



UNIT 1

STAGE
OF
mind

1. INTRODUCTION

In this introductory module we are going to present a series of exercises that can be used during the first sessions of this training programme in performing arts. The aim of this first phase is to create a safe space in which the participants feel comfortable and at ease. Each of the following modules will present a specific theme with concrete activities to gradually introduce the participants to the world of musical theatre. In order for these activities to be carried out in the most effective way, it is essential to start by creating a bond between the people in the group so that they feel comfortable to participate, engage and take risk as the sessions progress.

1.1 Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit, future training programme facilitators will:

- ▶ improve their skills to structure workshops, including introductory, core and closing exercises.
- ▶ understand how to gauge the appropriate level of energy and concentration for an exercise according to the workshop's participants.
- ▶ be able to identify potential challenges when implementing a performing art program with participants with mental health issues.
- ▶ learn how to adapt activities to support participants based on their individual needs.

1.2 Deliver the StaGe of Mind training programme

When implementing the StaGe of Mind performing arts training program, facilitators can use this document to select various activities and plan each session. The program is designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing facilitators to combine activities as they consider appropriate, depending on the group they are working with.

Each program unit includes three types of activities: introductory, core and closing. Facilitators should include all these types of activities in their sessions, so that warm-up and cool-down phases are also guaranteed as a way to open and close the sessions in the most safe and informed way.

In this first unit, one introductory, one core and one closing exercise are presented. However, future units will include more exercises, with the core exercises directly related to the theme of each unit.

The level of focus and the energy required is indicated in each of the activities provided, according to these definitions:

FOCUS

- ▶ **LOW FOCUS:** In this setting, there is no specific focus on any individual. The group functions as a

collective and individual contributions are not highlighted.

- ▶ **MEDIUM FOCUS:** While still not singling out any individual for extended attention, this setting places a greater emphasis on individual participation than low focus exercises. Short tasks may be assigned to individuals.
- ▶ **HIGH FOCUS:** This setting involves the group observing one or a few individuals perform a specific task for a longer duration than in medium focus exercises.

ENERGY

- ▶ **LOW ENERGY:** This type of exercise does not require a significant level of physical effort, speed, coordination or rhythm. It may involve verbal or mental activities that require concentration.
- ▶ **MEDIUM ENERGY:** This type of exercise involves physical movement, coordination and effort that surpasses the low energy exercises.
- ▶ **HIGH ENERGY:** This type of exercise requires sustained physical movement at a high level of intensity, often involving participants moving as quickly as possible.

Finally, when choosing a space for the implementation of this long-term performative art programme, several factors need to be considered. In addition to being accessible and inclusive, the space should provide a comfortable environment that promotes creativity and self-expression. This may involve providing chairs and tables for activities that require a flat surface, such as writing or drawing. Adequate lighting and ventilation are also important, as they can affect mood and overall well-being. Natural light can be beneficial, but artificial lighting should also be considered, especially for evening sessions. The space should also have good air circulation to ensure a healthy and comfortable environment. Overall, the space should be designed to be flexible and adaptable to different activities and artistic expressions, while also being safe and welcoming.

1.3 Mental health awareness for performing arts trainers

This training program has been developed by a team of experts in performing arts and reviewed by mental health professionals before being tested for its effectiveness in training participants with mental health difficulties. The mental health professionals involved in the project identified that potential training participants would need to have the necessary energy, commitment and resilience to complete the program successfully. It is also important to have an interest in the dramatic arts and a reasonably high level of confidence and wellness. The training program recognizes that not all participants have an interest in acting, so it offers alternative activities to suit their preferences, such as set and costume design. This allows a wide range of skills and interests to be explored in the context of creating a theatrical work, a project that involves several art forms and has the potential to engage all participants.

Implementing the StaGe of Mind training program is a significant undertaking that requires the mental health organizations to provide extensive support and encouragement to participants, and some atrophy of participants should be anticipated. As it is not possible to predict the specific issues that participants might encounter due to their unique mental health difficulties and personal history, the mental health



organizations involved in the project have focused on general situations that they have encountered before. They provided general guidance and suggestions based on this previous experience, which can serve as a guide for future facilitators to adjust and adapt as needed.

A list of potential issues that might arise during the program's delivery is provided below, along with potential adaptations. Having a system in place to regularly check in with participants about their comfort level has been indicated as a good way of minimizing issues.

1.3.1 Potential Issues and adaptations

It is important to acknowledge that each participant in the program may have unique experiences and needs. Here are some potential issues that may arise and suggested adaptations:

▶ **Social anxiety**

Some participants may experience social anxiety and may struggle with activities that require them to perform tasks in front of others. Possible adaptations include making such activities optional, providing a more experienced performer to accompany them as a "buddy," offering one-to-one time with a facilitator, or allowing them to communicate through written notes that are read aloud by the facilitator. It is recommended that the programme is delivered in alignment with trauma informed approaches

▶ **Effects of medication**

Some participants may take psychiatric medication that affects their energy or their ability to concentrate and respond quickly. Possible adaptations include modifying activities to reduce the risk of injury, providing soft surfaces or protective gear, allowing another participant to assist them, slowing the pace of the activity or making activities optional.

▶ **Low fitness level**

Participants with low fitness levels may find movement or exercise activities challenging. Possible adaptations include making activities optional, modifying activities to make them safer, providing support or aids such as balancing aids, or allowing another participant to assist them.

▶ **Sexual Trauma**

Some participants may have experienced sexual assault or trauma and may feel uncomfortable with certain body positions. Possible adaptations include changing the position to perform the exercise, being mindful of participants' comfort in close proximity with a person of a certain gender, or allowing participants to opt-out of certain activities.

▶ **Physical Contact**

Some participants may experience challenge with close physical contact, for a variety of reasons. Possible adaptations include changing how the exercise is performed to allow for no or lower level physical contact, reducing the proximity or participants in the activity, reducing sudden movement, making the activity optional, or providing an alternative exercise.

▶ **Sensory Issues**

Some participants may have sensory issues, such as sensitivity to loud noises, strong lights or certain



textures. Possible adaptations include altering the environment to suit the participant’s needs, providing protective wear such as sunglasses or noise-reducing earphones, or making activities optional.

► **Literacy Difficulties**

Some participants may have difficulties with reading or writing. Possible adaptations include focussing on verbal communication, communicating things visually using illustrations, video or social stories, using simpler easy read language, allowing the use of recording devices for note-taking, or providing alternative forms of note-taking such as drawing or sketching.

1.4 Unit activities

1.4.1 Introduction exercises

EXERCISE NAME: COLUMBIAN HAND HYPNOSIS

Exercise number: 1

Aims of the exercise:

- Foster a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere to encourage group cohesion and engagement
- Encourage physical activity by mobilizing the group in the designated area

Focus level: Low

Energy requirement: Low

Materials: Low

Duration: Low

Instructions:

- Have participants move around the room freely, making sure to always move towards an empty space.
- When the facilitator says “stop”, participants should pair off with the person closest to them.
- The facilitator selects one person to demonstrate the exercise. They should place their palm one foot in front of the participant’s face and explain that the participant is now “hypnotized” to maintain a distance of one foot between their face and the facilitator’s hand. The facilitator can move their hand in any direction, and the participant should follow.
- Pairs then decide who will be A and B. A places their hand in front of B’s face with the tops of their fingers level with the hairline and one foot away from the face. A should lead B around the room, making sure to maintain a distance of one foot between B’s face and A’s hand while avoiding other players.
- Once A and B have had enough practice time, they should switch roles so that B leads and A follows.



EXERCISE NAME: COLUMBIAN HAND HYPNOSIS

- ▶ The facilitator asks for three volunteers. A extends both arms so that palms are facing outwards, and B and C stand one foot away from each hand. As A moves their hands, B and C should move accordingly. Participants can then be divided into groups of three to practice this exercise. Each person in the group should have a chance to lead.
- ▶ The facilitator might ask the following questions:
 - a. Which part of the exercise did you find easier? Leading or following?
 - b. Did the leader make it easy to follow, or did they make it difficult? How did they make it difficult? For example, by moving their hand too quickly, so it became challenging to follow?
 - c. Who has the most control or power in this exercise? The leader or follower? (Participants will usually say the leader). Did the leader sometimes abuse this power or exploit the other person? If so, how and why? A brief discussion on power and equality can follow. For instance, in a relationship, people may often exploit each other rather than work in harmony.
- ▶ The facilitator can then ask participants to repeat the exercise with the emphasis now firmly on the leader and follower working in harmony. The concept here is that the leader and the follower should share power by working together. When the exercise is repeated a second time, the facilitator can ask participants:
 - d. In what way did it feel different? Why? Is it healthy for us to exploit each other? Is it healthy to allow ourselves to be exploited?

Working in pairs promotes teamwork and letting go of control. By allowing ourselves to let go of control, we can release any feelings of pressure that can affect our positive mental health. It's essential to allow ourselves time to sit back and let someone else guide us. Building trust can help us relax and let others give us help when we need it. Being responsible for someone else can get us out of our heads, think externally about everyone's needs and give us a sense of purpose. All of these can help promote and ensure our positive mental health.

1.4.II Core exercises

EXERCISE NAME: ENERGY CIRCLE

Exercise number: 1

Aims of the exercise:

- Assist participants in relaxing and overcoming inhibitions.
- Foster a spirit of teamwork and collaboration among the group.
- Develop concentration skills and focus among the participants.
- Raise energy levels and synchronize the group's momentum for greater cohesion and productivity.

Focus level: Low



EXERCISE NAME: ENERGY CIRCLE

Energy requirement: Low

Materials : None

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Instructions:

The focus of this exercise is on participation and inclusivity. Everyone is an important part of the circle, and this is an easy way for those who may be nervous to become involved without feeling pressured.

- ▶ Have everyone form a circle.
- ▶ The facilitator should turn their body fully to their right and make eye contact with the person to their immediate right, then clap their hands.
- ▶ That person should then make a similar gesture to the person on their immediate right, passing the clap on.
- ▶ Allow the clap to move all around the circle a few times without any anticipation or delay, establishing a rhythmical flow of handclaps going around the circle without interruption.
- ▶ The facilitator should then change the direction of the clap so that it passes to the person on their immediate left and continue the flow around the circle.
- ▶ Once this is established, the facilitator can explain that each individual in the circle can pass the clap energy to their immediate right or left.
- ▶ The facilitator should introduce a sound, such as “yo” or “ho” or “ha,” so that participants clap and make the sound simultaneously as they pass energy around the circle. The facilitator should make eye contact with the person on their right, clap their hands, and make a loud, energetic vocalization of the chosen sound, passed on simultaneously as a single gesture. The sound/gesture should be powerful and vigorous and involve a total commitment of body and voice.
- ▶ The clap/sound can also be sent across the circle, with the same speed and emphasis on eye contact and a strong desire to get the gesture to its target.
- ▶ The facilitator can then talk briefly about how to pass the clap around more quickly, emphasizing the importance of being present and “in the moment.” See term below.
- ▶ When the group is proficient at this, the facilitator can establish the rule that “hello” is sent in the right direction and “goodbye” is sent in the left direction. Another variation is for each person to create their own sound and gesture.
- ▶ The Energy Circle game requires active, intentional attention to the present moment. Players should follow the clap while focusing on their breath, avoiding anticipation or planning ahead. They should simply be ready and “in the moment,” open and available to play the game.



EXERCISE NAME: ENERGY CIRCLE

Key Terms:

“In the moment” refers to being fully present and engaged with the current experience, rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. Participants should be relaxed yet ready, drop down into their bodies, breathe freely, and focus on the current moment

1.4.III Closure exercises

EXERCISE NAME: THE BIG CHIEF

Exercise number: 1

Aims of the exercise

- Connect with a sense of fun and playfulness before the end of the workshop
- Get our bodies moving in space
- Develop teamwork and a shared connection in the group
- Develop a sense of high focus and concentration

Focus level: Low

Energy requirement: Low

Materials: None

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Instructions:

- ▶ Gather the participants into a circle.
- ▶ Choose one person to be the detective and to leave the room.
- ▶ Choose another participant to become ‘The Big Chief’, who has to come up with a motion or sound that the rest of the participants must mimic.
- ▶ When the detective returns to the room, they have three opportunities to guess who ‘The Big Chief’ is.
- ▶ Once they have been revealed, choose another detective and ‘Big Chief’.



END OF THE UNIT



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