



From Challenges to Opportunities:

Best Practice Examples for Working with Children, Adolescents, and Adults

STEPHAN RINKE-MOKAY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Author

Foreword

<i>1. Pedagogical Foundations</i>	1
<i>2. Working with this Guide</i>	3
<i>3. Questions for Professional Reflections</i>	4
<i>4. Best Practice Examples for Engaging Activities with Groups</i>	5
4.1 ICEBREAKER ACTIVITIES	5
4.2 CONCENTRATION AND ACTIVATION EXERCISES	12
4.3 CHALLENGING TASKS FOR GROUPS	24
4.4 UNITS WITH FASCINATING EFFECTS	46
4.5 MINDFULNESS EXERCISES	49
4.6 CREATIVE FORMS OF DOCUMENTATION	54
<i>5. An Example of a Project With 8x2 units</i>	57
<i>6. Training Opportunities With You First Social Services</i>	59

STEPHAN RINKE-MOKAY

FROM CHALLENGES TO
OPPORTUNITIES:
BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES FOR
WORKING WITH CHILDREN,
ADOLESCENTS, AND ADULTS

INFLUENCING GROUP DYNAMICS
-
IMPROVING WORK ATMOSPHERES
-
PROMOTING INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION

Imprint:

© 2024 Rinke Verlag UG (limited liability company)

Leninplatz 3, 06388 Südliches Anhalt, OT Edderitz

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Cover design: Stephan Rinke-Mokay, Dubai

Typesetting: Stephan Rinke-Mokay, Dubai

Printing and Binding: Rinke Verlag UG, Edderitz

ISBN 978-3-911432-03-0



www.you-first.ae

About the Author



Stephan Rinke-Mokay is a certified social worker and biologist with over 15 years of diverse professional experience. He worked as a coordinator for the network district Unterfranken for the Foundation "Kinder forschen," Germany's largest early childhood education initiative. Additionally, he conducted approximately 250 workshops for teachers from kindergartens and primary schools. He served as the pedagogical coordinator for an after school program at a middle school in Kitzingen, Germany, and as a youth care worker at a vocational school in Würzburg, Germany. Previously, he worked as a substitute teacher for the Workers Welfare Association (Arbeiterwohlfahrt) and gained insights into working with children and adults of all age groups. Additionally, he facilitated workshops for nonprofit organizations such as the Weltladen Würzburg, providing trainings at schools on the topics of education for sustainable development and global learning. He also engaged in educational activities for the Public Science Center of the Rudolf Virchow Center for Experimental Biomedicine in Würzburg and provided support to students at the Julius Maximilian University Würzburg.

For 15 years, he volunteered in a sports club in Würzburg and served as a student representative, organizing numerous events for local and exchange students. Internationality and inclusivity have always been among his focal points, evidenced by his participation in numerous relevant training sessions. In the spring of 2024, he decided to emigrate to the international metropolis of Dubai and establish himself as an independent social worker there. Originally from Saxony-Anhalt, Stephan Rinke-Mokay spent his 13 school years there. Before settling in Würzburg, he also studied at Philipps University in Marburg, Germany, and Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, USA, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree. His experiences were complemented by working as a freelance journalist and photographer.

**OPPORTUNITIES INSTEAD OF PROBLEMS,
POTENTIAL FOR DEVELOPMENT INSTEAD OF SHORTCOMINGS,
EQUAL WORTH, BUT NO SAMENESS,
HANDS-ON APPROACHES INSTEAD OF THEORETICAL CONCEPTS
DETERMINE OUR ACTIONS.
BECAUSE EDUCATION IS MORE THAN A PROFESSION.
IT IS A WAY OF LIFE.**

Foreword

If the years of working with children and adults have taught me anything, it is the realization that social and emotional problems in this target group are steadily increasing, making the corresponding work with them more challenging. Isn't that so? After all, that was the feedback I consistently received from teachers and educators. In my opinion, the crucial question is not whether there is this general trend, but rather to what extent we adapt to ever-changing challenges. I must say in advance that even this guide cannot change the well-known problems such as the shortage of skilled workers and the rigid structures in schools that can make one feel constrained. Instead, it aims to provide many impulses on how we can improve the atmosphere within a group, motivation, concentration, and mutual respect. From my own experience, I am convinced that it works. After all, in this guide, I have only listed activities that I have applied myself and that have proven successful. It goes without saying that shared experiences and activities improve the atmosphere and interactions in any group.

Many of the suggestions can be applied to various age groups, sometimes with small adjustments, sometimes with slightly larger ones. In any case, this collection should not be understood as a manual to be worked through, but as ideas that can be applied or varied. What's particularly easy about it is that the majority of the units require no additional materials. So, you can implement them anywhere and anytime. Therefore, I believe that there are many helpful impulses for all age groups starting at the age of three. After all, I have gained experiences with all of those target groups myself.

I invite you to embark on a journey of discovery with the group you work with. Be open to new things - and who knows, maybe some positive effects within your group will surprise you.

I wish you and your target group a lot of fun trying out these ideas and hope that the sustainable effects you hope for will materialize.

Kind regards,

Stephan Rinke-Mokay

1. Pedagogical Foundations

We don't learn for school, but for life. What was well-meaning advice given to us as teenagers has, for me at least, been confirmed in a professional context. It wasn't my degrees that made me the social worker I am today, but rather the diverse experiences of different professions, fields of deployment, and further education, combined with the personal drive to constantly develop. I was significantly shaped by working for the Foundation "Haus der kleinen Forscher" (today "Kinder forschen"), Germany's largest early childhood education initiative. What I particularly liked about their educational concept was the hands-on approach conveyed in the workshops, equipping the participants with tools which they could apply immediately the following day. After all, it was about practical approaches anchored in everyday situations and about exploring and discovering the world together through fun and interest. Theoretical explanations or frameworks were not the main focus. Why would they? How could a child (or an adult) understand something if they haven't come into contact with it themselves and therefore cannot base it on essential prior knowledge? Instead, we can understand things when we have experienced them ourselves. Therefore, one's own discoveries are the basis for learning, optimized by reflection and intensive learning support.

I am no longer a representative of the foundation for which I facilitated workshops for about ten years. However, the focus of this guide is not on STEM skills, technology, or education for sustainable development, as it is for the foundation. Nevertheless, the interactive format of the training sessions has greatly influenced me and convinced me that this is the most sustainable way to achieve visible results. Therefore, when I was in charge of an after school program, I placed great value on group activities – rightly so, as it turned out. It also didn't matter much that the proportion of children with a migration background was about 90 percent. Experiencing something yourself can be beneficial even if you still lack necessary vocabulary. The basis of those activities was always to create as positive an atmosphere as possible, in which the children knew each other and could feel safe and appreciated. I used the same approach for group intervention programs when working with refugees at a vocational school in Würzburg, Germany. Successfully, as the teachers often confirmed to me.

It is important to me to treat the people I work with on an equal footing. Genuine, sincere interest is perceived – and appreciated. In activities where students can learn a lot about each other, teachers or educators also benefit. Furthermore, the advantage is that many of the activities listed here are simply fun and therefore can contribute to improving the classroom atmosphere alone, which in turn is the basis for subsequently addressing serious topics that require concentration. Depending on how much time one spends with a group, I am convinced that at least one joint activity per day is beneficial, not only for the classroom atmosphere, but also for concentration and motivation. Having fun together does not

preclude the necessity of clear rules and structures, which are communicated and enforced transparently and form the basis of any group. Likewise, I think it's important to emphasize again and again that we all, including children and adolescents, have a responsibility for our behavior and that our actions have consequences. After all, our goal is to prepare the young people we work with for life. There, criticism is reality and it is to your benefit if you were taught how to deal with it. Therefore, children and adolescents should learn to deal with challenges and criticism, strengthening their defenses and resilience.

It is our challenge as educational professionals to familiarize the individuals in a group with each other, because the better we know each other, the easier it is to treat each other with respect and openness. We are not the same, but unique, yet all equally valuable. I think we all have the goal of anchoring these thoughts in the minds of the young people we work with.

I would like to make one more note on the subject of education. Occasionally, I encounter people who believe that educators and teachers do not educate and that this function is solely the prerogative of parents or at least the family. Similar to communication, however, I believe that it is impossible not to educate, as even our own actions as a role model have an influence. In fact, children depend on us to tell them what is right and what is wrong. If Lukas hits Amira, Samir wants to touch the power socket, or Dorian expresses inhuman slogans, then we intervene. We pursue a goal and want to influence the behavior shown. So, we educate. Not educating means absence or total anarchy. For good reasons, this is not the standard. Let us therefore be aware of our roles as educators. This includes constantly reflecting on ourselves, having good reasons for what we say or demand, and leading by example. Of course, there are always considerations to be made. Forcing a child to finish their meal is just as absurd as saying that children always know what is best for them when it comes to eating. The unhealthy choices of food that children are allowed to choose for themselves in an average German kindergarten in the morning speaks volumes. We are not doing our children any favors with this. They cannot understand yet that they are harming themselves in the long run. But we can.

The goal of education is not to always be popular. The goal of education should be to do what is best for children's long-term well-being. After all, we have to be aware that there is one major difference between us and parents: we were professionally trained to deal with children. It is up to us to live up to this responsibility to the best of our abilities.

2. Working with this Guide

This guide is a collection of ideas with over 90 activities for practical work with groups. What you can and want to apply from it is up to you, because only you know your own circumstances and can evaluate what is appropriate and what is not. The individual activities are listed within the chapters in no particular order.

Icebreaker games are especially recommended when a group does not know each other well yet, but can otherwise be used anytime. Activation and concentration exercises can be applied anytime and anywhere. The challenging tasks for groups in Chapter 4.3 are more time-consuming and elaborate but are suitable as an introduction to larger topics. The units in Chapter 4.4 are a brief selection of ideas that can arouse interest in a field through fascinating effects.

For mindfulness exercises, I would recommend using them only when the atmosphere and respect within a group are very good. Furthermore, these exercises are likely to work better with smaller groups. I usually used mindfulness exercises in individual case work at the vocational school but, based on experiences from my workshops, I am also convinced that they can succeed with groups.

Chapter 4.6 discusses how we can combine a necessity – documentation – with interesting aspects. Finally, Chapter 5 presents an example of a group intervention program, which is designed for eight weeks and can be adapted to your own target group as desired.

The use of the word "blackboard" in the descriptions is not due to my age or nostalgic feelings but to the fact that the equipment in schools varies greatly, and I cannot know what resources the readers have available. Of course, the term can be mentally adjusted to fit one's own circumstances.

In the choice of words in this guide, a neutral form was deliberately chosen since it can be applied to multiple different kinds of groups and it is not limited to children. After all, not only a positive classroom atmosphere is desirable but also a good working atmosphere. Therefore, feel free to conduct these activities with colleagues as well.

Do not be disheartened if you encounter resistance when using these units. This is completely normal, especially if the group is not accustomed to such activities. Also, do not question yourself if you feel like you are not reaching everyone. This is rarely the case. Keep the bigger picture in mind, in this case the rest of the group, and do not get caught up in individual cases.

Only you know the people you work with. Sometimes there are good reasons why a person does not want to participate in an exercise. For example, they might suffer from social anxieties. Of course, an affected person should then have the option to abstain. However, only you can judge whether unwilling participants have a good reason for not participating or if their motivation is simply too low.

5. An Example of a Project With 8 x 2 Units

The sequence of exercise units (45 minutes each) compiled here, lasting over eight consecutive weeks, serves only as an example and can be changed and adjusted as desired, depending on the target audience and objectives. The focus of the compilation listed here is on getting to know and working together with a group that is not yet well acquainted with each other as a basis for a good group atmosphere.

Session	Duration	Unit
1.	10 Minutes	Welcome, Introduction, Explaining Objectives
	10 Minutes	Introduction of the participants with additional information, such as spoken languages
	10 Minutes	Flying Names, p. 10
	10 Minutes	Quick Recognition, p. 10
	20 Minutes	Collecting Strengths, p. 35
	20 Minutes	Defining Goals, p. 35
	10 Minutes	A Letter To Myself, p. 55

2.	10 Minutes	Introducing Each Other, p. 8
	10 Minutes	Community Circle, p. 7
	15 Minutes	Group Estimates, p. 8
	40 Minutes	Program A Robot, p. 29
	15 Minutes	Robot Trio, p. 14

3.	10 Minutes	Magnets, p. 8
	10 Minutes	Forbidden Numbers, p. 13
	15 Minutes	Bullying Prevention, p. 36
	10 Minutes	The Good Person Inside, p. 38
	45 Minutes	Hovering Cup, p. 26

4.	10 Minutes	Distribution Dilemma, p. 24
	20 Minutes	Enjoy Your Mistakes, p. 27
	50 Minutes	Hunt For Marbles, p. 32
	10 Minutes	Crossing The Bridge, p. 23

- 5. 20 Minutes Flip Cup, p. 20
- 30 Minutes Code Of Conduct II, p. 32
- 30 Minutes Code Of Conduct, p. 31
- 10 Minutes Momentum, p. 19

- 6. 20 Minutes Trust Walking, p. 15
- 10 Minutes Draw On Command, p. 17
- 10 Minutes Build On Command, p. 17
- 50 Minutes Paper Tower, p. 27

- 7. 15 Minutes Letter Race, p. 16
- 10 Minutes Piercing Eyes, p. 20
- 25 Minutes Twisted Perception, p. 41
- 10 Minutes Thumb Wrestling, p. 32
- 10 Minutes List Of Unity, p. 38
- 15 Minutes Moral Foundation, p. 39
- 5 Minutes Allegory, p. 34

- 8. 10 Minutes Scrambled Letters, p. 16
- 10 Minutes Rock, Paper, Go, p. 15
- 15 Minutes Summary: What did we do over the last seven weeks and why? Did it have an influence on the group dynamics?
- 15 Minutes Participant feedback: What did you think of the units? What do you wish to come true for yourself and for the group?
- 5 Minutes Group leader feedback: How did I experience the units? What do I want to come true for you?
- 5 Minutes Hand out the letters from the first session. Does anyone want to comment on it?
- 15 Minutes Again, write a letter to yourself. The participants will get them back about six months later.
- 15 Minutes Systems Theory, p. 33

6. Training Opportunities With *You First Social Services*

Every publication has its limitations. In this guide, the focus is not on pedagogical backgrounds, but primarily on impulses that can enrich your work with your group. How these suggestions are implemented in detail, what purpose they serve, and how one subsequently builds upon them will vary from person to person. For me, these activities are not just means to an end, but often the entry point into larger thematic blocks. They do not intend to replace or displace teaching but to enrich it. I see a lot of potential for this, based of course on my previous experiences. With specific prompt questions, especially in Chapter 4.3, I have provided a small insight into the topics I would address when working with such groups. For many units, I could have written pages of pedagogical explanations, but I deliberately refrained from doing so in order not to distract from the actual content – ideas for practical group work. However, I still consider it essential to continually reflect on one's own pedagogical convictions. In doing so, we are all naturally biased to some extent. Therefore, an external perspective and collective reflection are not just details but necessary to be able to judge as objectively as possible.

This guide provides a good foundation for your own work, but many aspects become clearer when they are developed and reflected upon together. I therefore invite you and your colleagues to attend training sessions on this topic with us – if possible in person, but likely online. During the full-day workshops, the focus will not only be on pedagogical approaches, but also on dealing with challenging children and situations, designing interesting and varied teaching units, and collaborating with colleagues. All participants benefit from an active, motivated, and respectful group. I am happy to share my experiences and approaches with you for this purpose.

I look forward to your inquiries and wish you much enjoyment and success in applying this guide!

Best regards,

Stephan Rinke-Mokay

Contact:

Stephan Rinke-Mokay

You First Social Services

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

E-Mail: info@you-first.ae

Homepage: www.you-first.ae

