



GUIDE

Audiences with special needs

ARTIST-FACILITATOR TRAINING
AT THE OPÉRA DE MONTRÉAL

OPÉRA
DE MONTRÉAL

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For audiences with special needs, given that the ages within the same group can vary, it is possible to select exercises that represent the age categories present from the corresponding Padlets and to adapt them as needed. Moreover, it is important not to take the age of participants as the only determining factor, since the intellectual, sensory and emotional development can vary from one group to another, requiring yet more adjustment. That is why, for these audiences in particular, it is imperative to collect any useful information before the workshop presentation, in order to best understand the clients' capacity.

A AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS (ASD)

01 SKILLS TO DEVELOP

- Variable depending on the group (to be determined on a case-by-case basis according to the profile of the participants, obtained by the answers to a questionnaire or simply thanks to a preliminary discussion with the person in charge). These skills often include aspects of socialization, managing the reaction to sensory stimuli (singing voice, loud sounds), asserting personality or expressing emotions.

02 GENERAL TIPS

- Establish contact based on listening, empathy and authenticity. Do not start or end the workshop by playing a character. **Be yourself.**
- Provide a rewarding socialization experience, either through contact with the artist-facilitator, or by offering activities that promote contact between people.
- Propose activities that meet the needs of the group (discuss these needs in advance) with the aim of providing well-being.
- Listen and remain sensitive to feedback from the group (dialogues when the situation lends itself to it, or otherwise gestures, changes in behavior or attitude, emission of sounds, quality of listening, feeling of group/feeling of individuality, well-being/discomfort, etc.).





- Find out from the group leader (preferably in advance, or otherwise during the workshop) whether activities should be adapted to possible hypersensitivity of the participants. Operatic singing may cause discomfort in some individuals because of the decibel level, the presence of certain overtones, or the emotional content involved. These individuals may then put on noise-canceling headphones (a kind of earphones sometimes called “ earmuffs”) or cover their ears. These behaviors are normal, but they should be taken into account and activities modified if necessary.
- Because of the characteristic rigidity of this audience, be “predictable” and avoid surprises. For example, at the beginning of the activity, the artist-facilitator will briefly announce the plan of the meeting, if the listening level of the audience allows it. Each activity is then briefly presented, so as to create a sense of security. The plan can also be written on the board or on another visual medium that will allow participants to find their bearings in time.
- For certain participants, use pictograms to display the plan of the meeting or the activities (inquire in advance with the person in charge). Pictograms are often provided by the host organization, or sent in advance by the artist-facilitator to the organization so that the participants can get to know them).



- **Given the typical hypersensitivity of this audience, limit the number of simultaneous stimuli and eliminate distractions. Do not speak while listening to a musical extract or play an instrument while giving instructions. One focus at a time, one instruction at a time.**

- Also avoid wearing clothes with a repetitive pattern or features that attract too much attention.
- A participant may need to retreat to their corner or leave the classroom during the workshop. (Moreover, some participants will feel more comfortable if the room door remains open.) This is normal behavior, but the artist-mediator will remain attentive to the person who has moved away, in order to detect if an activity in particular displeased him, or if another one would please him and allow him to regain his place in the group.
- Know that hypersensitivity may cause some participants to have an unexpected crisis, triggered by a touch, a sound or even a simple look.
- Be aware of another common phenomenon: echolalia (the participant automatically repeats the sentences heard or the end of sentences).

03 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES RELATED TO OPERA



- To promote self-awareness through the discovery of the range of sounds possible to be produced with one's own voice.
- To encourage interaction through song to help build self-esteem and a sense of belonging.
- To offer opera, singing, theater (live vocal examples, presentation of audio/video extracts) as means of expressing emotions and arousing the interest of participants so that they continue exploring this universe on their own.
- On a case-by-case basis, the artist-facilitator chooses whether he or she should offer the "typical theoretical knowledge of opera", insofar as the audience is receptive. However, the activity is optional for this type of audience.

B FRANCIZATION

01 SKILLS TO BE DEVELOPED ACCORDING TO THE "LINGUISTIC, ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION" PROGRAM OF THE QUEBEC SCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAM

- Communicate orally in French in various situations
- Read various texts in French
- Write various texts in French
- And ultimately: contribute to the socio-cultural integration of participants

02 GENERAL TIPS

- In francization, it is advisable to engage with a variety of modes of presentation. An instruction or an explanation will be understood much more easily if accompanied by a visual element (gestures, facial expression, use of a table or projection screen, accessories and/or musical instruments, etc.).
- The vocal flow must be adapted to the group, without being caricatural, neither childish, nor too slow.
- Regularly check the understanding of the concepts by the group. If we ask the question “Do you understand?” or “Tell me if I speak too quickly”, people may not respond for fear of drawing attention to themselves or having to speak to explain what they do not understand. It is better to ask more specific questions, for example: “I just talked about ‘scene’; do you know what a scene is?” Make the group aware of the use of more rare or specialized words, and ensure that they understand them.
- **Learning is more effective if it is based on a reciprocal relationship. This is why it is useful to ask participants to share their cultural references, especially those related to their culture of origin.** Knowing that they are listened to and valued in their culture, they will be better prepared to discover Quebec culture.



03 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES RELATED TO OPERA (IN CONNECTION WITH THE PROGRESSION OF LEARNING OF THE LINGUISTIC, ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION PROGRAM)

- While contributing to the language enrichment of the participants, the excerpts chosen must present a kind of language that connects to the usual language of Quebec society, or be adapted to better serve this objective. The French poetry used in operas is often quite far from the language spoken in Quebec.
- The singers – specialists in the phonetic alphabet and phonemes – will offer phonetic exercises that will use phonemes specific to the French language in order to help participants in francization to fully grasp its subtleties. The next step will be to establish a link with the graphemes.

- Prosody awareness exercises, reinforced by the highlights of the music, are recommended. The musical setting of a text provides additional information to the audience on the the tonal accents specific to the language, by linking the strong or weak syllables of the text with the strong or weak beats of the music.
- We aim to draw excerpts from operas from the French repertoire that will allow participants to better understand French culture and, if possible, Quebec culture.
- The use of extracts from known operas in other languages makes it possible to translate or recompose them.

C

FUNCTIONAL LIMITATIONS

(VISUAL, AUDITORY, MOTOR, COGNITIVE DISABILITIES, ETC.) AND LEARNING DIFFICULTIES (INCLUDING DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER [DLD], STUDENTS GROUPED IN “LANGUAGE CLASSES”, ETC.)

NOTE: a person with a functional limitation will not necessarily have learning difficulties if their limitation is not cognitive; here we group the two audiences in the same category since the preparation of the workshop has similarities.

01 SKILLS TO DEVELOP



- **Promote autonomy, focusing first on the person’s acquired and innate capabilities, then try to develop new skills that can be transferred to other areas of their life.** The choice of skills to be acquired will be determined in consultation with the person in charge of the group.
- In the absence of cognitive limitations, the goals will be the same as for another person of the same age group. However, the activities are likely to require more help and different methods.
- Is the disability from which a person suffers recent, sudden, or does it date from a long time ago, from birth? This is relevant information to gather when setting workshop objectives.

02 GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND TIPS

- People with functional limitations often practice sensory compensation: when they are deprived of one sense, they mobilize all the others to compensate. For example, just because someone isn't watching doesn't mean they aren't listening! They may be concentrating on her auditory sense, on their valid senses. This compensation can require a lot of energy on their part, so it is advisable to be attentive to the signs of fatigue they show and to proceed to a change of activity or to introduce a break.
- For a visually impaired audience, if you physically illustrate what is expected of students (as with the instructions "imitate me" or "do like me"), you must simultaneously describe the desired action or movement in words.
- Also for the visually impaired, the perception of the 3rd dimension may be lacking, which prevents movement coordination activities (catching, balancing, etc.).

03 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES RELATED TO OPERA



- **Opera being a total art, choose the artistic activity that will be the most likely to encourage the participation of individuals by matching the activity to the strengths of the individual.**
- In the absence of cognitive limitations, refer to the objectives of the corresponding ages. In the presence of cognitive limitations, determine the objectives together with those in charge.

D MENTAL HEALTH

NOTE: In this section, we assume that the participants with whom the artist-facilitators will work already benefit from guidance from professionals for diagnosed mental health problems, and that a clinical team will be present at all times during the workshops, which provides a “safety net”. In the event of a crisis in the absence of a clinical team, the facilitator must listen, trust their intuition and try to talk to the person – as much as possible during the break or at the end of the activity – ask them if they are well, if they want to talk about it. The question should also be asked: “Do I feel comfortable letting them be alone?” If not, ask them if someone is coming to pick them up and try to put them in touch with that other person. As a last resort, call 911.

01 SKILLS TO DEVELOP



- Be present, diligent and fully engage in learning. Let go. **It can be beneficial for the participant to take a break from their personal problems and immerses themselves fully in the activity.**
- Personal challenges should be adapted to the needs of each person, and determined by the clinical team in dialogue with them.
- Perseverance, confidence...

02 GENERAL TIPS

- Consider participants with a neutral eye, without considering or even knowing the diagnoses they have received.
- Run the workshop as if you were dealing with the general public, with the same quality requirements. **HIGH EXPECTATIONS = TRUST** (“If I allow myself to have high expectations of you, it is because I trust that you can do what I ask of you.”) Being too protective of this public can be perceived as another form of stigmatization, of victimization. However, the challenges to meet should be chosen in such a way as to bring success to the participants – a primary objective.

- Recognize everyone's potential and seek to showcase their talents. Again, make them experience successes. Such an approach is particularly important with these participants, who often struggle with low self-esteem (the feeling of not being up to it).
- Even if talent is not evenly distributed among individuals, encourage team spirit. No stars in this context, only a common goal. If you observe a tendency to compare, defuse it. Success must be collective: **it is necessary to create dynamics that go in the direction of positive interdependence, meaning that each individual's contribution is necessary for the success of the project.**

03 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES RELATED TO OPERA

- Mobilize the group through participatory activities.
- Emphasize activities that involve action and movement. Bringing people back to the present moment is the best antidote to the tendency to ruminate on the past.
- **Prioritize breathing exercises: this is a transferable skill in people's lives for the management of anxiety.**
- Do not be afraid of activities that get emotional. The mobilizing potential of opera necessarily comes with a destabilizing potential. Trust the people who participate; the clinical team is there when needed.

