

Good practice: Occupational Therapy Workshops (Therapy through art)

21st Century Skill connected:

Learning skills: organization, time management, multitasking, cleaning workspace
Literacy skills: numeracy

Life skills self-awareness building, problem solving, creative thinking, self-control

Give an explanation of how this good practice works. Examples from websites, videos or other media are necessary.

Just like in the “Good practice 2” example, this particular activity is being held in one of the wards in Płock prison (Poland). It is a ward for inmates who have mental disabilities. These are non-psychotic mental disorders and mentally retarded. Just for this particular group of inmates there exists occupational therapeutic workshop. This is an institution which organizes various additional activities during which inmates can not only productively spend their time, learn new skills via therapeutic workshops but alleviate their mental disabilities. This is the most important part and role of this particular institution.

One of the most important parts of the occupational therapeutic workshop is organizing artistic workshops. Within the workshop there exist three separate ‘classes’ – IT, woodcraft and strictly art & craft.

The idea behind these workshops is to keep inmates occupied, make them focus on specific jobs (woodcraft and art&craft activities are extremely popular), so that they can be “withdrawn” a bit from the fact of their imprisonment. The workshops are led by professional therapists, who at the same time are their teachers and teach them various skills, mainly vocational skills connected to the activities that they do there. Inmates learn basics how to operate IT equipment, how to use basic software, i.e. Word, Excel, some real basics of Windows, etc. In the woodcraft workshop they learn how to operate basic electrical devices (i.e. a saw, a drill) or basic woodcraft tools – piles, hand saws, screwdrivers, etc.

The same woodcraft workshop organizes another very specified activity – stained glass windows making workshop. This one is a bit more complicated due to the fact that the whole procedure of making the stained-glass windows is more demanding. However, the participants also learn the new skills via hands-on activities.

Both woodcraft and stained-glass windows making workshops are extremely popular and the outcomes are visually attractive (see the attached pictures).

At the art & craft workshops, inmates have a variety of activities during which they learn various artistic techniques, starting from “normal” drawing/sketching/painting, through embroidery and mosaics gluing, to more complicated techniques like rope twisting, moss seeding (and making moss “pictures”) or powertex figures making.

Explain how this good practice helps solve problems/stimulates social vocational skills in your country. If possible, provide data of how successful the good practice is.

One needs to know that the described above techniques are those that are connected with vocational skills acquiring. Since the participants are inmates with mental disabilities, one of the 'joining' factor in the Occupational Therapy Workshops is the fact that all participants also undergo social skills therapy. There is a variety of different exercises that inmates have in this respect. First and foremost is the fact that all therapeutic participants receive certain amounts of money for their participation. These are not large amounts, however, the fact that they "earn" money for their participation leads to the most important social skills training – they undergo economical training. They need to skilfully administer their financial means in order to buy some good in the prison shop, save up the money and possibly spend it on more 'important' things. Through the years, therapists have noticed that this is one of the most important 'lessons' for all participants.

Other social skills that are trained in the Occupational Therapy Workshops are:

- Communication – therapists tend to sum up and discuss what participants have done during each session. Prisoners have to talk about what they managed to do or failed. If they failed, they need to explain what they should do to succeed next time, etc.
- Cooperation and team work – many a time, during the classes, inmates have to work together on one project (this is an intentional plan of the therapist). That forces inmates to cooperate and work on a common thing, something that many of them lack while being outside the prison.
- Following directions – obviously, while at the workshops, participants (especially at the beginning) do not know what and how to do certain things. They need to follow their educators' instruction in order to achieve something.
- Using manners – many a time, inmates lack basic culture and refinement. Language they use is very often far from kind and elaborate. During therapeutic classes, it is required, participants use proper language, they need to be kind and courteous toward one another and prison staff.
- Savoir vivres – every once in a while, Occupational Therapy Workshops organize various meetings, usually connected with special holidays (e.g., Christmas or Easter). During these meetings, snack treats are served, everyone is sitting at the same table and so on. Participants organize everything on their own (sometimes they also prepare food for the whole group) – they lay the table, clean up, serve food, etc. The idea behind it is to make them feel as if they were doing it in their own houses, so that they could get the refinement, basic 'table' skills and so that they could gain elementary good-behaviour skills while in a group at the table.

We could mention here tens of other social skills that participants gain. These skills would apply not only to this particular example but also to the other two above. To name just a few that us, as prison educators, consider as very important:

LISTENING

- Learning to negotiate,
- Listen with full attention,
- Active listening.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Starting and maintaining a conversation,
- Giving and accepting compliment,
- Learning how to speak in public,
- Addressing different people.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- Using appropriate tone and volume of voice,
- Using gestures,
- Learning to read body language,
- Making eye contact,
- Respecting personal space,
- Facial expression.

EMOTIONS

- Identifying emotions,
- Expressing emotions,
- Expressing strong feelings.

PROBLEM SOLVING

- Identifying and describing problems,
- Generating solutions,
- Learning to apologize,
- Showing respect,
- Assertiveness
- Many, many more...

Explain in one or two sentences how this good practice matches with the connected 21st Century Skill.

Basically, Occupational Therapy Workshops teach in a very versatile way. One may think that this particular form of education is a kind of a 'cover' but in fact it is. Prisoners learn some specific skills while doing various activities but underneath, other very important skills (in this case social skills) are smuggled. It cannot be underestimated especially if we consider that many of the inmates simply lack those basic skills (both 'school' and social ones) and this is one of the reasons why they end up behind the bars.

Good Practice 3 Appendix 1 – Pictures from the workshops