

2020-1-DE02-KA227-ADU-008006



Co-funded by
the European Union

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Summary

Introduction	3
Activities for Icebreaking:	4
The sea of rules.....	4
Name game	5
Magic soap.....	5
Positive look at others	6
Look left change place	6
Circulating clapping	7
Bunny, bunny, bunny.....	7
Activities for Language Learning:	8
Favourite words and things I like.....	8
Onomatopoeic words.....	8
Collaborative poetry, stories and plays	9
Accepting and rejecting	10
Mimic gifts	11
Activities for Job-Seeking:	12
Concentration.....	12
Shapes together and same rhythm	13
Non-verbal communication.....	14
Activities for Affirmation:	15
Creating your Superhero	15
Statue techniques.....	15

Introduction

Creative FEMpower-project created curriculums for four workshops for immigrant women to help with self-esteem, language skills, job-seeking and integration: Creative Explorational, Language Learning, Job-seeking and Affirmation workshops.

This collection of activities is a complementary compendium of some creative methods that can be used to enhance any work done with migrant women and combined with other curriculums. These methods are classified in four categories according to which they are most beneficial for: Icebreaking, Language Learning, Job-Seeking and Affirmation.

The Icebreaking exercises are great for both new groups for building the group dynamic and to lighten up the mood, energize and motivate between more challenging exercises. The activities for Language Learning support formal language lessons. Creative methods for Job-seeking help build skills and mindsets that are beneficial for acquiring a job. The exercises for Affirmation can be used to support immigrants' self-confidence and sense of belonging in a new country to help with the process of integration.

The exercises presented here are mostly based on methods of theatre pedagogy, but with emphasis on playfulness and creativity, and don't require formal education or special artistic talents. When doing improvisational games, it's important to emphasize that there is no wrong way to do things and no mistakes to be made. In improvisation a mistake is a gift that will only create more opportunities. The activities are supposed to be fun for the participants, so there should never be any pressure to take part. If someone is having reservations, the trainer should make sure not to make a big deal out of it, but rather encourage them to participate with asking questions and offering words of encouragement.

Activities for Icebreaking:

The sea of rules

Background music, ocean, sea, water, nature sounds (the forest of rules) etc. Everyone's voice will be heard. Everyone thinks in their mind 3-5 rules that they find important in terms of group building and safety. The rules are written on the sheets. The tags e.g. are placed in a space where you can walk around in the middle of the rule wishes (sheets). Everyone is allowed to mark 3 most important rules of the "rule sea" for themselves, e.g. with a stone, a sea shell, etc. What kind of rules were obtained, which ones were considered the most important? Conversation with the nearest person approx. 5 min. what the rules mean to themselves. If desired, share a few ideas and experiences from the discussions with the whole group. The chosen rules are written down and distributed to the group.

Tips for the trainers

Drama contract / safer space principles. A drama contract is created when the facilitator and the group agree to do something together. When building a drama contract, rules are jointly agreed upon; how you behave in the group, what the practices are and where the boundaries are. This guarantees safety and the opportunity to throw yourself in, have fun and learn. The facilitator must ensure that the rules are implemented along the group's journey and understand that everyone interprets them from their own point of view. The rules created together also give the group the right to intervene in possible conflicts along the way. You can always go back to the rules and you can clarify them. What is important for engaging in a group is that all members of the group are involved in building the drama contract. The drama agreement and the rules are binding and create a safe working environment.

Name game

In a circle everyone in a group says their own name and associates one move with it. Movement can be very simple and abstract, e.g., waving your hand, clapping etc. Everyone repeats the name with the move. Then the next person says their name and attaches to it another movement which everyone repeats. Then repeat the first and second in a row and continue until everyone has done their own. The game can be carried out while sitting or standing and with large or small movements.

Tips for the trainers

This is good for new groups to help learn each others names. Hearing your name repeated is also a simple way to make people feel seen. This can be varied later, e.g., speed, and an attempt is always made to remember the next one together. The group always supports each other and works together, if one doesn't remember all the names at first they can follow others.

Magic soap

Helps create excitement, but also with the idea of purifying ourselves so we can interact with others. Is also warms up your mind and body.

1. Take a mime/imaginary soap from the center of the circuit. The color and scent make you feel good, everyone determines it for themselves. Ask the participants to tell what their soaps are like (shape, colour, smell). Wash yourself with soap and wash away muscle tension, nervousness, thoughts about doing this wrong. Wash away embarrassing thoughts or what everybody else think, etc.

2. Take a water, bucket, shower, etc. Rinse the brown-gray foam that has come off us, to the mega drain which sucks everything away.

3. Take a towel and dry the rest. Do it with a rough or soft towel. Now our own body is open to others. Energy flows between us only when we are open. Here we are now, just like this. You are important.

You will receive a soap as a gift. You can dig it out in a suitable situation sometime later.

Tips for the trainers

The purpose of this exercise is to remove inhibitions, so it's important that the trainers themselves are feeling open and liberated. This exercise is great as a first activity since you literally are washing away embarrassment.

Positive look at others

What are the obstacles between our communication, things we don't really see and understand in each other? Let's think about what it is between us: e.g., hurry, embarrassment, resistance, shyness, maybe they don't like me, I don't want to be too pushy, I have heard things about them... Let's push away these things from between us. While standing in a circle, one by one everyone says what they are pushing away while using mimic expression. When everything is pushed away, everyone looks at everyone with this positive gaze at their own pace, in peace, while sensing how this positive look affects them. There's no need to search for eye contact or stare at someone. We sense and feel in our bodies how and with what energy we are viewed. You will feel good when you get positive gazes.

Tips for the trainers

This activity is similar to magic soap and a natural continuation to it; first you cleanse yourself from things within you bothering you and then you do the same in regards to other people.

Look left change place

The group forms a circle. Everyone looks to their left and lets their gaze goes on in a circle constantly trying to meet others eyes. When two people have eye contact, they swap places between themselves. When they are in a "new place" they start to look to the left again etc. People are constantly changing places in a circle and that's the idea. Constant moving and changing. You have to open yourself that it will happen.

How did it feel to face another person's gaze? Smiles, happy expressions, who wouldn't want to be viewed positively? See another person, really! Eye contact and a smile can be a really big major in someone's day and turn the day into something completely new, giving strength. The power of making visible.

Tips for the trainers

This activity continues the theme of positive look. It also creates the feeling of finding and understanding when the eyes meet and both parties know what they are supposed to do without any words.

Circulating clapping

The clapping runs in the circle. People form a circle. A patch chain is set in motion so that one claps their hand and the person to their left continues the clap. The leader can change the direction of the chain. This will be done for a while. The tempo of the clap can vary from slow to fast. When this goes well and smoothly, new instructions will be given. Two quick consecutive claps reverse the direction of the clap and the direction of the clap changes.

Tips for the trainers

This activity is good for warming up the body and waking up if the group feels tired or passive. It's actually challenging to do this activity without anyone making mistakes – it is important to embrace those mistakes and have fun. Succeeding requires for everyone to really pay attention to what others in the group are doing and being able to react. Practising this helps to build co-operation.

Bunny, bunny, bunny

The group stands in a circle. Three people form a “rabbit unit”. The middle, or “central rabbit,” raises both hands to the both sides of her head and swing the fingers like rabbit ears. The people around the “central rabbit” are “side rabbits” and they raise one hand closest to “central rabbit” and wiggle the ears. All three shout out loudly “Bunny, bunny, bunny” and wave their hands. The “central rabbit” shifts the turn to another person by making clear eye contact with them and pointing with their outstretched ears at the person of their choice. That person becomes the next “central rabbit”. The persons who are standing on both sides of the new “central rabbit” become new side rabbits. One drops out of the game if she does not react in right time, if she is an extra side rabbit, if she uses the wrong side rabbit hand etc. When somebody drops out of the game it is paused and the group decides who is the new “central rabbit”. When someone falls off, they are given a roaring applause. This will be continued as long as there are only two persons left.

Tips for the trainers

This is a similar game to the clapping activity and perfect for energizing the participants. The trainer should make sure that everyone understands the activity before beginning.

Activities for Language Learning:

Favourite words and things I like

The participants tell their favourite word in the language their learning and why. The words are written down so that everyone can see them and it is made sure that everyone knows what they mean. After gathering the words, you can form some poems using them.

In this game each of the participants said one thing that they like and asked if anyone else felt the same (ie. "I like cats. Is there anyone else here who likes cats?" "I like swimming. Is there anyone else here who likes swimming?") and other participants reply with raising their hands. Every subject is used to spark up conversation with additional questions: "Oh you like cats, do you have any?" "Where do you go for swimming?"

This activity can be continued with simple questions like favourite colour, favourite animal, etc. Even simple questions can bring up deeper answers, like favourite colour blue reminding of the sky in homeland.

Tips for the trainers

This exercise was developed for a zoom-setting and is easily done remotely if necessary. Even though the questions are really simple, the personal questions give room for self-expression where it's still easy to set your boundaries on what the participants want to share. It helps to create a conversational atmosphere which creates possibilities to rehearse using the language.

Onomatopoeic words

In this activity you start by going through different animal noises in the language being learned by asking from the participants if they know what sound each animal makes. It's also fun to compare the animal noises in different languages, especially if the group has people from different countries.

You can later expand onto other onomatopoeic words in the language.

Tips for the trainers

Going through onomatopoeic sounds is very exciting for the lower language group as they are able to make guesses and figure out the right answers even if they didn't know them.

Collaborative poetry, stories and plays

In this activity you write a fold-up poem in pairs, where one person writes a sentence and the first word for next sentence and another person completes the sentence and gives a first word for the next sentence. The poets get to read their poems to rest of the group.

You can also make poems as group effort with everyone saying one word or sentence at a time in turns. This playful way of making poems is great for people who are not that into poetry and is easy with low language skill.

This activity can be easily expanded into stories. If you wish to add more improvisational elements, you can act out the story at the same time as it is told: two people are storytellers and two other actors.

Tips for the trainers

With poetry it's good to emphasize the aspect of being playful with the language and how you can convey thoughts even without perfect grammar, which is very liberating since grammar rules plays a large part in learning a language. Doing poems together also removes the pressure of "coming up with a perfect line". Even a very plain sentence can have its meaning flipped completely by the sentence coming after it. If you choose to do the plays, it's good to do some warm-ups beforehand and make sure the participants are up to it.

Accepting and rejecting

Suggestion and answer “no-because” (rejection). In a circle. Take a pair/or one group with 3 persons. One enthusiastically suggests something in common action. The other one always **rejects** using words: no-because. Pairs are changing the role all the time.

e.g., Suggestion: “Hey, it’s such a wonderful weather. Let's go outside?”. Rejection: "NO, BECAUSE I hate being in sunshine.” The same in the other way around, always repeating with new questions and non-given answers. No pressure on questions. How does it feel like to be rejected? How does it affect to your feeling, body or energy?

Suggestion and answer “yes-and” (approving). One enthusiastically suggests something in common action. The other one always **approves** using words: yes-and.

e.g. “Hey, let’s paint that wall?”. "YES, AND let’s paint the whole house too and other one can continue YES, AND maybe the next house too, YES, AND every house in the city etc. So the pair will have a conversation which goes on and on. How does it feel like to be approved? How does it affect to your feeling, body or energy? What about group energy and the energy of working space?

Tips for the trainers

You always give your own energy. Rejection moves us away from connection, uncertainty and resistance arise: why would I even offer anymore? With this activity it’s important to discuss the purpose of the activity, which is to demonstrate the effects of rejection and acceptance. This leads into the basic rule of improvisation, the “yes, and” -mentality, where you accept the suggestion from the other and add onto it. Don’t try to invent something in your mind in advance, to control or to be the leader. Don’t try to be too intelligent, witty or funny.

Mimic gifts

Mimic definition exercises. In a circle. Quickly experiment with a mime definition, that will support future practice. Everyone lifts something from the middle of circle, using hands and body expression. Each separately but all at the same time.

1. Lift something large and very light e.g., a large feather. Everyone determines which thing is and put it down saying verbally out loud "Oh, a large feather or whatever the thing is" Everything is right!
2. Lift something big and heavy + definition out loud
3. Lift something small and light + definition out loud
4. Lift something small and heavy. + definition out loud

Give and receive mimic gifts/presents. How to influence each other in a positive way? In a circle make pairs/or one group with 3 persons. In the middle of the circle is an endless pile of imaginary gifts.

One is taking a mimic gift from the middle of the circle. Is it big or small, heavy or light? Gives a gift to their pair. The recipient is always delighted and happy about a gift, whatever it is. Repeating with always a new gift. Pairs change roles between the gifts.

Doing something together with mimic gift. When the recipient gets a gift, they suggest that they will do something with it together! And the other says YES and then they are doing something with it, in action. If the common action starts to fade or stuck, stop it and take brand new gift!

Tips for the trainers

These activities are great for learning new vocabulary, since you add kinesthetic learning with the mime. Lower language level students might need more support with their conversations with some additional questions. It's ok to use a dictionary.

Activities for Job-Seeking:

Concentration

Listen to yourself and space around you. Breathing is something that is common to all people. Conscious thinking and experiencing of it makes us sense and respect ourselves and others. It puts us in touch with the world.

1. The facilitator gives impulses. Stand still and relax your shoulders, head and whole body. Breathe in peace as deeply as you want. Place your hands on your abdomen and diaphragm and feel how your breathing moves and affects your body. After this move your entire body from head to legs. Eyes may be closed. The facilitator can choose the movements but they can be for example: Turn your head from side to side. Rotate the shoulders around in different directions. Make a rotation of the upper body in different directions so that the hands follow relaxed. Rotate the hips. Rotate the knees. Rotate the ankles. At the end shake your whole body and let the sound come out from the base of the stomach.

2. After that, if it is possible, lay on the floor, if not, sit on a chair. Eyes closed. Relax. Breathe. Listen to the sound of your body: your heartbeat, breathing etc. Move a little bit outside of yourself, what do you hear next to you, listen what kind of sounds do the people in the room make, what other sounds there is inside of the room. What can you hear outside of the room? Sound of the building, traffic, nature... Stay still few minutes. You are part of the world.

Tips for the trainers

This activity is basically meditation, but the purpose in this context is to make the participants more aware of their surroundings to open them up for the rest of the exercises.

Shapes together and same rhythm

Shapes together. Walk in a room/space, no speech. The facilitator gives/shows some shapes (word or picture or both) that the group must do together. Group can't talk, whisper, moving others, no one organizes, no one isn't a leader. They are jointly responsible for this. The goal is to build attentive and calm atmosphere. There is no hurry. Shapes could be e.g., circle, square, triangle, fork and knife, number 8, number 4, etc. Afterwards groups discuss how it felt. Was it difficult when speech was not allowed? Whether there was a difference in interaction because of the lack of speech? Finally, a group can try new shapes and they are allowed to use speech. Was it easier at all? What happened to the attentive atmosphere?

Same rhythm. Listening, sensing and finding a common rhythm. It's awesome that we humans have different rhythms, it's also the thing that sometimes creates challenges to interact and work together. "How can it take so long for them to do things" or "why are they in such a hurry again, I'd like to think about it for a little while".

1. Walk with your own speed and rhythm. Exaggerate your own walking style and pace. If you normally walking fast, do it very fast. If you are swinging while walking, swing more! Peek a little at others about how different people we are and that's a good thing.

2. Return to you normal walking pace.

3. Together we can do amazing things. Looking for a common rhythm by sensing each other's. No one isn't a leader, not doing rhythm with heels or boots. Someone must drop their own walking pace, someone must raise the pace. It is not that we should be alike, but how we together create a common "space" for this group.

A. Once a common rhythm is found, group starts to speed up the walking pace. No one is leading based of listening and sensing. Facilitator can show when to speed or slow by hand or using the image of volume button. How fast the group can walk in a same pace? How slow they can walk in a same pace?

B. Then group can test:

Stop walking at the same time

Turning to right at the same time

Joint jump

Start walking together

Tips for the trainers

With this exercise the participants get to rehearse their co-operational skills.

You can discuss with the group which one felt easier, slow or fast walking. The idea is that the energy that is formed between people is like a safety net. If someone "falls", network supports and gives energy. But if those threads aren't in the net, one can fall through. Wouldn't it be safe and comfortable to feel and be together like this?

Non-verbal communication

Courage circle, numbers 1-5. Non-verbal communication. Think about numbers 1 to 5. Number 1 is the most shy, silent and uncertain. Number 5 is the most outgoing, loud and confident.

We all have these 5 numbers in ourselves, we are using them in different situations in our life and stages of life. They are also changing depending on where we are and with who we communicate.

IMPORTANT: Don't rate numbers on a scale of good-bad. Or that one should be "always brave, loud and taking space". It is socially intelligent to be able to change and "play" with their own status/being/self. In each number there is a positive and negative side.

In a circle. Everyone doing at the same time. Facilitator gives numbers and instructions like:

1. Closed posture. Protecting their chest with their hands and feet turned in. Shy, timid, quiet, small voice almost whispering and avoids eye contact. Don't take space, give space to others. Don't want to be the center of attention. This can be also an inner experience, not visible to the outside. Or the feeling in front of the new or exciting situation. One can also be an observer, a listener, one does not have to try to be anything else. Observes.
2. Body can open a little bit, hands more to the side. Better posture. Looking for eye contact, but it is not very strong. Can look around a bit. A small smile and greeting "hello". Voice and breathing still thin. Willingness to interact, but not necessarily to take the initiative itself. Ready to go with others together. Gives space to others. Observes.
3. Legs in shoulder-width crotch position. Hands on the side, relaxed. Calm eye contact to others. Voice comes deep from the stomach "hello". Comfortable being. Neutral face expression. Ready to take space but also to give it to others.
4. Body open, weight on one hip. Hands can move and explain. Louder voice. Shows varieties of expression and emotions. Strong eye contact. Listens but is waiting for own turn to speak, sometimes a little bit too enthusiastic. Gives nice energy to others but can take too much space with their own strong expressions.
5. Take space, moving. Strong body expressions. Loud voice, speaking on top of others. Repeat others stories as their own. Doesn't sense the space and others' emotions or reads them wrong. Wants to control and to be right. Also gives energy and courage to other people: "let's do it".

Playing with caricature characters. Group can also play with numbers using caricature characters. Very over the top stereotypes e.g., raging leader (king/queen etc.) or a very submissive servant.

Playing with meetings between different kinds of caricature characters. Everyone chooses own number, don't say it to others. What is the place? E.g. library, a shop etc. All characters (numbers) go to that place and see what happens: meetings and conversations.

Tips for the trainers

Based on these exercises, you can practice a job interview situations and all kinds of encounters in normal life. What is the status and role you take on in a job interview? How about with your co-workers?

Activities for Affirmation:

Creating your Superhero

This is a very simple exercise, where you ask the participants to create their own Superhero-character who have the power to give anything they want to the world. The participants are asked to use props/costumes to find inspiration and then introduce themselves to the group by telling their Superhero-name and what it is they are to giving to the world.

Tips for the trainers

Using costumes and props and a character it's easier to participants to express their wishes and what it is they actually wish to bring into the world – usually the qualities we admire the most are something that exist within ourselves but isn't necessarily expressed or developed fully.

Statue techniques

Photographer. Divide into pairs and name the persons A and B. One of the pairs A takes B from the hand and rotates them around. A releases their grip and B stays in the position they get in when the movement stops. A looks at and observes B's position. A describes, "What they see, what posture says, what posture indicates." After that, the tasks are changed. If desired, the task can also be done with only one pair rotating each other and the whole group discuss what the position says.

Still-statue. Group forms a still image (statue) of the issue physically, not words. Strong expression in the body. A picture can be something done by an individual or a group (half of the group or smaller groups). The image divides alternative perspectives on the situation / emotion.

"I will give you a word/theme to explore. Your job is to create a still statue that represents possible experience of the topic. It can be your own experience or more common."

Topics for the statues e.g., joy, sorrow, hate, envy, love, freedom, enthusiastic, home, lost, new beginning, hope etc.

Once statues are made, choose a way to look at the images. If you have divided group a half, others watching and sharing what they see in the picture.

"I see big smiles on faces. Body is open, hands wide open, persons look at each other, they are turned towards each other's, they seem that they are soon hugging etc."

Still statue and sound of thought. After looking at the still image and what it expresses, one can hear what the statue feels and thinks at that very moment. The facilitator touches the statue to the shoulder and statue says a word, a sentence, a sound that exactly fits the position and emotional state of what they think of the situation just then. The purpose of the method is to break free of stereotypes and find an interpretation of the subject together with the individual and the group.

Moving statue, movement and sound. In the moving statue, feelings are represented through movement and sound. Statues are not still anymore and they can repeat words, sentences or sound expressing their emotions.

Tips for the trainers

Statue-technique can be used in many different variations: you can do mind-maps with the group where the trainer begins the statue with a central thought and participants add into it. A good example of this kind of mind-map statue with immigrants is to do statues of the country they have immigrated in – maybe one statue with positive things and another with negative things.