



From systematic observation to verifying impacts: observation model for creative group activities

OBSERVATION MODEL

- Enables systematic observation of creative group activities from different perspectives.
- Helps perceive small changes in human interaction.
- Verifies impacts of culture, arts & well-being work and illustrates the construction of its impact chains.
- Improves quality and reliability of observation data.
- Supports systematic development of various creative group activities models in the field of culture, arts & well-being.

Inclusion increases gradually. At first, changes are small: the person pushes the hood back, looks into the eyes or smiles. Small changes are crucial for the person to start working towards recovery, rehabilitation or learning. Models and indicators are needed to verify drivers of change. Systematic observation helps perceive the small changes in human interaction and thus verify the impacts. When observation is complemented by interviews, impact chains can be traced as well. Observation model has been developed to facilitate documentation of creative group situations. It has been applied in the observation of various teaching situations, creative group activities and in culture, arts & well-being work (Huhtinen-Hildén 2017; Huhtinen-Hildén et al. 2017, 128–129; Huhtinen-Hildén & Pitt 2018, 65–67; Huhtinen-Hildén & Isola 2019b).

Observation model helps in verifying impacts

Observation model has been developed to verify the impacts of creative group activities, thus, it is examined here from the perspective of creative group activities. The model is nevertheless applicable in a variety of instructed group activities. It is natural for a human being to pay attention to familiar elements or elements which correspond to the initial expectations of the situation (Loughran 2006, 45). Observation model assures that observation is performed systematically from four different perspectives. It improves the quality and reliability of data. Observation may be performed by several observers.

Observation model is a structure to:

- develop various operating models to culture, arts & well-being in the spirit of, e.g., action research
- collect systematic data from an operating model being developed, by collecting observations from several perspectives – also those unfamiliar to the observer
- verify impact chains related to culture, arts & well-being, with a combination of qualitative interviews and quantitative indicators.

With the model we can:

- obtain information on possibilities offered by creative activities
- increase understanding of various professional means of facilitating and/or pedagogical situation which support participation in creative activities, group interaction and group process
- tap into the mechanisms and elements of group interaction
- obtain information on how creative activities and/or group activities help participants in achieving their individual objectives.

Observation model has been created to creative group activities

Creative group activities refer to **facilitated situation**: the facilitator supports group dynamics and individual, creative expression. The participants deal with emotions, thoughts and associations in a functional manner by using, for example, music, verbal, visual and bodily expression, drama, objects meaningful to self, natural environments and various sense-activation exercises.

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An evidence-based model

Observation model has been developed to facilitate the analysis of music teaching situations in a group (Huhtinen-Hildén 2017; see also Huhtinen-Hildén & Pitt 2018, 65–67). It has been applied in many situations observing creative group activities.

The model has been used for data collection in creative group activities research (Huhtinen-Hildén & Isola 2019b) and in a development project of using creativity and arts in elderly care (see Huhtinen-Hildén et al. 2017, 128–129).

Group activities as described in observation model are

- **dialogic:** acceptance, respect and genuine listening (Arnkil & Seikkula 2014, 18–19) are realized by words, images or with the means of, e.g., musical interaction. The facilitator is responsible for the roles of participants not getting locked and the safety of the group. (Huhtinen-Hildén 2017; Huhtinen-Hildén & Pitt 2018.)
- **pedagogical situations:** the participant is seen as a learner to whom creative group activities offer a learner-centred opportunity to change. The pedagogical choices of the facilitator aim to open possibilities to experiencing, expressing and being creative.

Affordances, agency and interaction in group activities

Movement, sound, images, stories, materials and play used in activities create different affordances, i.e. possibilities or invitations to participation, experiencing and experimenting (Gibson 1966): how does a stone feel in your hand, how does acoustics feel in your body?

Agency is wanting, being able and knowing how; constructed individually and in relation to others (Jyrkämä 2008). By observing gestures, tones of voice and reactions we can obtain information on what, in that situation, prevents or permits wanting, being able and knowing how, i.e. directs agency to new elements or strengthens belief in self.

Positioning in relation to others occurs in interaction and the wordless negotiation thereof takes place through continuous dialogue (Langenhoven & Harré 1999). Interaction is a constant, dynamic movement where individuals consciously or unconsciously have an impact and are impacted, come closer and withdraw.

Observation from four perspectives

Observation in a facilitated situation may be conducted systematically by looking at

- means and approaches of creative activities
- facilitating
- individual participants' means of being and doing
- group interaction.

Observation from different perspectives is particularly important when a holistic understanding of the situation is set as a goal. With the help of different perspectives, the observers gain a deeper understanding of the construction of the creative group process. For a systematic progress of data collection, the situation should be concretely and correctly documented but without personal interpretations. At this stage, it is important to document the considerations of the observer in the observation diary.

While observing, it is important to bear in mind that it can only capture a small, visible share of the agency of an individual participating in the group activities (Jyrkämä 2008) or of what kind of affordances creative activities entail. In observing creative group activities the observers should look at creative and functional expression. Functional or artistic dialogue is as important as verbal dialogue. However, its nuances often remain unnoticed and verbal dialogue is emphasized.

1) Means and methods of creative activities

Movement, sound, materials and play used in creative activities offer possibilities or invitations to participation, experiencing and experimenting. Observe the following:

- What was done: what was done first, how was it developed and taken forward?
- What kind of approaches and means of creative activities (singing and vocal delivery, playing, listening, musical exercise, musical inventing and composing, improvisation, visual expression, drama, stories, poems, dancing, bodily expression) were applied in the situation, and how?
- What kind of objectives and dimensions were set to the activities (if they emerge in the situation)?

Tips for deepening impact assessment

Systematic observation may be complemented by interviewing the facilitating professionals or participants of group activities (Huhtinen-Hildén & Isola 2019).

Observation data may help in reminiscing events.

When observations are combined with the participants' experiences, perception of impacts will deepen. Observations may be complemented by applying an indicator on experiences of social inclusion (Isola et al. 2017, 53–55).

- How different phases followed one another?
- How did the process progress?

2) Facilitating

By facilitating we mean supporting of group activities and pedagogical choices that enable participation in creative activities. Observe the following:

- How the facilitator is positioned and acts in different stages of the process (e.g. giving instructions, supporting, spurring, encouraging, inspiring, listening, co-learning, actively participating vs. observing, degree of reciprocity)?
- What kind of bodily expression does the facilitator have?
- How the applied approaches influence the participants' activities, participation, motivation, level of activity and interaction?
- What kind of observations can be made of the facilitator's actions and presence in interactive situations (speech, gestures, facial expressions, body language)?
- What kind of pedagogical choices can be observed in the creative moment: how does the facilitator maintain the structure of the activities/creative moment and, on the other hand, enable creative expression and improvisation?

3) Individual participants' means of being and doing

Individual experiences of creative group activities can be perceived by observing the opportunities created thereby. Observe the following:

- What do creative activities enable to the participants?
- What kind of objectives and dimensions were set to the activities (if they emerge in the situation)?
- How did the participants react to the creative activities?
- What kind of emotions did the participants convey?

Describe what you observe but do not interpret.

4) Group interaction

Group interaction depends on participants and on how they position themselves to one another, and on how they are able to change these positions during interaction. Observe the following:

- Interaction and observations of group activities: what kind of thoughts and observations arise from this particular group?
- What kind of gestures, facial and other expressions, emotions and reactions are observed?
- Can any transmission of emotions be observed? If yes, in what kind of situations it occurs?
- How do different doings impact interaction? Describe the interaction you observe.

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Suggested citation:

Huhtinen-Hildén L, Isola, A-M (2021) From systematic observation to verifying impacts: observation model for creative group activities. *Data Brief* 49/2021. Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, Helsinki



Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare

ISBN 978-952-343-729-6 (online publication)

ISSN 2323-5179 (online publication)

<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-343-729-6>