



# The Power of Play and Drama

Evaluation, findings and recommendations from the  
EU Erasmus Plus ARTPAD project 2015-2018

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# Document Control

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# Executive summary

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## 1.0 Introduction

The ARTPAD (Achieving Resilience through Play and Drama) project was funded through the European Union's Erasmus+ programme from September 2015 to August 2018. The project aimed to promote awareness and skills development for education practitioners in formal and informal settings in terms of how play and drama can support the development of resilience in pupils struggling with formal education (particularly disadvantaged children), thereby increasing their motivation to engage with education and addressing issues of early school leaving. Five partners (Austria, Germany, Hungary, Poland and the UK as lead partner) carried out transnational research to identify good practice and produced a *Best Practice Guide* and a learning resource.

## 1.1 Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation paid attention to both group processes and outputs in order to evaluate how far the project's objectives were met. It took a participative action approach, using an iterative process of change/learning/action with partners. Three rounds of interviews were carried out, together with observation of processes throughout the project.

## 1.2 Resilience, play and drama: why do they matter in education?

The EU acknowledges that some disadvantaged children struggle to engage in education, and early school leaving (ESL) has been highlighted as a problem to be addressed. In addition, it is recognised that preparation for an uncertain future requires social and emotional skills, adaptability and resilience rather than fixed skills and knowledge.

There is significant evidence to show that engagement in drama and in play help to build these flexible social and emotional skills and resilience. The project did not seek to produce further evidence, rather than focus was on how to support education practitioners (teachers, youth workers, playworkers, etc) to facilitate drama and to create conditions for children to play.

The three core concepts underpinning the project (resilience, play and drama) are not easily defined and the contexts for their use varied enormously across partner organisations and national systems. Partners engaged in lively debate and the report highlights some of the variations in understanding and potential for application. The *Best Practice Guide* offers the following definitions:

**Resilience** is an ability to overcome, adapt and cope with adversity and stress, thereby allowing individuals to develop resistance against risk and chronic stress factors. It is widely believed that children and young people with low resilience, due to a variety of circumstances and/or environmental factors that have impacted on their development, will lack the ability to cope in stressful situations and may consequently display behaviours that impact on learning and socialization.

When referring to **drama** we are using the term to imply children and young people's participation in the drama process through role play, improvisation, characterisation and other forms of practical engagement.

**Play** is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons.

Much of the debate about fixing definitions focused on the primacy of process over product, of experience over outcome. In both play and drama, children can create ‘as if’ and ‘what if’ worlds where they can experience life from a different perspective. This may be useful in terms of making life either less scary or less boring, or it may be a therapeutic endeavour, or it may be for the thrill of the emotions evoked.

### **1.3 Transnational learning**

Partners spent the first year visiting projects using play and drama (and also theatre, games and other experiential approaches to learning), using these as a basis for working on the *Best Practice Guide*, and particularly for debating the core concepts. The debating process led to the development of a set of six **principles**.

The principles draw attention to the importance of specific methodologies; creating the right environment where children feel safe and happy to explore; adults developing an attitude that respects children and works with them as they are; supporting individual children to work with others, balancing individual and group needs and desires; empowerment; and aligning all the principles together in support of children’s resilience through play and drama.

### **1.4 Supporting teachers to create conditions for the development of resilience through play and drama**

The *Best Practice Guide* offers an evidence base for how play and drama can support the development of resilience as well as engagement in learning, thereby preventing early school leaving. It gives practice examples of their application in formal and informal education settings. Alongside this, partners developed a training course aimed at supporting educators to work with drama and play. The course was delivered over a five-day period to employees and volunteers from partner organisations who can become trainers and deliver the course in their own countries. During this intensive five-day course, participants kept a learning journal that was used to make amendments to the course and to find out how it may be adapted and delivered in partner countries. The course was a good opportunity for networking and the group has stayed in touch, sharing tips and experiences, using a closed Facebook page.

### **1.5 Next steps and recommendations**

Partners (including those attending the training course) will use the resources and experiences from the project in diverse ways, including ‘bottom-up’ approaches to promoting principles, concepts and practical tips through networks and workshops and a ‘top-down’ approach through influencing policy makers and education leaders. A number of recommendations emerged from discussions regarding the learning from the ARTPAD project and the resources to be used.

#### **Recommendations**

Given the importance of play and drama in supporting children’s resilience and engagement in education, and given the opportunities and challenges for continuing the work, the project makes the following recommendations:

### **National governments:**

- Governments should give serious consideration to the evidence that play and drama in schools can help build resilience and prevent early school leaving.
- Governments should pay attention to supporting time and space for play and drama in children's lives, both in and out of school. This is recognised as a responsibility of national governments in General Comment 17 on article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Developing competences in facilitating play and drama should be included in the curricula for teacher, youth worker and social pedagogue training, in vocational training in pedagogy, and in professional development for educators.
- Governments should support the sharing of good practices and resources between local authorities and educators.

### **Local governments:**

- Local authorities should assist with the development of infrastructures and with resources to support initiatives to develop opportunities for play and drama in formal and informal education settings.
- Local authorities should support the inclusion of play and drama in the post-qualifying professional development for educators and social/youth workers.

### **Universities:**

- Universities should support the development of play and drama in educational settings and in youth work through curricula and learning outcomes for educators and youth workers, conferences, publications, summer schools, etc.
- University networks should promote the use of play and drama in education to support the development of resilience and address some children's lack of engagement in the classroom, and to prevent early school leaving and high numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

### **Schools and other educational settings:**

- Consider the benefits of play and drama for children's enjoyment of school and for building their resilience
- Consider ways to integrate play and drama into the school day both inside and outside of the classroom, including through training staff using the ARTPAD course

### **European Union:**

- Work to support national governments in implementing article 31 of the UNCRC (drawing on General Comment 17), encouraging and supporting local governments and education settings to recognise, respect and promote children and young people's article 31 rights.
- support further programmes seeking to develop the work further and embed it into education systems.

# Evaluation Report

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## 2.0 Introduction

The ARTPAD (Achieving Resilience through Play and Drama) project was funded through the European Union's Erasmus+ programme from September 2015 to August 2018. It brought together five partners from Austria, Germany, Hungary, Poland and the UK (as lead partner) with expertise and experience in educator training, drama and play<sup>1</sup>. The project aimed to promote awareness and skills development for practitioners in formal and informal education settings in terms of how play and drama can support the development of resilience in pupils struggling with formal education (particularly disadvantaged children), thereby increasing their motivation to engage with education and addressing issues of early school leaving.



The project had three key objectives:

1. to undertake a transnational research and development phase of the project to enable understanding between partners and to identify best practice in their delivery of drama techniques and children's play facilitation;
2. to create a Guide and a learning resource to inform, inspire and enable leaders of schools and youth projects to deliver the above practice;
3. to place emphasis on developing the practice for disadvantaged children and young people to aid the building of resilience and engagement for learning.

This report details the work of the project, including the processes and outputs, and makes recommendations for policy makers, education leaders and practitioners in terms of supporting children's access to play and drama as a way of developing their resilience and their enjoyment of and engagement in schooling. The report is a part of the evaluation of the project.

## 3.0 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation sought to pay close attention to group processes, the theoretical assumptions underpinning why the proposed interventions might work, the differences

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<sup>1</sup> A full list of partners can be found in Appendix 1.

within each partner's contexts and understandings and how the group worked with these differences, as well as evaluating how far the project's objectives were met. It took a participative action approach, using an iterative process of change/learning/action with partners. This involved a close relationship with the partners and the processes of the project, attending key partner meetings and being included in key communications, with three rounds of interviews. Two interim reports were presented to the partners, and recommendations for future actions and any changes were discussed and agreed. In addition, evaluation data were gathered from discussions, minutes and recordings of partner meetings; post meetings evaluations; drafting processes for the *Best Practice Guide* and the training course; feedback from partner multiplier and dissemination events; a partner reflection on learning from the project; the training course delivery in Gdansk and any other opportunities that arose.

#### **4.0 Resilience, play and drama: why do they matter in education?**

This section considers the relationship between the three core concepts in the ARTPAD project as they were discussed within the project. It opens with an outline of the problem that might be addressed by supporting educators to introduce drama and support play in education settings, and then offers a brief description of the initial evidence base used to inform the project design, drawing on the previous work of two of the consortium partners. It then goes on to discuss some of the core concepts in more depth, drawing on the debates between partners and on the *Best Practice Guide*<sup>2</sup>, ending with an overview of the ARTPAD Principles that the partners developed and adopted.

#### **4.1 Starting points: the rationale for the programme design**

##### **4.1.1 Evidence of the problem**

The first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, jointly signed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on 17 November 2017, states that 'everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning'<sup>3</sup>. It is acknowledged that there are particular groups of children and young people who, through various manifestations of disadvantage, struggle to engage with education systems and drop out as soon as they can. In recognising early school leaving as a problem to be

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<sup>2</sup> ARTPAD Consortium (2017) *Best Practice Guide: Achieving Resilience Through Play and Drama*, available at <http://artpadproject.eu/publications>.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission (2018) *The European pillar of social rights in 20 principles*, available at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

addressed, and the Europe 2020 strategy set the goal of reducing the proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds leaving education and training early to below 10%. Although many countries have reached or are close to this target, there is still work to be done: in 2016, there were over 4 million early school leavers in Europe, of whom only 45% were employed<sup>4</sup>. The Council of the European Union recognises that this is an issue of inequality:

*Early school leaving tends to result from a range of frequently interconnected personal, social, economic, cultural, educational, gender-related and family-related factors, and is linked to situations of cumulative disadvantage which often have their origin in early childhood. Groups with low socio-economic status are affected to a greater extent and early school leaving rates are particularly alarming for certain groups, such as children with migrant backgrounds (including newly arrived migrants and foreign-born children), Roma children and children with special educational needs<sup>5</sup>.*

Alongside this, recognition of global changes and challenges have prompted a review of the initial key competences for education and lifelong learning adopted in 2006<sup>6</sup>.

Acknowledging these changes, the review states:

*it appears no longer sufficient to equip young people with a fixed set of skills or knowledge; they need to develop resilience, a broad set of competences, and the ability to adapt to change<sup>7</sup>.*

Similar statements were made in 2015 by the OECD:

*Today's socio-economic climate brings new challenges that affect the future of children and youth. Although access to education has improved considerably, a good education no longer secures a job, youth have been particularly affected by rising unemployment following the economic crisis. Problems such as obesity and declining civic engagement are also increasing while the ageing population and the environmental outlook are worrying. Moreover, inequalities in labour market and social outcomes tend to be widening. Education has strong potential to address these challenges by enhancing a variety of skills. Cognitive skills matter, but social and emotional skills, such as perseverance, control and*

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<sup>4</sup> European commission (2018) proposal for a council recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/recommendation-key-competences-lifelong-learning.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> council of the European union (2015) outcome of proceedings: council conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school, available at <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/st-14441-2015-init/en/pdf>

<sup>6</sup> recommendation of the European parliament and of the council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/txt/?uri=celex%3a32006h0962>

<sup>7</sup> European commission (2018) proposal for a council recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/recommendation-key-competences-lifelong-learning.pdf>

*resilience are just as important. All of these skills need to be fostered for individuals and societies to prosper<sup>8</sup>.*

The quality and design of education systems has a significant impact on learners' engagement with learning, as does the overall school environment, relationships between educators and children, levels of support and pedagogical approaches. Respect for diversity, the promotion of intercultural understanding and a sense of belonging are fundamental to inclusive approaches to education, as is the availability of professional development for educational staff<sup>9</sup>.

Given this, the ARTPAD project sought to develop resources for education leaders and practitioners, youth workers, social pedagogues and playworkers that can support them to appreciate the value of, and to feel confident in offering, drama and opportunities for playing.

#### **4.1.2 The evidence base for the use of play and drama in educational settings**

The development of the project and its design drew on two key research studies that give evidence for the links between drama, play and resilience. The first was a previous EU-funded project called DICE (Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competences in Education<sup>10</sup>), a cross-cultural research study that worked with 12 countries (Czech Republic, Netherlands, Norway, Palestine, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK) to investigate the effects of educational theatre and drama on five of the eight Lisbon Key Competences (communication in the mother tongue; learning to learn; interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competences; entrepreneurship; and cultural expression). The detailed research with 4,475 students aged 13 to 16 years found that those who participated in theatre and drama programmes generally fared better across a range of indicators, including having more confidence; enjoying school more; being better at coping with stress; being more open to difference, learning and novelty; and being more empathic than those who did not engage in such programmes<sup>11</sup>. The Polish partner for the ARTPAD project had also been involved in the DICE project. Acknowledging that DICE worked only with 13- to 16-year-olds and with well-trained theatre and drama specialists, ARTPAD

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<sup>8</sup> Oecd (2015) *skills for social progress: the power of social and emotional skills*, available at [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/skills-for-social-progress\\_9789264226159-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/skills-for-social-progress_9789264226159-en).

<sup>9</sup> Council of the European Union (2015) *Outcome of proceedings: Council conclusions on reducing early school leaving and promoting success in school*, available at <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/st-14441-2015-init/en/pdf>

<sup>10</sup> [www.dramanetwork.eu](http://www.dramanetwork.eu)

<sup>11</sup> DICE Consortium (2010) *The DICE has been cast: A DICE resource research findings and recommendations on educational theatre and drama*, available at [http://www.dramanetwork.eu/policy\\_paper.html](http://www.dramanetwork.eu/policy_paper.html).

sought to build on this to include younger children and non-specialist educators, specifically extending one of its key recommendations:

*all teachers working in European schools should have a basic knowledge of what educational drama is and how the subject areas can contribute to the enhancement of teaching and learning.*

The second research study was a review of contemporary literature on children's play undertaken by staff at the University of Gloucestershire<sup>12</sup> (the lead UK partner for ARTPAD). The literature showed the benefits of play accrue from its characteristics of unpredictability, spontaneity, uncertainty, novelty, adaptiveness and goallessness rather than directly from its content. Play's value, therefore, arises from the process of playing that gives immediate benefit, rather than from direct practice-based link between the content of playing and the development of skills needed in later life. In particular, playing was shown to contribute to the development of adaptive systems that together might be understood as resilience. For example, the sheer thrill or pleasure of playing is more than a luxury; positive emotions are fundamental to good mental health and well-being, they fuel resilience, broaden thinking and the desire to seek out new things, and build coping resources<sup>13</sup>. In addition, through the emotions evoked in playing, it contributes to the development of emotion regulation, stress response systems, attachments (to peers and to place) and to creativity and openness to learning<sup>14</sup>. The tension, highlighted in the review, is that policy – if it recognises play at all – tends to focus on an instrumental value of playing, leading to the promotion of particular kinds of playing seen to support development of the right kinds of skills; this then compromises the very characteristics of playing that from which these benefits can accrue.

Given that the research literature showed a link between drama, play and resilience, the ARTPAD project did not set out to gather more evidence for this; rather its focus was on developing resources to support educators in schools and in youth projects, sharing ideas on how they might bring drama and play into their work with disadvantaged children and young people as a basis for engagement in education and for developing resilience. It sought to do this through an initial research phase, sharing knowledge, expertise and visiting case study examples of good practice in each of the five partner countries in order to produce a *Best Practice Guide* and developing a training course to introduce some of the knowledge and practical approaches for educators to use drama and support play in their

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<sup>12</sup> Lester, S. and Russell, W. (2008) *Play for a Change: Play, Policy and Practice – A review of contemporary perspectives*, London: National Children's Bureau, available at <http://www.playengland.org.uk/resource/play-for-a-change-play-policy-and-practice-a-review-of-contemporary-perspectives/>.

<sup>13</sup> Le Nguyen, K.D. and Frederickson, B.L. (2018) 'Positive Emotions and Well-Being', in D.S. Dunn (ed) *Positive Psychology: Established and emerging issues*, New York: Routledge.

<sup>14</sup> Lester and Russell, *ibid*.

settings.

## **4.2 First steps: debating the core concepts: resilience, drama and play**

The first year of the project was spent in transnational research. Partners met up for three days in each country, visiting projects that were already using play and drama in their work, and debating these as a basis for the Best Practice Guide. Details of the visits are covered in section 5 below. This section aims to give a flavour of some of the debates that arose following visits and in the preparation of the Guide. Partners brought with them high levels of skills, experience and knowledge in specific approaches to teacher and youth worker education, drama and/or play. Such skills were highly valued, and at the same time, different approaches, practices and organisational and cultural contexts meant that it was clear that the three core concepts needed further debate in order to agree how to present this in the Best Practice Guide for education leaders and practitioners in a way that could be useful across European countries. Different methodologies were employed to help the group reach agreements. A brief summary is offered here of these debates, since it is important to note how the three concepts are contested across several domains, including in the academic literature, in practice-based approaches and in cultural contexts (organisational and geographic).

### **4.2.1 Resilience:**

It was noted early on that there were several understandings of resilience among partners. At the very first meeting a range of perspectives were offered. Some of this was about specific meanings of words in translation (for example, the interchangeability of 'skills' and 'competences'); one partner pointed out that in German there are 18 words for resilience. Some saw resilience as a personal competence that can be developed or even taught, others as a meta-competence providing a foundation for, or emerging from, other competences such as self-belief, empathy, hope, self-reliance. It was noted that some of the literature on resilience takes a systems perspective, seeing it as the capacity for systems to overcome or resist stress factors, and these systems range 'from the molecular to the global'<sup>15</sup>. Hence, resilience may not be something that resides exclusively in individual children as competences that can be taught, but that operates across personal, relational and contextual domains. This fitted well with partner discussions regarding the importance of environments and relationships, and of creating conditions where capacities for self-regulation can develop. This led to a discussion about whether the focus is the here and

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<sup>15</sup> Masten, A. (2007) 'Resilience in Developing Systems: Progress and promise as the fourth wave rises', *Development and Psychopathology*, 19, pp. 921-930

now or the future: the capacity for supporting the development of resilience being about change.

**STORY IN A BOX:**

One partner told a story of his work with children in Gaza, where he had been asked to do some drama work with children in order to build their resilience. Yet at the same time it was a common belief that children in Gaza inherit forms of resilience to cope with situations of conflict. They may well be resilient, but they still have nightmares and wet the bed. Drama in this context was about simple techniques to help them with this in a therapeutic way, a chance for developing a sense of agency, for creating meaning and to be human.

In order to arrive at an agreed definition for the purposes of the *Best Practice Guide*, partners gave their understandings and an analysis of terms used was carried out to produce a ‘network graph’:

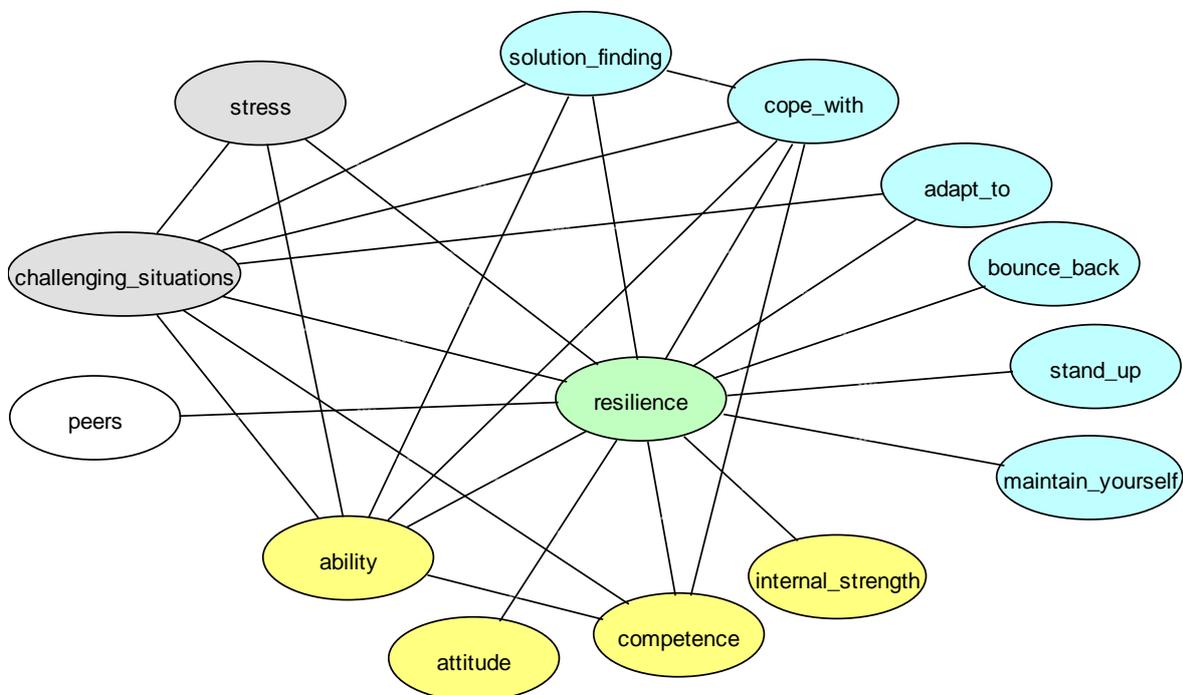


Figure 1: a network graph of resilience

The *Best Practice Guide* defines resilience as:

*an ability to overcome, adapt and cope with adversity and stress, thereby allowing individuals to develop resistance against risk and chronic stress factors. It is widely believed that children and young people with low resilience, due to a variety of circumstances and/or environmental factors that have impacted on their development, will lack the ability to cope in stressful situations and may consequently display behaviours that impact on learning and socialisation<sup>16</sup>.*

Children who are unduly stressed and who lack resilience are less likely to engage successfully in education, withdrawing or presenting challenging behaviour. This highlights the links between the conditions that support students to engage in education and also to develop resilience.

The ARTPAD project looked specifically at two approaches that can support children's development of resilience and their engagement in learning, namely drama and play. Yet these concepts too were open to interpretation, both conceptually and in terms of the examples of good practice in projects visited by partners. Defining a boundary making practice, it is useful in terms of coming to a shared understanding, yet it can also be limiting. For the purposes of the *Best Practice Guide*, specific definitions of drama and play were adopted, yet there was much in terms of the practices shared that fell outside of the boundaries for the Guide, so it is worth exploring the bigger picture here.

#### **4.2.2 Drama**

The Best Practice Guide states

*When referring to drama we are using the term to imply children and young people's participation in the drama process through role play, improvisation, characterisation and other forms of practical engagement. Whilst acknowledging that observing 'drama as theatre' and 'Theatre in Education' is highly effective for learning, ARTPAD will be specifically referring to individual engagement in drama and a range of drama approaches that an educator could use<sup>17</sup>.*

The difference between drama and theatre was debated at some length. Both drama and theatre (and also play) work with 'as if' worlds, where 'those involved either as participant or audience ... suspend disbelief and imagine and behave as if they were other than themselves in some other place at another time'<sup>18</sup>. Drama and theatre might be seen as two

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<sup>16</sup> ARTPAD Consortium *ibid.*, p. 5

<sup>17</sup> ARTPAD Consortium, *ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>18</sup> DICE Consortium (2010) *The DICE has been cast: A DICE resource research findings and recommendations on educational theatre and drama*, available at [http://www.dramanetwork.eu/policy\\_paper.html](http://www.dramanetwork.eu/policy_paper.html), p. 15.

ends of a continuum from process to product: theatre is concerned with performance, whereas drama focuses on the construction of imagined experience. 'Drama is more concerned with providing the child with lived-through experience, with the enactive moment, rather than with performing the rehearsed moment'<sup>19</sup>. Drama allows children to identify with real and imagined situations and roles and actively explore them in a relatively safe way<sup>20</sup>. Specific approaches such as positional drama helps those participating to experience life in 'another pair of shoes', and these can be used not only as separate drama classes, but as an approach to curriculum topics or classes on social and emotional aspects of learning<sup>21</sup>. The use of a continuum to describe these differences highlights the main focus of each and also allows for blurred boundaries between fixed binary concepts. These were further explored in the visits to examples of practice across the five partner countries (see section 5 below).

**STORY IN A BOX:**

*Júlia (15) grew up with a depressed mother, and a father who was rarely home; later they divorced. Not surprisingly she herself could not find the beauty of life, and was very shy and inhibited, suspicious about everyone, randomly smiling. The parental role was not to like the world.*

The drama school provided a safe place for her to show a little more of herself, to experience success and to find friends. It also opened her eyes for the nice things in life, including arts and drama. She finally went on to study further in a drama vocational secondary school. She is not yet sure that she wants to work in theatre, but this is something she finds happiness in

### **4.2.3 Play**

The debates here concerned notions of freedom and self-organisation. The UK partners brought a specific perspective to the project, that of playwork. Playworkers work with

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<sup>19</sup> DICE Consortium, *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Gałqzka, A. (2011) 'Drama as a Tool of Appreciative Inquiry in Creative Learning', *The New Educational Review*, 24(2), pp. 45-56.

<sup>21</sup> Colverd, S. and Hodgkins, B. (2011) *Developing Emotional Intelligence in the Primary School*, Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge.

school-aged children to support their play, and they have a very clear definition set out in their officially endorsed principles, namely that

*play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons<sup>22</sup>.*

There was much discussion regarding the concept of ‘free play’ as different from ‘play’. Some of this was a matter of how the words were used in different languages, and, although not specified in the bid for funding, the concept of ‘free play’ was adopted to differentiate it from more structured or adult-led games and activities. Within the classroom or other structured contexts, play can often be used effectively as a mechanism for learning or as an experiential process, for example, using board games, role play, sport or other leisure or creative activities. Whilst the value of this was recognised, there was a strong sense that children’s own self-organised play had specific benefits that could not be derived from adult-led activities.

Self-organised playing is an act of collective agency arising in-between children, the material objects and landscape features to hand, and less tangible aspects such as embodied movements, desires and expectations<sup>23</sup>. It offers children moments where the rules of the rational world need no longer apply, but are not far away either. In these moments of self-organised playing, children appropriate aspects of their everyday life and turn them upside-down in order to make life either less scary or less boring<sup>24</sup> in largely unpredictable and opportunistic ways. It is the vitality of emotions that play evokes that is of value here:

*Moments of playing are highly contingent and often fleeting, but a sufficiency of moments of play maintains a state of anticipatory alertness and readiness to seek out further space–time for playing. Equally, a prolonged and severe reduction in moments may lessen such a desire, contributing to reluctance or inability to seek out new experiences and affiliations with subsequent impact on children’s well-being and development<sup>25</sup>.*

Partners recognised that societal change has affected children’s lives significantly. Increased moving and parked traffic, increased segregation in daily life (including an increase of time children spend in the institutions of childhood), less ‘slack’ public space and tolerance of children in the public realm are among the many factors that have reduced children’s ability

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<sup>22</sup> Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group (2005) *The Playwork Principles*, available at <http://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/playworkprinciples>.

<sup>23</sup> Lester, S. and Russell, W. (2014) *Children’s Right to Play*, in L. Brooker, S. Edwards and M. Blaise (eds) *SAGE Handbook of Play and Learning in Early Childhood*, London: Sage.

<sup>24</sup> Sutton-Smith, B. (1997) *The Ambiguity of Play*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>25</sup> Lester and Russell (2014) *ibid.*, p. 299.

to find time and space for just playing, particularly for disadvantaged children<sup>26</sup>. Paying more attention to self-organised play within formal and informal educational settings therefore becomes important in terms of children's well-being, their resilience and their capacity to engage in learning.

This perspective draws on the UK model of playwork and was the focus of a previous European project involving three partners from the ARTPAD project (UK, Hungary and Austria)<sup>27</sup>. The playwork approach aims to support children in the creation of a space where they can play, using a 'low intervention-high response' style of working that supports children's self-organised play rather than directing it<sup>28</sup>. It is practiced in out of school services such as adventure playgrounds, out of school childcare and parks; in addition, it has influenced relatively recent changes in school play times with significant benefits to children's enjoyment of school and engagement in learning (see examples in section 4 below)<sup>29</sup>. Whilst the value of this approach was acknowledged, some partners stated that as playwork was not known and understood well in other countries, the approach may be hard to transfer<sup>30</sup>.

**STORY IN A BOX:**

*There was a small boy who really liked to wear dresses and he was being teased because of this. The playworkers, men and women, decided to turn up to work one day wearing kilts.*

#### **4.2.4 The contribution of drama and play to children's well-being and resilience**

The *Best Practice Guide* details in some depth how resilience develops and how drama and play can contribute to resilience and engagement for learning. The table on the next page, taken from the Guide, is offered here as a summary of this.

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<sup>26</sup> Lester, S. and Russell, W. (2010) *Children's right to play: An examination of the importance of play in the lives of children worldwide*, The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation, available at <http://ipaworld.org/ipa-working-paper-on-childs-right-to-play/>

<sup>27</sup> The VIPER (Volunteers in Playwork Employment Routes) ran from 2012-2015 and developed an introductory course in playwork for volunteers as a route to employment. <http://www.viperproject.eu/>

<sup>28</sup> NPFA et al (2000) *Best Play: What play provision should do for children*, available at <http://www.playengland.org.uk/resource/best-play/>

<sup>29</sup> Lester, S., Jones, O. and Russell, W. (2011) *Supporting school improvement through play: An evaluation of South Gloucestershire's Outdoor Play and Learning Programme*, London: National Children's Bureau, available at <http://outdoorplayandlearning.org.uk/home/for-schools/research/>

<sup>30</sup> There is a European Playworkers Association; it was thought the organisation was no longer functioning, but we have found out recently that it is, and have initiated contact. Nevertheless, it is agreed that the concept of playwork is not known and understood

<b>PROGRESSIVE WORKING TOWARDS RESILIENCE</b>				
	<b>Environment</b>	<b>Competency</b>	<b>How developed</b>	<b>Techniques/methodologies</b>
<i>STABILISATION</i> <i>Sense of a safe environment</i>	Basic needs clearly met within the environment Safe adults Safe peer group	REGULATION decreasing anxiety/stress decreasing hyperarousal The environment aids regulation Building non-verbal communication affect-signals	RECOGNITION OF THE CHILD/YOUNG PERSON In discussion with the children/young people Atmosphere of trust and mutual respect facilitated by adult Child approbated and valued by adults Valued by peer group facilitated by adult Building trust and accepting that a child/young person may have issues in coming forward because of heightened “shame” affect	Patience and gradual building of work Inclusivity in teaching Role Play /Ritual Positional Drama Story work games Affect games –understanding emotions Non-verbal communication practiced Role Play/Emotions/cards/freeze Play
<i>INTEGRATION</i> <i>Sense of self</i>	Acknowledgement that time and help may be required or the child/young person to process what is happening in any given situation	INTRAPERSONAL - EMPATHY Self- regulation: controlling impulses Positive self-talk Inner dialogues	ACCEPTING BEHAVIOUR IS A MANIFESTATION OF PREVIOUS LIFE EXPERIENCE Everyone involved introduce discourse that involves helping the child to make sense of their own experience and to manage things they find difficult Affective attunement to teacher/youth worker	Ritual Use of metaphor/stories to aid understanding of own stories Affect modelling Role Play/Emotions/cards/freeze Positional Drama One to one games Play
<i>INTEGRATION</i> <i>Sense of others</i>	Safe and managed group-work	INTERPERSONAL - EMPATHY Interaction Self-regulation Working with others	PRO-ACTIVE RESPONSES Shared social events within the classroom/youth space Ritual in everyday situation marked as group activities Order and repetition Social interaction: every offer valued	Group drama exercises Role play/Ritual Collective games Giving choices/aiding making choices Use of metaphor/stories to aid understanding of own stories Forum Theatre Play
<i>ADAPTATION</i> <i>Sense of a place in the world</i>	Safe and managed group-work	CONNECTEDNESS Beginning of self esteem Self-value and seeing self in the responses of others	PRO-ACTIVE RESPONSES Shared social events within the classroom/youth space Social interaction – every offer valued	Giving choice The use of metaphor Cause and effect workshops (CBT element) Play
<i>ACTUALISATION</i>	Participant led group-work	SELF-ACTUALISATION Coping with change Strength to face unpredictable situations.	LEARNERS AS TRAINERS Self-empowerment Peer-led project	Devising Performance Forum Theatre Workshop practice, Peer-led practice Play

Table 1: progressive working towards resilience, from *The Best Practice Guide*, p. 20

### **STORY IN A BOX:**

*Ela was a rather plump girl who loved tableaux work. She really enjoyed making group shapes and guessing what others were showing. Ela liked exercises with object transformations and brainstorming for character development and storytelling. She preferred non-speaking parts in the little sketches, though. Each time other kids would make a comment about her appearance she would burst out crying and run to the toilet. During a workshop on the use of masks she offered help to many participants who had trouble designing original masks for their characters. Ela was very proud to show the work to her mum and the younger brother. On this particular day her little brother ran into the room after the session and asked Ela for the chocolates she usually saved for him. The other participants started laughing at him warning he would be soon as fat as his sister. Ela calmly asked the group to put their masks on. When they did she said to her brother, 'Look, whenever somebody says something nasty to you imagine what mask they are wearing, it really helps to see their faces differently'.*

#### **4.2.5 Discussions on drama and play**

Partner discussion during this initial research phase and during the drafting of the *Best Practice Guide* also highlighted some difficulties in talking both about drama and play. Drama is perhaps more clear-cut, being something that educators can 'deliver', with specific methods and techniques. Play, on the other hand, and particularly the notion of self-organised play that the partners sought to promote, cannot be delivered in the same way but is more a matter of co-creating a space-time where children can play. In discussions, the importance of children's freedom to self-organise, to participate and to experience directly was considered important. In this sense, although

drama techniques can be highly structured, both drama and play aim to create a space where children feel safe and comfortable to create 'as if' or 'what if' worlds where they can experience what that feels like and experiment in relative safety.



This, together with the passionate debates about resilience, drama, theatre, games and play, also gave rise to many discussions about what might count as good practice that could be shared in the *Best Practice Guide*. In the end, the definitions given here prevailed for the purposes of the Guide and the training course that was also developed; nevertheless, there were many other practice examples visited that used experiential learning and ‘as if’ approaches that perhaps did not fit the specifics of the Guide. The deep discussion evaluating each project visited, and the questioning of the purpose and scope of the Guide and the training course, also gave rise to a fruitful discussion on shared principles and values, described in the following section.

### 4.3 The ARTPAD Principles

The ARTPAD principles emerged from discussions on the core concepts and on how to offer education leaders and practitioners practical ways of supporting them to offer drama and play in ways that were culturally and organisationally relevant and practicable. In interviews, all partners said they could stand behind these principles and use them in their work after the project. The principles are also underpinned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The *Best Practice Guide* states:

*We believe the following Principles are important for a pedagogical approach that recognises the role of drama and play when working with children and young people in re-engaging them in formal or informal education<sup>31</sup>.*

The Best Practice Guide discusses these in more detail with practice examples from drama and play, and follows this with academic evidence for the relevance of the principles in terms of supporting resilience through play and drama. Many of these examples re from UK practice, given earlier discussions about the project’s parameters. The principles draw attention to the importance of:

- specific methodologies;
- creating the right environment where children feel safe and happy to explore;
- adults developing an attitude that respects children and works with them as they are;
- supporting individual children to work with others, balancing individual and group needs and desires;
- empowerment; and
- aligning all the principles together in support of children’s resilience through play and drama.

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<sup>31</sup> ARTPAD Consortium (2017) *ibid.*, p. 23.

They are presented below in poster format, designed by the Hungarian partners, the Rogers Foundation.



## Principles to develop the resilience of children and youth

**Empowerment**

Drama and Play support resilience through developing competencies in making individual choices, being in control of things happening around them and having an ability to influence these things.

**Environment**

The creation of an environment that considers both the human and physical aspects of the space will best support resilience and the engagement of children and young people in formal and informal learning.

**Attitude of the adult**

The respect, relationship and support developed through a positive attitude from the adults around them plays a huge part in children's self-confidence, resilience and overall development.

**The Individual within the Group**

An understanding of the impact of wider influences on the child, both from home and society is important when considering their development of resilience.

**Methodology**

Both drama and the creation of spaces where children can play have specific approaches and methodology that need to be understood. They also require a particular mind-set in order to support the development of resilience and child-driven, self-initiated learning.

**Alignment**

Alignment as a final principle: All our efforts should be aligned to support and facilitate the development of resilience for children and young people.



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## 5.0 Transnational learning

The project spent the first year visiting each partner country to look at practice examples where educators were using play and drama in their work with children and young people. There was much discussion regarding how best practice might be identified, interwoven into the ideological discussions on shared understandings of the three central concepts. It was felt that 'best practice' was perhaps less about fixed criteria and more about values and principles. This worked both ways, as discussions following visits to practice examples often informed the emerging discussions on conceptual clarity and the ARTPAD principles.

Partners felt that the Guide should use the power of personal stories to persuade education leaders and practitioners of the value of both drama and play to support their work. Rather than drama and play being an additional burden, or an added extra, the stories and best practice examples can show how using drama and creating space and time for children to play throughout the school day or in out of school projects can support the aims of education.

Some examples of practice inevitably fell outside of the parameters for the *Best Practice Guide* and the training course, but they were valuable in that the discussions following visits stimulated lively discussions about how what had been seen related to the focus of the ARTPAD project. Often, projects used methods and techniques that were useful even if the overall aim of the project was outside the scope of ARTPAD. The discussion was also important in identifying key values and principles such as the importance of trust and good relationships; acceptance (including Rogerian principles of unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence); 'as if' worlds; the importance of telling/sharing stories; the importance of acknowledging, naming and working with emotions; the importance of physical movement; how drama can be promoted in schools as a tool to use in lessons to support the curriculum not only as a subject in its own right; the importance of active listening; the value of being non-directive at times; the value of finding something particular children can excel at; the need to get to know the children and their wider contexts; the fundamental importance of nourishing children (physically and emotionally); making small changes.

Examples of projects visited included several children's and young people's theatre clubs and workshops (including working with refugee, migrant and Roma children); the use of storyboarding using a range of materials; the use of symbols as a basis for discussion; music theatre; a drama class for social work students; free play in a private kindergarten school; drama classes in elementary schools; a 'Day of Joy', including looking at using board games, folk/fairy tales and storytelling as pedagogical tools; simulation games; youth and community centres, outdoor adventure and activity centres; projects to improve play in school playgrounds and play times; a play ranger project; an adventure playground and a scrapstore. The full list of projects visited is given in the *Best Practice Guide*.

**STORY IN A BOX:**

*A boy called Silad was marginalised by the group because he appeared to be not very bright, but he had a good range of survival skills. He realised he was very good at playing games where strategy was important for winning, and as he displayed his skills, his status in the group went up, along with his self-esteem. He moved on to board games requiring more abstract skills, entering competitions and is now working in IT.*

In interviews and in their reflections on learning from the project, many partners have said they were inspired by the projects visited, and there has already been a cross-fertilisation of some of the ideas and practices. For example, one Polish partner introduced the concept of PlayPods<sup>32</sup> into her daughter's kindergarten, itself a project visited on the Polish study tour, and others have expressed interest in trying to adapt the idea in their own country; some partners have collaborated on further bids to extend working on some of the ideas, including some that it was decided did not fit tidily into the ARTPAD parameters. The idea of self-organised play (or 'free play'), which has caused so many debates throughout the project, has at the same time caught the imagination of some partners who feel strongly that it should form a part of teacher training both for early years and primary age, and also that information/training could be made available to parents.

**STORY IN A BOX:**

*Louis was at the adventure playground. He has been frequently excluded from school because of issues with his behaviour and concentration. Today the tools were available as there was some building work happening on site. Louis asked for a hammer. He hadn't used one before so the playworker showed him initially what to do and stayed close by in order to observe. Louis became involved in nailing a rail around the tree house platform and was actually very good at hammering in nails. He was pleased with himself and exclaimed, 'This is what I want to do when I grow up!' After a while three other children joined in and Louis organised and supported them, leading the small 'team' to progress in building the rail around the platform. He communicated, supported and encouraged the others in what they were doing, meanwhile still very effectively hammering in nails himself. This was a boy who in school cannot concentrate, has anger issues and has been excluded for his behaviour. At the end of that day Louis had made friends, contributed to the building of the tree house and appeared to be immensely proud of his work and himself.*

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<sup>32</sup> 'The Scrapstore PlayPod® is a holistic process that works with the entire school community to change both the human and physical play environment transforming play at lunchtimes.' The process involves consultancy, training and mentoring as well as the provision of a container <http://www.playpods.co.uk/>

## 6.0 Supporting teachers to create conditions for the development of resilience through play and drama

Alongside the *Best Practice Guide*, partners developed a training course aimed at supporting educators to work with drama and play. The course was designed to fit university accreditation structures. The five-day course was delivered in Gdansk, Poland, to employees or volunteers of partner organisations who had some expertise in drama and/or play. The intention of this was both to pilot the course and to train participants as trainers who could then deliver the course in their own country. Some of those attending were also involved in the projects visited in the research phase of the project, but not all. They were a mixture of drama and theatre teachers, youth workers and playworkers. The week was an intensive experience for all concerned, and there was much formal and informal sharing of knowledge, expertise, tips, game and fun.

The course had sessions on: resilience and its links to play and drama; understanding children's play; imagination: 'what if?' worlds; positional drama; role play; Mantle of the Expert; environments for play; the role of the adult; reflections on and into practice.

Participants were asked to keep a learning journal throughout the week, and these were collated as feedback both on the content and delivery of the sessions and on how they might use it in their own work.



Although most participants overall found the content, level and delivery of the course good, they did have thoughtful and constructive comments on improving it and the additional resources and support they would need to deliver all or some of it. These were collated, discussed at a partner meeting, and used to make final revisions to the course manual, and also informed partner discussions regarding how the course might be used in each partner country (see 8.0 below)..

At the end of the course, participants were also asked how they might use what they had learned. All were keen to use some or all of the ideas in some way. Responses ranged from direct work with children and young people through to influencing the policy makers, including:

- using some or all the techniques and ideas in their work with children and young people;
- delivering some or all of the course to educators and parents;
- developing a module on an undergraduate education programme;
- using some elements in work with home educators;

- taking some elements into schools;
- writing an article about the course;
- holding workshops at network conferences of drama teachers and generic educators;
- contacting ministries of education to talk to them about the benefits of play and drama in education settings;
- an ambition to get the approaches into a range of education contexts through existing networks, including schools, kindergarten, working with refugee children, work with disabled children, theatre groups, children’s care homes, etc.



The participants on the course felt the need to stay in touch with each other and share ideas, and a thriving (closed membership) Facebook page is now in operation. There have been some posts of people using ideas from the course in their own work, including training other adults.

One participant wrote on the Facebook page:

Dear ARTPAD-Family 😊

*Our week in Gdansk was really amazing for me. Wonderful people, interesting issues, games and drama techniques, inspiring trainers, ... there are no suitable words for this great time. I was really not able to take off the piece of colourful wool from my wrist until now 🧶.*

*I came back to Austria fulfilled with positive energy for my work ... I thank you so much for all the good vibes I took from our workshop.*

## 7.0 Getting the message out

The ideas behind the project have been disseminated in a number of ways. The project website ([www.artpadproject.eu](http://www.artpadproject.eu)) gives a full description of the project and hosts projects publications, including the *Best Practice Guide* in all partner languages. It also has partner details, together with a series of partner blogs about the study visits and events held in each country. There is also a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/ARTPADProjectEu>) and a Twitter account ([@ARTPADproject](https://twitter.com/ARTPADproject)).

Partners have also held events in their own countries promoting the work of the project. These have included discussing the key concepts and the *Best Practice Guide* and also promoting the

training course with taster workshops. These have generated considerable interest in the ideas and in the training course, including a request to extend the ideas into working with Early Years Educators.

Partners have also promoted the project through their networks and the normal course of their work, and have also published articles on websites and in professional publications. Now the project is nearing its end, partners, together with the training course participants, are writing essays, articles and reflections that will be put together in a freely available book, with the working title of *The Strength of European Diversity for Building Children's Resilience through Play and Drama*.

## **8.0 Sustainability: next steps and recommendations**

Partners were asked what their plans are for continuing the legacy of ARTPAD in their own countries. All were keen and have developed plans. What became apparent again from the discussion on next steps was the differences in approaches to (formal and informal) education, including ethos, custom and practice, structure of education systems and governance, and therefore the ability of partners to influence practices in schools and out of school projects or in practitioner training and professional development. In discussions, partners acknowledged that the course did not have to be offered as a whole, agreeing which sections were necessary in order for it to be called an ARTPAD course; this means the materials can be adapted to suit a range of audiences and delivery structures. One partner felt it would be difficult to influence a tightly structured and regulated education system across 16 different state education ministries, so their strategy is to use their existing networks with youth projects to offer sections of the training course to youth workers and teachers through residential programmes in centres within their existing networks and build from the bottom up that way, whilst also trying to influence education policy through contacting ministries of education. Another partner felt that in their country, free play and drama are not excluded from the curriculum, and the task was to convince education leaders that ARTPAD ideas can help schools to deliver successfully on the national curriculum. For another, they are working with the municipality to introduce PlayPods® into all schools, including training for staff, and then hoping to attract attention from other municipalities to do the same. And for yet another, the change in the school day from mornings to full day means there is a need for education and training for teachers and social pedagogues responsible for pupils at lunchtime and in the afternoon. Although the idea of building resilience is broadly acknowledged, there is a lack of competencies and tools to implement this approach. They hope to deliver workshops and training through their existing and expanded networks.

Some partners are using university connections to reach educators both in their qualifying training and for professional development, and also to use national and international networks to spread the message even further. A non-university partner has also made an agreement with the local university working on primary teacher training to co-operate on play-related issues; this university is hosting the final ARTPAD international conference, adding a poster-section to it about play. Many universities run summer schools, including for overseas students, and the training course could also be offered there. For example, one partner has achieved accreditation from the Ministry of Human Resources for three 30-hour courses for further teacher training: one the ARTPAD principles, one on drama and one on play. One partner is planning to think beyond education and is building links with staff at the crime prevention unit in Ministry of the Interior, who believe that crime prevention starts with good education. Similarly, they are working with the Chamber of Commerce to embed ARTPAD principles and ideas into their vocational training programmes for vocational education staff.

Others are working through existing networks with drama and theatre workshops to offer training. Finally, several partners are planning further European projects to develop aspects of the ARTPAD work. One of these has been successful and has already started. This is the CAPS (Children's Access to Play in Schools) project, which will work with six partners: UK, Hungary, Austria as the same partners as ARTPAD, and Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia with partners from or linked to previous projects. The aim is to learn from and extend the work done in ARTPAD on play in schools. It will draw from a UK project (OPAL: Outdoor Play and Learning) to introduce playwork in schools in Central Europe. Partners will establish advisory committees with education leaders and develop National Adaptation Plans that can be used to develop quality criteria for a play-friendly school label and a training course for staff to support them to meet the criteria. The links through the advisory committees will enable at least one pilot of the 'kitemark' process for a play-friendly school.

## **Recommendations**

Given the importance of play and drama in supporting children's resilience and engagement in education, and given the opportunities and challenges for continuing the work, the project makes the following recommendations:

### **National governments:**

- Governments should give serious consideration to the evidence that play and drama in schools can help build resilience and prevent early school leaving.
- Governments should pay attention to supporting time and space for play and drama in children's lives, both in and out of school. This is recognised as a responsibility of national

governments in General Comment 17 on article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- Developing competences in facilitating play and drama should be included in the curricula for teacher, youth worker and social pedagogue training, in vocational training in pedagogy, and in professional development for educators.
- Governments should support the sharing of good practices and resources between local authorities and educators.

#### **Local governments:**

- Local authorities should assist with the development of infrastructures and with resources to support initiatives to develop opportunities for play and drama in formal and informal education settings.
- Local authorities should support the inclusion of play and drama in the post-qualifying professional development for educators and social/youth workers.

#### **Universities:**

- Universities should support the development of play and drama in educational settings and in youth work through curricula and learning outcomes for educators and youth workers, conferences, publications, summer schools, etc.
- University networks should promote the use of play and drama in education to support the development of resilience and address some children's lack of engagement in the classroom, and to prevent early school leaving and high numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

#### **Schools and other educational settings:**

- Consider the benefits of play and drama for children's enjoyment of school and for building their resilience
- Consider ways to integrate play and drama into the school day both inside and outside of the classroom, including through training staff using the ARTPAD course

#### **European Union:**

- Work to support national governments in implementing article 31 of the UNCRC (drawing on General Comment 17), encouraging and supporting local governments and education settings to recognise, respect and promote children and young people's article 31 rights.
- support further programmes seeking to develop the work further and embed it into education systems.

## Appendix 1: project partners

### Project Partner Contact Details

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