabilities to become professional actors. The troupe aims to put its singularity into a strength, to enrich its productions and the whole performing sector.

Productions are firstly performed in l'Oiseau-Mouche Theatre, located in Roubaix, next to Lille. They are then toured nationally and internationally. To date the company has created more than 50 productions and have performed over 1700 times both in France and internationally. Compagnie l'Oiseau-Mouche is well-known by the French public authorities, and is granted support by the city of Roubaix, the North region of France, the French Ministry of Culture,



**l'oiseau-
mouche**

Europe Creative and ERASMUS+.

To diversify, Compagnie l'Oiseau-Mouche is permanently searching for new artistic form. The result is an abundant repertoire with multiple aesthetics and influences. For each production, a new director is invited to work with the actors. This meeting is thought as a global sharing: the director comes to the theatre, present how they work, leads a workshop which can then lead into creating a new performance. The director also casts and choose the actors they would like to work with.

Compagnie l'Oiseau-Mouche offer professional training to all actors. This training is a significant part of the activities in the theatre and is strongly linked to each production – led by visiting artists and directors. Training is also led by the senior actors to the newer hired actors.

Residency

The residency was divided into two parts. The first week was directed by Michel Schweizer and was focused on the relationship between performers and audience. A few examples of Michel's past practice were screened in order to explain his artistic approach. Then, the actors experimented in several practical exercises: mainly improvisation and collective exercises.

The second week, led by Pascal Quéneau, was more focused on physical practice and the relationship between the actors, their body and the floor. The exercises were performed as solos, duos, trios, and worked on watching/being watched, as well as contact (between the actors and with the floor).

The main objective was to allow the actors to ask themselves about their bodies, the way it moves, and the way they move with others, and in the room. To meet the other actors from the three countries and the translation were two noteworthy issues everyone had to deal with on

the first week. Compagnie l'Oiseau-Mouche have learned a lot from the residencies across the project lifetime. "First of all, we realised that it was possible to work on an artistic creation with people who do not speak the same language." (Annabelle Mailliez, Development Manager). The support staff ("éducateurs") realised that their support was very far from the work on stage unlike the English and the Swedish staffs (who are constantly practicing on stage with the actors). "Three other companies have probably learned that l'Oiseau-Mouche work with various directors, which enable the actors to be 'at ease' with different approaches and artistic worlds." (Annabelle Mailliez, Development Manager).

Strategy

Compagnie de l'Oiseau-Mouche staff is divided between administrative and "educative" jobs. The educative team is composed by four permanent employers who graduated a bachelor degree in adapted support for disabled persons. This team guides, assists and cares for the artists with learning disabilities. They go with them during the tours, assist them during the rehearsals and workshops with guest artists. This educative team do not intervene between the actors and the guest directors in artistic issues; they are here to support as mediators.



Moomsteatern

Malmö, Sweden

A professional inclusive theatre company employing actors with learning-disabilities.

Moomsteatern is a professional inclusive theatre company in Malmö, Sweden. Actors with learning disabilities are employed on a full-time basis to be on stage often integrated with non-disabled freelance actors. The sole aim of Moomsteatern is to produce performing arts of high artistic quality.

The company was established in 1987 and since being set up Moomsteatern has the expressed goal to work with artistic objectives, banning all therapeutic and social aims. This means that the focus of the group is always the audience, the story and the art. The company is a non-profit foundation, with fifteen employees including artists, technical staff and administration. For each theatre production Moomsteatern collaborates with professional guest artists, musicians, directors, scenographers and costume designers.

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Moomsteatern creates two or three productions each year which they perform at their own stage in Malmö to their main audience in the South of Sweden (Skåne), but they also tour nationally and internationally.

We do continuous in-service training for the actors, to learn new skills and keep up with their acting skills. We work with a large variety of directors and producers. Sometimes those directors are completely new to Moomsteatern and sometimes they return after a few years to make a second or third production. Our artistic leader chooses our repertoire, which directors we work with and how to cast our actors based on the individual skills and challenges of each actor. Our directors or playwrights always adapt the script to the actors.

Moomsteatern strive to be an equal workplace and there are no health care workers. The focal point for the actors is the development of their professional skills. To never bend the rule of demanding high artistic quality is essential to their success. This is made possible due to support from their colleagues.

Residency

The Moomsteatern residency was Textlab. Textlab was about experimenting with the possibilities and challenges of working on the same script/text in three languages. The idea came from a workshop Moomsteatern, Compagnie l'Oiseau-Mouche and Mind The Gap did during their first collaboration project 'Crossing The Line'. At that time three actors – one from each country – worked on a scene in their individual languages and we wanted to deepen this by doing a whole play together. The idea was to find a way of communicating what is being said, between each other and with the audience, without actually understanding the words that the other person says.

The restrictions of the pandemic put another layer or challenge on this, by that communication happened through a screen, which of course restricted the use of body language. Moomsteaterns hope was that Textlab could lead to new artistic ideas of how a play can be made, and that the actors that were part of the project to have developed their skills in learning and communicating text.

Strategy

There are three people hired at Moomsteatern that are called the backstage team; two stage managers and one rehearsal and production coach. The stage managers have tasks very similar to what they would do at any other theatre, but at Moomsteatern the support of the actors are extended tasks built in to the everyday work. The rehearsal and production coach is hired mainly to support the actors and the team during productions and in-service training. The actors are encouraged to be as self-propelled as possible, and staff only help with issues directly connected to their work. This includes the in-service training for our actors.

In some ways every employee at Moomsteatern is part of the support work. They all find ways to help each other, to adapt the workplace to the needs of all colleagues and take part in the in-house training. The backstage team work closely together and communicate on a daily basis. Some tasks that are about supporting the actors during rehearsals or other activities are done based on which one of them is available. The backstage team also communicate on a weekly basis with the artistic director and the executive director, who are deeply involved in the work and development of the actors.



Mind the Gap

Bradford, England

Creating bold, cutting-edge theatre with learning disabled artists.

Mind the Gap was formed in 1988 and is based in Bradford, West Yorkshire. Our main aim is to raise the visibility of, and opportunities for, learning-disabled artists within the creative sector: as performers, theatre makers, participants and audiences. Three main activities form the basis of our work: 1) making and touring productions and events led by our core team of learning-disabled artists; 2) running a thriving training Academy for 70+ aspiring artists; and 3) collaborating with fellow companies, artists and cultural venues to make the UK's creative scene more accessible.

Mind the Gap's artistic programme is created and delivered by a core team of learning-disabled and/or autistic artists, who are in supported employment and whose talents are continuously maintained and developed. We make a wide range of work – sometimes inspired by relevant issues or experiences, or an existing text or script.



Mind the Gap supports a company of fourteen artists that have completed Academy training and work within the company on various projects and productions. As core members of the company, we invite these artists to be involved in all of our work and we work closely with them to support them on their journey within the arts industry. Projects that artists are involved with include company productions, leading workshops, sector leadership, developing their own work and continued professional development.

One of our main objectives as a company is raise awareness to industry professionals and other performance makers/touring companies about working with people with a learning disability and/or autism. We are passionate about working with our artists to share our expertise and support other companies to be more inclusive with their practice.

Residency

The residency hosted by Mind the Gap was a week-long music residency working with one of our freelance music artists, Craig Lees, exploring song writing, soundscapes and telling stories through music. The aim of the residency was to share with our partners Compagnie "Oiseau-Mouche and Moonsteam the skills-based learning that exists at Mind the Gap as part of the artists' training and CPD.

Throughout the week the participating artists had the opportunity to develop skills as solo performers as well as working in an ensemble. As an ensemble, their journey during the week culminated with a song they wrote together that they sang in each others' languages.

During this residency we piloted the Doodle Book, an accessible resource created in collaboration with York St John University, illustrator Brian Hartley, and artists at Mind the Gap, designed to

support artists to reflect on their own performance practice. At the end of each day artists from each company would reflect on their practice using selected pages from the Doodle Book, completing activities and questions that prompts discussion about their work. We received great feedback about the Doodle Book: the artists from the partner countries really liked the different, interesting ways to reflect on their experiences and having a structure to help reflect straight away after each session.

Mind the Gap's biggest learning has been confirming how important the skills-based work we do is, and the relationship between the training and the professional work that we make. As the other partners do not have quite the same focus on skills training within their companies, it was great to share what can be possible with their LD Artists, and to work with the brilliant artists/companies involved in the project.

Strategy

Mind the Gap has a dedicated support team within the company that supports artists and students in various areas of their work and training within the company. The two main areas of support we offer is learning support and pastoral support.

The Academy training programmes each have a dedicated support worker to support students with their training and are responsible for ensuring each students' individual needs are accommodated for, according to their access needs assessment that takes place during the recruitment period. Support workers also provide pastoral support to students and artists outside of their training which may include attending an event, touring work and rehearsals.

The support we offer is individualised and all dependant on how much the artist requires. We believe that the support we offer at Mind the Gap should be championing the skills and abilities the artists have and guiding them to work successfully within the arts industry.



Creative Doodle Book

We all know what creativity is. It is being imaginative; or expressing yourself in a new or playful way. We are all creative, but sometimes we need don't know where to start or need a little help. The Doodle Book was developed to support the artists with learning disabilities and autism express and reflect upon their creativity.

The Doodle Book was produced through a collaborative process with artists from Mind the Gap. Together we discussed what it means to be creative and the different stages of making theatre, dance and art. The result was a series of open tasks divided into three sections: Do; Think; and Reflect.

By 'open tasks' we mean that they are accessible to everyone, regardless of skill or training, and that there is no right or wrong way of responding.

Since then we have used the Doodle Book in a range of contexts, particularly as a resource to support community and learning-disability arts during the Covid-19 pandemic. We've been running Zoom workshops using the Doodle Book and have found it an excellent way for people to work together while physically apart. People who have been involved in the project have told us it generates a positive effect on their mood and general wellbeing. Other responses have said that it has provided a structure for self-reflection that is playful and allows people to develop confidence in their own creative voice.



The Doodle Book was developed by
Matthew Reason (York St John University)
in collaboration with Mind the Gap.

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Photo Elicitation

Photo-elicitation was first adopted by photographer and researcher John Collier in 1957 and has become one of the most widely known and frequently used techniques within social science research and is based on the simple principle of using one or more images in an interview and asking the informant to comment on them. The images may be produced by the researcher, or informants can produce the images and then discuss the meaning. A pivotal aspect of this approach is not so much studying the images as analysing how informants respond to them, attributing social and personal meaning and values.

In Photo-Elicitation the researcher assumes that the images, the meanings we attribute to them, the emotions they arouse in the observer, and the information they elicit generate insights that do not necessarily or exclusively correspond to those obtained in verbal inquiry. Each interpretation describes the specific methods through which we observe and experience the world, mediated by social and cultural institutions. It allows us to gain an insight into another person's experiences. The activity of observation is inextricably linked to our way of thinking, imagination, memory of past experiences and our ability to combine these elements.

The main aim for the photo-elicitation for the Ogmios Residencies was for artists from all three companies to reflect on the residencies they had taken part in, to understand what worked well and what each company might be able to learn from through their artists experiences.

Photo-elicitation can also be a useful technique for breaching the communication impasse between artist and facilitator and/or support, and to collect information in an alternative way to just using 'words. Photo-elicitation can help to promote more relaxed and more aware participation in artist development /

performance development, by exploiting the evocative power of images to empower artists to express themselves more freely in producing the snapshots and, secondly, by exploiting the power of images to catalyse informants' exploration and association of meanings and understandings in the discussions about the snapshots. This is what happened at all Ogmios Residencies, when we were able to establish an effective link between the content of the images produced, the artists understandings and the topics the project explored including artists with learning disabilities self-reflection.

If there is the time, will and opportunity to adopt photo-elicitation as part of artist self-reflections and artist development – the most interesting possibility offered by its use would seem to be the establishment of a dialogue in which complementary and concurrent understandings of the physical, social, and cultural





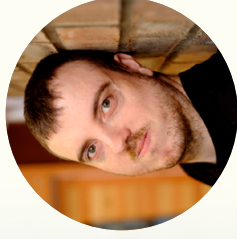
I was nervous at first but I have learnt a lot. I got into the swing of things and I have really enjoyed it all.
Jez Colborne, Mind the Gap



I only knew the work of my own theatre, I didn't know other work.
Trygve Algeus, Moomsteatern



It was very nice meeting all the companies. I was rich and I would like that it continues.
Frédéric Foulon, L'Oiseau Mouche



I have been inspired by the residencies, the people and their talent.
Alan Clay, Mind the Gap



The residencies have provided all companies with lots of invaluable learning throughout the project lifetime, allowing for time to be spent at each partner company and multiple opportunities to learn more about each venues processes, cultures and artistic visions.

All companies went into the Ogmios project, funded by Erasmus+, with an open mind about how they could develop their own practice through learning about other companies practice and experiencing it first hand, as well as sharing their own practice.

We hope this good practice guide gives you an insight into each companies culture and the methods used across the last three years.

For more information on the project please visit: [**crossingtheline eu**](https://crossingtheline.eu)

Lauren Hall is a PhD researcher at York St John University. Over the last three years Lauren has been embedded in leading learning disability arts organisation Mind the Gap to conduct research focusing on questions of visibility, career opportunities and leadership development of learning disabled artists.

As part of Lauren's role within Mind the Gap she has also undertaken evaluation for multiple projects including their Staging Change & Engage project, Bradford Producing Hub and the Erasmus+ project.

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