

METHOD GUIDE

Art Education Laboratories | Finland
Luckan Raseborg Children's Culture Center



ASSOCIATION OF
CHILDREN'S
CULTURE
IN FINLAND

MIND|
GAP|THE

METHOD GUIDE

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Luckan Raseborg Children's Culture Center

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FOREWORDS

Dear reader,

In your hands is our project's method guide, offering a look into the art education laboratories held in Finland during autumn 2024 and spring 2025.

These workshops, called laboratories in the project, were organised for young athletes aged 13 to 16 as part of middle school training camps coordinated by the Finnish Olympic Committee. Young athletes from many different cities and regions across the country attend these week-long camps at sports institutes during the school year.

This entirely new form of cooperation between sports institutes and the cultural sector progressed smoothly. We introduced the possibility of integrating art workshops into the psychological training component of the camps. One workshop was held at each camp, and during the school year the young athletes participated in a total of four art workshops.

The exercises in this method guide can be applied to various youth groups. Based on feedback from participants and art educators, the activities were calming and supportive of group cohesion. They helped build team spirit among young people who had not previously met.

We wish you rewarding moments with this guide and its exercises.

About Mind The Gap

Mind The Gap is an innovative Creative Europe project that strengthens artistic and cultural education while promoting wider participation among children and young people across Europe. It builds cross-sectoral cooperation between culture and education to address key challenges affecting young people's well-being.

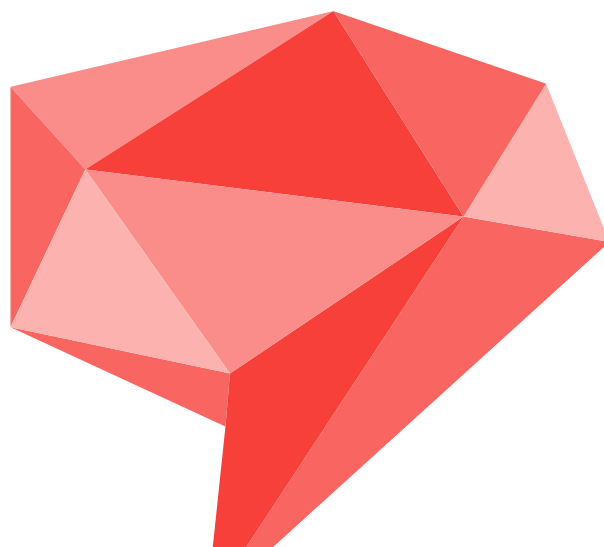
Throughout the project, each partner has designed a unique art education laboratory within an educational environment. Partners share methods, conduct peer reviews, and provide feedback. This collaborative approach equips art educators and organisations with tools to support children's and young people's well-being, creativity, and self-expression.

The learnings from the laboratories are collected into four method guides, which make the implementation of the methods easy. The method guides are available both in the partners' national languages and in English.

These method guides and the Mind The Gap project have been made possible through the co-funding of the European Union.

Mind The Gap project (11/2024–8/2026) is coordinated by the Association of Children's Culture in Finland. The project partners are Kulturtanken (Norway), the Małopolska Institute of Culture in Kraków (Poland), and Pionirski dom – Center za kulturo mladih (Slovenia).

MIND
THE
GAP



Arts and cultural education with young people – how to use this guide

Adolescence is a period of significant growth and change, during which identity, self-esteem, and a sense of agency are shaped in relation to peers. At the same time, sensitivity to evaluation and fear of failure often increase. In arts and cultural education, this calls for a safe, trusting, and voluntary working environment where participation is not based on performance but on the opportunity to experiment, express oneself, and remain unfinished.

From a pedagogical perspective, flexibility and adaptation are essential. The exercises function as tools and ideas that can be applied according to the needs, skill levels, and motivation of the group. They can be combined, modified, and used in different orders, the key is to choose approaches that best suit the situation. When activities are accessible and meaningful, they support young people's sense of competence and strengthen confidence in their own abilities.

Creative work is interaction within and with the group. The facilitator's task is to listen, support, and respond to the group's needs. The role is facilitative: the educator enables learning and creativity, encourages participation, and makes space for young people's own ideas, opinions, and shared decision-making.

Alongside artistic practice, emotional, interaction, and participation skills, such as the ability to recognise and express feelings, listen to others, and act and build meaning together, develop. In this way, arts education supports not only artistic expression but also holistic growth, wellbeing, and collective agency. The plan prepared by the facilitator provides a reliable backbone and sense of security, but the work itself emerges through interaction with the group.

Art-based methods can be successfully applied to different themes, situations and sports according to the needs of the groups. The exercises in this guide are intended as methods to support your work with your own group. They offer ideas, structures, and examples that can be combined, adapted, shortened, or expanded according to the situation. They do not need to be followed in a fixed order or completed as whole packages. Take what you need, apply freely, and make the exercises your own.

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METHOD 1

Space and flow – painting with acrylics

KEY WORDS: space | flow | joy of creation

Recommended for ages 10 and higher

Time spent 2–2,5 h

Max 12 participants



Paint your own space landscape

We live in a world where the pace is often very fast and where the youth are used to a flood of information that does not always give them time to stop and think. In this workshop, the participants learn to regulate their own pace, to find their own inner flow and to enjoy creation itself.

Space is well suited as a theme, since there is no right or wrong way to paint space. Fantasy is the only limit, and creation becomes effortless. It is also interesting for the participants to see each other's different interpretations, which opens discussion around creation and the inner process.

The workshop begins with a relaxation exercise that helps the participants to find presence in the moment and focus on themselves. It is important that this is given enough time. Without presence in the moment, it can be difficult to find your own flow.

To support the theme, it can be beneficial to use sound and video or images of space as background throughout the whole workshop. The material helps to collect thoughts around the theme and gives the participants a chance to take micro pauses while creating.

Before the laboratory

Preparations

- Enough space for both relaxation and creation
- A screen for video or images, possibility to vary lighting
- A water outlet where participants can wash their hands and brushes
- Blankets for the relaxation exercise
- Underlay to protect tables
- Acrylic paint, canvases, brushes, water cups

Preparatory exercise

- Go out in the evening, find a place where you feel relaxed. Listen, smell, and feel. Look at the night sky and let your thoughts wander.



Description of the method

3 min

Introductory discussion on the workshop as a safe and positive space with mutual rules on how to show consideration.

5 min

Discussion on the preparatory exercise. Ask the participants to go back in their memories and ask a volunteer to share what they experienced, and what feelings were brought up.

3 min

Review of the different stages of the workshop and practical questions.

15 min

Relaxation exercise in dimmed lighting. Participants can lay down with a blanket or sit comfortably. Deep breathing and muscle relaxation. A fantasy journey to space that starts and ends where the preparatory exercise took place.

3 min

Review of the exercise and its aims.

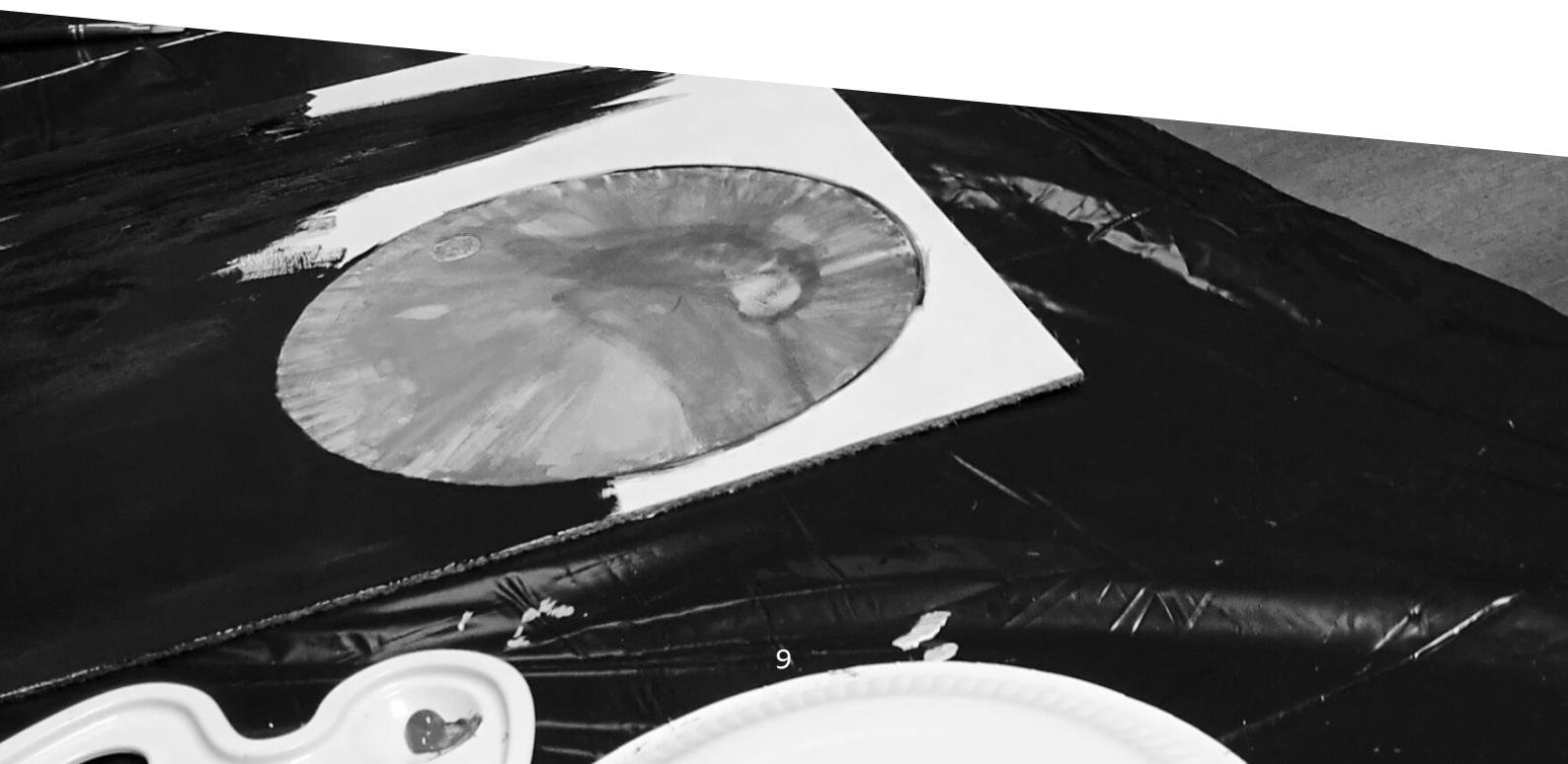
5 min

Introduction of the material, practical guidance and tips, e.g. paint wet on wet, or how to use the brush.

1–1,5 h

Participants make their own interpretation of space by painting on canvas or cloth with acrylic paint.

The instructor gives guidance in washing the brushes and other practical things when the participants have finished painting.



After the laboratory

15 min

The workshop ends with a review where the participants get to show their work and share how they experienced the workshop. The instructor gives positive feedback for every piece of work and guides and encourages the participants to do the same.

Participants are given a chance to give anonymous feedback on the workshop with a question form either digitally or in paper form.

The paintings are left to dry, participants are informed about when they can pick up their paintings.

Tips & additional resources

The material can vary based on availability and the group's earlier skill level. For example, watercolor on aquarelle paper or gouache on primed cardboard can be used.

The instructor can take their place among the group and paint their own picture together with the participants. This creates a relaxed atmosphere, and the participants get a good model for how to work on their paintings. The instructor's role changes from supervisor and teacher to a supportive coworker that can help if needed.

[Link to video material of Space](#)



METHOD 2

Design a set of playing cards

KEY WORDS: Playing cards | strengths and challenges | contrasts | fine motor skills

Recommended for ages 13 and up

Time spent 2–2,5 h

Max 12 participants



Design a set of playing cards

The workshop encourages the participants to become conscious about their own strengths and challenges and to describe those in photos. A traditional card deck consists of four suits, and each card is two-sided. How would a card deck of your own life look?

The exercise practices concentration and precision, as the format is quite small and the design takes clarity and simplicity. The participants are encouraged to find joy in carrying out the exercise through playfulness and positive self-acceptance even though it can feel demanding. Micro pauses are used to support concentration.

In this workshop, the materials used are familiar to most even without earlier experience in creative work. This moves focus from material skills to performance and content.

Before the laboratory

Preparations

- Comfortable tables and chairs
- Possibility for background music
- Cardboard size A6 or smaller
- Markers of different kinds and thicknesses, color pencils, pencils, aquarelles
- Rulers, scissors
- Playing cards for inspiration

Preparatory exercise

- Find contrasts in nature and photograph them. Soft-hard, dark-light, big-small etc.

Description of the method

3 min

Introductory discussion on the workshop as a safe and positive space with mutual rules on how to show consideration.

5 min

Discussion on the preparatory exercise. Ask the participants to show their photos if they want to and share how they experienced the exercise.

5 min

Introduction of the exercise and practical questions.

3 min

Material review

1,5–2 h

Participants make their own playing cards; the aim is to make one card of each suit. They can use their photographs for support in image composition.

Micro pauses every 20 minutes, if needed



After the laboratory

15 min

The workshop ends with a review where the participants get to show their work and share how they experienced the workshop. The instructor gives positive feedback for every piece of work and guides and encourages the participants to do the same.

Participants are given a chance to give anonymous feedback on the workshop with a question form either digitally or in paper form.

Tips & additional resources

The instructor can take their place among the group and paint their own picture together with the participants. This creates a relaxed atmosphere, and the participants get a good model for how to work on their paintings. The instructor's role changes from supervisor and teacher to a supportive coworker that can help if needed.

The instructor needs to be responsive to challenges in concentration and initiate micro pauses. Focus can also vary between the two sides of each card. On one side the participants are faced with a more demanding photo composition, while the other can be decorated with patterns, mandalas or the like.

Different card games, tarot cards and similar things can be used as inspiration.

METHOD 3

My spirit animal in clay

KEY WORDS: clay | playful | surprising | stimulates different senses

Recommended for ages 7 and up

Time spent 1,5–2,5 h

Max 15 participants



Make your spirit animal in clay

Spirit animals or totem animals have been present in many cultures already in prehistoric times. The animal helps its carrier to find their inner strength and gives comfort in difficult moments. In this workshop the participants get to think about which animal could be their spirit animal and then create a figurine of it in clay.

Clay is a material that enables playful creation, where mistakes are easy to correct and the end result can be something unexpected. It is difficult to follow a predetermined plan when working with clay. The material encourages the user to use their intuition and try their hand at it. Different senses are also stimulated during the workshop. Clay has a special smell. When working with clay, many sounds can be heard, and the material can feel both unpleasant and lovely in the user's hands. Working with clay is a very physical experience that helps the participant to focus on creation and enjoy the moment.



Before the laboratory

Preparations

- Preferably a room with good ventilation
- A kiln
- Space for the figurines to dry
- Stable tables
- A water outlet where participants can wash their hands and instruments
- Underlay suitable for both work and drying
- Clay
- Instruments suitable for the work
- Water bowls
- Caring skin cream

Preparatory exercise

- Familiarize yourself with the ways animals have been portrayed in art by visiting The Finnish National Gallery website. Choose your favorite piece of art.



Description of the method

3 min

Introductory discussion about the workshop as a safe and positive space with mutual rules on how to show consideration.

5 min

Discussion on the preparatory exercise. Ask the participants to share what kinds of artwork they found, which were their favorites, and why.

5–10 min

Look at photos of totem animals from different cultures and discuss spirit animals and what they are.

3 min

Review of the exercise's different stages and practical questions.

5 min

Material theory. The instructor shows how to cut and soften clay, how the different instruments are used and the basic working method.

1–2 h

Participants create their spirit animals in clay by forming small sculptures in the size of their choosing. (1 h for 7–9-year-olds, 2 h for ages 10 and up)

5 min

Washing the instruments.



After the laboratory

15 min

The workshop ends with a review where the participants get to show their work and share how they experienced the workshop. The instructor gives positive feedback for every piece of work and guides and encourages the participants to do the same.

Participants are given a chance to give anonymous feedback on the workshop with a question form either digitally or in paper form.

The sculptures are left to dry, and participants are informed about when they can pick up their artwork.

Tips & additional resources

The material used can vary based on availability and space. Self-hardening hobby clay can be used instead of clay that needs to be burned.

When using dusty clay, allergies and asthma need to be considered beforehand. As a material, clay can cause skin to dry, and it can be good to use caring skin cream before and after the workshop.

The instructor can take their place among the group and make their own figurine together with the participants. This creates a relaxed atmosphere, and the participants get a good model for how to work on their artwork. The instructor's role changes from supervisor and teacher to a supportive coworker that can help if needed.



[Link to The Finnish National Gallery](#)

METHOD 4

Logo – roles and body painting

Key words: body painting | logo | creative process | roleplay

Recommended for ages 10 and up

Time spent 1,5–2 h

Max 15 participants



Make a logo that describes yourself

Many young people feel that high pressure is being put on them to find their place in life early on. They must choose a field of study and hold on to it, they must succeed and appear strong. This workshop gives them a chance to fantasize and play with different roles as a counterweight to all the pressure. What would a logo for you as an athlete/musician/entrepreneur/scientist... look like? Fantasy can be used, and everyone can choose their own dream role.

The process goes from a thought to an image that is then simplified to a logo through many different sketches. It is interesting and surprising to get to see the different stages concretely through the sketches. Sometimes the final logo is found among the first sketches and sometimes among the last ones. Participants learn to observe and analyze their own work.

When the logo is then transferred to a body painting, a “tattoo”, it can happen that it still needs to be changed to fit the body’s color and shape. The process varies and creation gets an intimate and personal touch.

Before the laboratory

Preparations

- Big screen or similar
- Paper for sketches
- Pencils, erasers, thin markers, colored pencils
- Timer clock
- Colors and brushes suitable for body painting
- Skin cream
- Water outlet for washing up

Preparatory exercise

- Familiarize yourself with different company logos, find your favorite and think about why you like that one.

Description of the method

3 min

Introductory discussion about the workshop as a safe and positive space with mutual rules on how to show consideration.

3 min

Review of the exercise's different stages and practical questions

5–10 min

Discussion on the preparatory exercise. Ask the participants to share/show which logos they chose and why those in particular.

5 min

The instructor shows the group photos of different pieces of art and logos with simple form expression and clear lines for inspiration.

7 min

Introductory exercise on how to do sketches. The aim is that the participants relax and find playfulness in their creation.

1 min / sketch

- The instructor finds an object that everyone makes a sketch of. Time spent 1 min / sketch.
- Sketch the object.
- Sketch the object without looking at the paper.
- Sketch the object without lifting your pen off the paper.
- Sketch the object with the pen in the hand that you don't normally use.

30–45 min

Participants create a logo that describes themselves in a role of their own choosing. The instructor focuses on supporting the participants in the process of creating a final image through several sketches.

10–15 min

Discussion in small groups where participants get to show and discuss their logos. What is good and what good be done differently?

20–30 min

Participants paint the final logo on their own body like a "tattoo" / help each other paint "tattoos" on each other.



After the laboratory

15 min

The workshop ends with a review where the participants get to show their work and share how they experienced the workshop. The instructor gives positive feedback for every piece of work and guides and encourages the participants to do the same.

Participants are given a chance to give anonymous feedback on the workshop with a question form either digitally or in paper form.

Tips & additional resources

If a shorter workshop is wanted, the part with the body painting can be left out.

Use high-quality body paint to reduce the risk of allergic reactions and communicate the risk to the participants already in the beginning of the workshop. Provide skin cream that can be applied on skin before painting, so the paint is easier to wash off.

The instructor needs to take an active role and guide the participants through the process. Point out details in the sketches to make the participants stop and observe their work. Look at the sketches simultaneously, put them in order and see how the thought has wandered forward through the sketches. Notice individual lines or forms that could be worked forward. Point out that a sketch is not a drawing, but more of a way to visualize your thoughts.

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