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Good practice: “Landscapes”

1. What is it?

We’d like to share the good practice ‘Landscapes’ that we got to know in an Adventure Therapy program from Luk Peeters. By using this practice several times with different groups and in different ways, we saw it having therapeutic value for some people in the group.

First, participants are asked to describe a landscape they see and that moves them in one way or another. The invitation is to take the time for the landscape to affect them and then describe the landscape with as much qualities (adjectives) as they can imagine, add sounds, smell, ... to make the description as rich as possible. They are invited to do this on an individual base and to write the description down.

The landscape to describe can be

- A landscape they encounter on a solo walk. Participants are asked to frame the part of the landscape that ‘strikes’ them and describe it.
- A landscape on a picture that they choose out of more pictures
- A picture they took themselves while doing something (hike, walk, bike tour...). It can be digital and can be printed as well. We once used a Polaroid camera that gave a print immediately so that they could use it afterwards.
- ...

Next, they are asked to re-read what they wrote and describe the landscape with even more emphasis by using more fitting words, by adding even more adjectives, by making it ‘bigger’, using alliterations...

The following step is to make this text all about yourself by replacing the subject by 'I' or adding the personal pronoun 'my' in front of certain words and descriptions: 'Make it about yourself!' Inform the participants that it might feel strange or funny or awkward to do so.

The next step is re-reading the text for oneself, being aware of what they feel in the moment of re-reading. If they're touched, they can explore it more and make it even bigger. The sentences that leave them indifferent, can be left out.

Recommendation: It can help participants if you, as a facilitator, give an example: a short description of a landscape, that you first make richer and then turn it personally until it 'fits'.

In the end participants can be invited to read aloud their 'landscape' for the group. They can use the place (inside-outside, in the middle of the group...) and position (standing up, sitting higher in a tree or on a table...) that suites for them.

As a facilitator it is important to create the appropriate space and atmosphere in the group and to slow down the participant to be able to bring his 'landscape' genuinely. After reading, it is possible for other group members to react on what they heard, saw, experienced,...

2. Who is the target group?

We have used 'landscapes' with different kinds of participants: young adults (17-25 years) and adults, trainers, clients in a therapeutic group... We have never used this method (up until now) with youth at risk and youngsters younger than 16. We mainly used it in programs of at least 3 days to be sure a safe environment is created in order for participants to share what they wrote in group if they want to. We introduce 'landscapes' only when a more reflective space is already created in the group. In our experience it can only deepen the reflective space if there is already a baseline.

A condition to make this practice work, is that participants must be willing to write and they have to be open to and able to 'play' with language. The lack of feeling convenient with language has been a reason to us (sometimes) not to work with this practice.

3. Who are the trainers/educators? What are their competences?

Trainers need to be able to create a reflective space and to slow down the participants. They need to be good at facilitating group processes and discussions as well as the individual therapeutical process of the participants.

For a group of max. 14 participants one trainer can be enough to facilitate this.

4. What kind of methodologies do you use in this workshop?

This activity is always imbedded in a larger (often adventure therapy) program and is at its best when the group has gone together through a whole process, not at the first days when they are still in the group dynamic phase of inclusion or focus on the influence and roles. Therefore we do it more towards the end of a program, but with enough space afterwards to process.

'Challenge by choice' is important in this practice. It is an activity that brings a lot of participants into a situation of stretch. It is important that the trainer recognizes and distinguishes stretch from panic because when a participant panics, he/she will not learn or grow/heal anymore.

This practice combines individual and group processes: in the first place it is a personal work and challenge. The sharing in group might facilitate a deeper connection between the participants and can make other participants 'co-facilitators' in the individual process of the reading participant. The group can support the participant in taking the challenge and reacting on what the participant brings.

E.g. A young participant describing a tree very recognizable for the way the other participants experienced her. In the reactions afterwards somebody continued the description with growing possibilities of the tree that were very striking for the participant reading her landscape.

E.g. A person who had the tendency of making herself little comparing to others, positioned herself on a big branch of a tree and asked the group to sit down. After her 'landscape' somebody gave her back that it was the first time since the start of the program he really 'heard' her.

E.g. A participant being too much confronted with some of his 'darker sides' by reading back what he wrote in his 'landscape' decided not to read aloud his 'landscape' for the group. He shared with the group some of what was on his mind on that moment and kept the 'landscape' for himself.

5. Why do you use this practice?

A lot of our youngsters or even adults rush through life and through the programs without taking the time to slow down and even stand still to be more aware and feel what is going on. The 'landscape' gives them the opportunity to focus (without distraction by others and other input channels), to stop running, to encounter themselves, take the time,...

Participants, especially vulnerable youngsters, have often not only lost connection to the outside world (and to nature) but also the connection to their own inner world. The 'landscape' can help them in an indirect way to come closer to what really matters to them/ what keeps them busy by describing something outside of themselves (nature/ landscape).

6. What are the Adventure Therapy components in this workshop?

The 'landscape' has the potential of un-doing a projection. We all make projections when we 'project' something we ourselves feel uncomfortable about on someone or something else or even on a group.



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It can manifest itself by feeling irritation towards that person/ thing, by feeling excessive admiration or sometimes even by having an inappropriate good feeling.

The landscape gives the opportunity to get aware of the possible (mostly unconscious) projections participants are invited to make on a landscape that 'touches' them. By asking them to only keep in their descriptions what 'strikes' them and deleting what leaves them indifferent, the projection might get clearer.

The 'landscape' provides a frame that can activate emotional (dysfunctional) schemes and has the potential to be a motivator or trigger towards a (wish to) change towards more functional schemes.

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