

## Art & Psyche Group Work Project for Teenagers, from COVID to Today

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### Abstract

The AA. report the experience of working with a group of thirty-five teenagers conducted at the “Adolfo Pansini” classical high school in Naples. The project, still ongoing, is based on the principles of Narrative Medicine applied to institutional contexts, integrated with the use of “Bionian” group techniques, body movement and graphic art. Through this innovative methodology, the adolescents involved faced and processed the particular emotional conditions (deriving from Covid and pandemic isolation, post-Covid, bereavement and complex living conditions).

Thanks to the path undertaken, the children have achieved subjective, group and social identity development and have rediscovered the projection of themselves towards a future that seemed impossible to imagine and plan.

**Keywords:** Narrative Medicine, Art, Psychology

### Introduction

The “Art & Psyche” project is mainly aimed at working with adolescents in groups. The methodology is also adaptable to subjects of different ages. During the Covid-19 pandemic period, it was developed at the Liceo Classico “A. Pansini” of Naples (becoming an integral part of the Three-Year Training Offer Plan in 2024) [1-5].

Thanks to the methods used, based on the principles of both “Narrative Medicine” (NBM) and of a psychodynamic nature for interventions on groups; students – in difficult times adolescent period, worsened by the context of social restrictions linked to the pandemic - addressed the typical themes of age and context. The closeness, support, social inclusion, acceptance and overcoming together of bereavement, social isolation, fears, uncertainty of growing up and the difficulties typical of adolescents, as well as serious episodes in one's life (including the death of a class and some of their parents) were developed

“psychically” through the integration of art, body movement and creative stimulus [5-9].

### Objective

The primary objective of the “Art & Psyche” project is to promote the integration and social inclusion of adolescents, providing them with the tools to understand and combat phenomena of discrimination, isolation and violence for a more conscious development of their individual and social psychic identity ; to achieve these objectives, techniques specific to Narrative Medicine applied to institutional contexts were used as well as a creative correlation between Narrative Medicine, “Bionian” psychodynamic and group analytical techniques, body movement and “figurative arts” in a complex methodology in capable of focusing on the real needs of the participants in the project itself and in line with the emotional, mental and physical needs of adolescents.

## Materials and Methods

The multi-professional and multidisciplinary approach involves:

- A psychologist and psychotherapist
- A painter and illustrator
- An expert in body movement

"Art & Psyche" develops on average over five months for (one meeting of at least two hours per month). The classrooms and spaces in which the activity takes place must be reorganized (e.g. moving desks, chairs, chairs) to allow spontaneous and free activity and allow body movement, when expected [10-15].

The emotional space and meanings that are created during each single session can be understood as a true "Transitional Space", halfway between the internal world and the external world in resonance with a possible narrative of the self that occurs through the word, the body and finally the graphic representations. In every meeting a real transformative space of emotional, psychic, experiences is generated subjective and group life. Group moments represent a transformative and re-elaboratory possibility of anxieties and fears, to gradually arrive at a healthier representation of the Self and a construction of one's subjective identity in formation, both individual and group.

Each meeting is characterized by an intense dynamic interaction between the activities/stimulus carried out by the professionals involved and the participants.

The project involved 2 classes: a total of 35 students between 15 and 18 years old, of which 20 females and 15 males.

The work carried out gave rise to a real "itinerant" path that accompanied and accompanies the participants in their growth and involved and involves the same group of adolescents for 4 years in order to evaluate their process and evolution over time subjective, identity, family, group and social level [16-22].

### Phases

- **Phase 1:** each meeting opens with the stimulus of the psychologist who solicits the group's brain storming on themes spontaneously emerging from the group itself. To support this phase, the psychologist can introduce the visual stimulus of a pictorial work which at the moment is in line with the stimuli and arguments coming from the adolescents themselves: pain, confusion, fears, desire for hope, anxieties etc.
- **Phase 2:** we move on to bodily movement through "role play", dance and yoga techniques appropriately merged in order to allow participants to process the stimuli and topics expressed in the first phase on a bodily and then mental level.
- **Phase 3:** graphic restitution: the students return to their seats and through a spontaneous graphic production with drawing, express their own elaboration at the level of thought of the themes narrated at a verbal and then bodily level in the previous phases

The way of moving from one phase to another is not rigid and/or self-conclusive: it occurs through a fluid intertwining of subjective and physical emotional experiences and stimuli. Each meeting tends to respond to the real needs of the children as they

present themselves "in the here and now", and on what spontaneously comes out of their stimuli. The meeting, therefore, is not pre-established on a specific topic, but the area of intervention arises spontaneously from the group participants

### The Pictorial Stimulus

In "Phase 1" the pictorial work acts as an associative starting point for the emotional channel and for the internal resonances of each individual and the group. The paintings used become a real "Transitional Object". This group creative experience takes place in the "psychic space between the internal world and the external world" and can be attributed to the "area of transitional phenomena" and gives life to that ability to produce ideas, originality, the ability to synthesize and analyze, to define and structure in a new one's experiences and knowledge both at a subjective and group level, arriving at a healthier representation of the Self and the Other. Each subject freely externalizes their moods in the group and for the group through "brain storming" work. This generates in the participant a "significant and significant" reflection first on himself and then on the other, stimulating positive and transformative comparison with himself and with his companions on both an individual and group level [23-28].

The integration between Art and "Bionian" group psychodynamic techniques, through the use of the "picture" object in its transitional function, defines the latter as a functional tool and stimulus to Psychic Narration. The experience becomes "therapeutic", or "transformative", even though it is not a clinical context; allowing adolescents to express complex deep states in more than just verbal ways; encouraging a process of creative elaboration of suffering and self-revelation.

### Body Movement

It can sometimes happen in "Phase 1" if the stimuli coming from adolescents are such as to first require work through the body which becomes mainly emotional release. Subsequently, the psychologist resumes the stimulus activities described in "Phase 1" and then moves on to the graphic processing of "Phase 3".

Bodily movement leads the individual and the group to the perception of themselves and the Other; of one's feelings and the feelings of the Other.

The Psychologist also intervenes in this phase, as well as transversally to each phase if necessary based on the stimuli coming from the adolescents themselves to: contain, remodulate, represent, allow thinking, elaborate, define the space of awareness and thought about the emotions elicited in each encounter; contributes to a more concrete experience of reality, helping children to understand and be aware of the dominant emotional states in the group and providing more appropriate knowledge. In the analysis of group dynamics, knowledge and the cognitive process actually arise in the intrapsychic dimension and become clear only at the interpersonal level, that is, when "common sense" is formed. Knowledge is a "conjunction between different elements", that condition by which it is possible to make connections between oneself and the Other, through "the social component of instinctual equipment", so present in spontaneous group work with adolescents. Each

meeting becomes a link for the next, representing a path of subjective and group narration.

### The “Graphic” Moment

It is always final of each session, as it is a re-elaboration of each meeting: each boy interprets and re-elaborates the theme and emotional processes of the meeting in his own way, returning a drawing of it.

### Discussion

The entire process, which develops through meetings, is configured as a real path that both the individual and the group experience internally and externally with results of growth and transformation.

Important goals are achieved:

- Self-awareness
- Awareness of one's emotions and body
- Awareness of the relationship with the Other and of the encounter with the emotions and experiences of the Other Increase in self-esteem
- Creative construction of identity processes
- Elaboration and transformation of one's experiences through gradual, creative and respectful methods of growth and individual times and of the group itself
- Effective communication and improvement of inter- and intra-group social relations.

A significant increase in emotional well-being and the perception of safety was also highlighted among the students participating in the project.

The enthusiasm and active participation of the adolescents during the sessions confirmed the effectiveness of the methodologies adopted.

It was spontaneously reported to us by both teachers and parents that the participating children reported a tangible improvement in individual and social behavior both as children and as students; in group and social integration as well as improved cognitive and learning ability due to the lowering of subjective and group anxiety thresholds. The children, in better understanding their identity, were able to build study and work projects for their future in line with their identity and their desires.

“Art & Psyche” integrated organically with the students' educational path, enriching the human, scholastic and professional background of students and teachers. The interest and support from school institutions and families have contributed to the success and continuity of the proposed initiatives.

We thank the painter Ester Rascato and the body movement expert Rosaria Clelia Niola for their fundamental collaboration, without whom the project would not have been realized [29, 30].

### Conclusion

The “Art & Psyche” project has demonstrated significant positive impacts on the adolescents involved. By integrating Narrative Medicine principles with psychodynamic group techniques, body movement, and graphic art, the participants experienced substantial growth in self-awareness, emotional understanding, and social integration. The project has fostered a healthier self-representation, improved self-esteem, and enhanced communication skills. Notably, it has also led to a decrease in anxiety and an increase in cognitive and learning abilities. The project's success is evident in the improved individual and social behavior

of the students, as reported by teachers and parents, and in the active, enthusiastic participation of the adolescents. This innovative approach has not only enriched the students' educational journey but also provided a sustainable model for addressing the complex emotional and social needs of teenagers, especially in the context of post-pandemic recovery.

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