

FINAL EVALUATION THEMIS / IDEAL IN THE NETHERLANDS

1. INTRODUCTION

IDEAL (*Integrating Disadvantaged Ethnicities through Adult Learning*) is a multilateral Grundtvig project under EU's Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). LLP aims at supporting learning opportunities from early childhood to old age. IDEAL is partly funded by the EACEA (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency) and was launched on October 1st, 2011. The project has had a lifetime of two years (until September 30th, 2013).

Four partners have been involved in IDEAL: Projekt Sultana, Settlementet in Copenhagen, Denmark, Themis¹ in the Netherlands, Hyllie Park Folk high school in Malmö, Sweden, and Stichting Mooi / Xtra in The Hague, the Netherlands. All organisations are specialised in working with disadvantaged, uneducated and marginalised participants and have experienced how traditional methods of facilitating and learning fall short, when applied to the target group.

It started by Sultana inviting Themis / Rogier van 't Rood to train them in using the participatory psycho-social and mother tongue based Themis-method, with facilitation by a well educated similar background role model, for marginalised non-western female immigrants, which he had developed and implemented in the Netherlands. This was followed by exchanging methodological experiences. Projekt Sultana has been working with a double language approach and solution focus. Hyllie Park has solid theoretical and practical experiences of the mother tongue based double language education and is one of the leader organisations of using this method in adult education in Sweden. Stichting Mooi (NL) in The Hague became a fourth partner. They had staff and facilities organised for a pilot group in the Netherlands with supervision by Themis (NL).

The already existing Dutch Themis modules were taken as the starting point. These were first translated into English. The Danish and Swedish partners incorporated their experiences into the Themis modules: solution focus (Denmark) and the double language mother tongue based approach (Sweden) respectively. Their contributions were translated back into English and then further into the other languages.

Each pilot group has been working together for approximately a year (or approx. 300 contact hours) and at the start has consisted of 10-15 participants (women only). In Denmark they chose to have one group with Arabic, Turkish and Urdu speaking participants and three female facilitators, each of them speaking one of these languages (Arabic, Danish and Pakistani background respectively). In the Netherlands they had Berber/Arabic speaking participants and a female facilitator who, because of her Moroccan background, is well acquainted with both languages, and in Sweden they had only Arabic speaking participants from different countries with a female Arabic speaking facilitator from Iraq. Continuous evaluations with the participants and the facilitator(s) have been made. Lessons learned from the pilot and shared through regular status reports led to additions and changes which

¹ By Vantrood Educational Services, a consultancy firm owned by Rogier van 't Rood, in Eijsden-Margraten / the Netherlands.

improved the lesson plans even further, and which has given knowledge and reflections on the contents of the facilitator's handbook as well.

1.1 Objectives and rationale of THEMIS / IDEAL

IDEAL aims at the empowerment of disadvantaged, uneducated, non-western immigrant women.

Large numbers of immigrants from non-western countries do not fully participate in the EU-countries of their arrival, especially uneducated women. Many among them suffer from a low self-esteem and low self-confidence, and from various psychosomatic illnesses, which consequently hinder their full participation in society and as such their citizenship. Working with these participants the facilitator is confronted by methodological challenges. With no experience with formal learning, no literacy as a method of memorising, but extensive use of oral and visual memorisation processes instead, the participants have different pedagogical needs as compared to a student with a well-developed educational background. The IDEAL method, using many pictograms for memorisation purposes (in combination with focus group debates, role plays, guided fantasies and many other activating methods), will help them to acquire the necessary knowledge and competences for becoming an empowered active citizen of EU-member states. IDEAL could be seen as a first step on the path towards active citizenship, creating the basic conditions (or necessary requirements): an improved self-esteem and self-confidence, appropriate communication skills and awareness on gender equity and on the possibility and experience to make significant changes for the better in one's own life. Therefore it needs to be followed up by other activities and learning events.²

IDEAL makes use of three methods proven to be effective. The three methods built upon are: "the mother tongue based dual language approach", "the participatory psycho-social approach of Themis", also introducing pictograms and the "IDEAL-tree", and the "solution focus approach"³. These methods are described further in the IDEAL-handbook. All IDEAL partners have already fully implemented the IDEAL method.

All methods have in common that they take the participants and their mental framework as their actual starting point: by allowing the participant to act in her mother tongue language reflecting her life experiences, by putting themes, issues and challenges on the agenda that the participant herself considers as important and relevant. At the same time, the experience of being taken seriously as a complex and multifaceted personality prepares the groundwork for a continuous constructive and goal oriented work. The groundwork is crucial as the issues raised during the process can be sensitive, even painful.

The mother tongue based dual language approach gives the participant the opportunity to express herself in her mother tongue in a grown-up and nuanced manner. The participatory

² In the Netherlands and previously before IDEAL, Themis had already developed and implemented follow up modules to the five modules shared in IDEAL. Due to the limited life span of this Grundtvig-project it appeared not to be possible to have these translated into English for sharing with the IDEAL-partners in Denmark and Sweden.

³ Solution focus also belongs to the large family of participatory approaches.

psycho-social approach of the Themis method⁴ involves the participant in a manner different from the traditional, formal teaching approach. It appeals to and makes use of several senses (the cognitive, visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and communicative); by doing so, it involves different types of learners and their strategies. The approach was developed in order to foster learning and development in Third World countries, on the basis of ideas expressed by Paulo Freire, thus including activities, learning strategies and memorisation techniques that meet the needs of a population with little or no formal education. This way it also supplies the needs of the target group in question. By sliding back and forth on the scale of literacy, the approach can be adjusted to the target group without interfering with the contents or the activities. *Solution focus* contributes with a concrete verbalisation to the implementation of the participatory approach⁵.

Results show that even participants who have not benefitted from more formal teaching will experience progress and be able to redefine themselves as individuals capable of learning. The success boosts the motivation and encourages them to continue the struggle to strive for other changes. Taking the mental framework of the participant as a starting point is a crucial aspect of this approach, as well as a safe and conducive learning environment. The participant is invited, through questions, debates, role plays, games, etc. to reflect on its knowledge, values, norms and beliefs, and to transform oneself to becoming an active participant in society.

2. EVALUATION OUTCOMES IN THE NETHERLANDS (THEMIS / IDEAL)

At Stichting Mooi in The Hague (the Netherlands) the group started with thirteen female participants, most of them born in Morocco (Berber and Arabic speaking) and with two women from Sudan (Arabic speaking). Three left the group, including all from Sudan, due to external pull factors: illness, pregnancy and remigration. All three regretted the necessity to leave the group. Four of the ten participants remaining are fully illiterate.

The facilitator in the Netherlands has a degree in higher vocational education in the Netherlands and is an experienced and cheerful facilitator employed by Stichting Mooi, but she never worked with a participatory method before. She was born in Morocco, migrated to the Netherlands with her family when she was a teenager, and she is Berber and Arabic speaking. She was assisted by two successive internship students from The Hague Hogeschool (higher vocational education), also with a Moroccan background. A volunteer with a Surinam background assisted in organising outdoor meetings, for putting lessons learned into practice (see below).

The first student intern assisting the facilitator appeared to have rather strong opinions about a strict interpretation of the Quran. Her explicit interpretations discouraged the participants to focus on their own self-esteem, for instance by declining celebrating

⁴ The Themis method is inspired by the works of Paulo Freire and by highly reputed Freirian methods like GRAAP (Burkina Faso), Reflect (Robert Chambers / Action Aid - UK), Training for Transformation (Ann Hope & Sally Timmel – South Africa), and by Dutch approaches on enhancing female emancipation, in the seventies of the 20th century.

⁵ Solution focus counselling is developed by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg. The American mental health counsellor Jeffrey Guterman is also mentioned as an important contributor to this approach.

birthdays, to sing songs for and to say nice things about the person whose birthday it was. After a short while she could be replaced by a far more moderate student intern who was well able to keep her personal opinions for herself. The celebrations were resumed.

The participants were recruited voluntarily, on the basis of mouth to mouth information, started by the facilitator. After a few weeks enrolments were stopped, when the group was large enough. Nevertheless, during the IDEAL-course other women continuously but fruitlessly requested for participation. Meetings were generally held on three mornings per week, including lessons on practice. Venue was a separate classroom owned by Stichting Mooi, in a primary school and near the homes of the participants. Supervision meetings with the Themis-facilitator and her assistants were held three-weekly on average. Main focus at these meetings was each time on challenges met in class and on effective facilitation approaches.

2.1 Outcomes of focus group debates and interviews

On the basis of interviews and focus group debates by the facilitator and her assistant the following achievements are reported:

- *Saying no*: previously all women depreciated themselves and they did not dare to say no to family members (esp. husbands and mothers in law), even if they were not able to comply with the demands posed. Because of this they experienced high levels of stress and stress related complaints, like sleeplessness, shoulder and back pains, stomach problems, headaches, loss of energy, feelings of depression. Compensated in many cases by eating too much, causing weight and weight related problems. These complaints are reduced.
- *Setting boundaries*: partially because of priority lists developed by the participants themselves, they all became aware about important issues in their personal lives, which they want to get grip on and to enhance.
- *Increased self-confidence*: all have become less shy and withdrawn; they feel stronger and are better able now to show their needs and expectations, and to defend their personal interests. They do not want to stay offside anymore and like to join in activities.
- *Increased basic knowledge*: increased knowledge of the Dutch language and on issues they did not know before, especially on health and body, and on (un-) healthy food. Also on the Dutch society, the way Dutch people generally behave and communicate. All understand the Dutch better and show a higher appreciation for Dutch culture.

Achievements at home:

- Because of improved communication skills (Module 4), they have learned to check better the information provided by family members, by asking questions, and not take everything said for granted. This ability prevents quarrels and arguments, also by understanding that the way someone expresses himself might come across more negative than intended.
- They understand better the difference between a fact and an opinion, and are less upset about opinions of others, which they do not share
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- They give a careful thought first, before they reply, also considering now their own needs, thus being better able to care for their own interests.
- They have better structured their household activities, also saving time for themselves, making them feeling more comfortable and steady.
- They are not put aside anymore, by husbands, family in law and friends, by being less shy and modest.

Achievements in Dutch society:

- They feel taken more seriously by Dutch counterparts, like the doctor or in the school of their children: they ask for assistance and are better able to express their interests.
- They dare to criticise each other.
- They understand how important it is for their children to become involved in school affairs, and many contribute to activities in school. They also dare to ask for school performances of their children which they did not dare before.
- Because of improved planning skills they have time now for leisure activities, like sports. This helps them to discharge and to build new energy.

Specific effects of the module on health (Module 3):

- Development of vocabulary (both in Dutch and in their mother tongue)
- Better able to listen to the needs of their body; less stress and stress related complaints, thus an improved physical and mental well-being (also because of improved communication skills: see above).
- Better knowledge and understanding of the bodily functions.

Specific effects of the module on child upbringing (Module 5):

- They all have become aware of the importance of a positive attitude towards their children: less complaining, nagging and negative reinforcement, more positive affirmation: they understand that it is important to compliment the child and to listen to him / her. Previously many just threw away objects made in school, in front of the child, saying that this was a useless item (even when it was produced as a present for the mother). They now understand that this behaviour does not contribute to the self-esteem of the child.
- They now perceive their children as a conversation partner, and not as an object that needs to be trained only, also by taking children's' feelings more seriously. 7 out of 10 participants report a better communication with their children.
- By structuring their household better (rhythm cards exercises), they have obtained ample time spend more quality time with their children. They also understand now the importance of paying attention, within the context of their parental responsibilities: these are not just limited to practical daily care, but include social elements as well. 7 out of 10 participants report a more efficient use of their time.
- Setting and maintaining rules at home: time to be at home, bedtime, time spending watching TV or being on the internet (also checking better TV and internet subjects), sharing meals together.
- Better understanding of the mental development of the child (puberty!), resulting into less physical punishments and threatening. They also shout less, and have tempered

their voices. Previously a number of mothers punished their children by holding the child's finger in a flame. They have abandoned this practice.

2.2 Practical extra-curricular activities undertaken

- *On sexuality* by a speaker with a Moroccan background. The participants expressed their great enthusiasm about this subject, resulting into a second meeting. Participants were very happy about the knowledge shared about the functioning of female organs, about effects of puberty and menopause and about the devastating effects of female genital mutilation (FGM). This issue of FGM was raised during the general meetings on health by the Sudanese participants (at that stage still in the group), resulting into the development of a background information sheet on FGM. The issue of puberty was raised as well in Module 5, on child upbringing. It made the mothers understand better the behaviour of their children, which they did not understand before (and thus causing lots of nagging and negative reinforcement, esp. towards girls).
- *On the mode of operation of Dutch doctors*, by a Dutch speaker. Less enthusiasm is reported, perhaps due to the fact that the speaker was not able to connect well enough to the mental framework of the participants.
- *On stress and assertive behaviour*, by an immigrant speaker. Resulted into many eye-openers, in combination with Module 4 (on caring for yourself and effective communication).
- *On domestic violence*, by a speaker with a Moroccan background. Domestic violence is better understood, both in its causes and in its manifestations, also the roles of the women themselves. Resulted into many eye-openers, in combination with Module 4 (on caring for yourself and effective communication).
- *On rising children and punishments*, by a Dutch speaker. She was able to connect well to the participants, and this meeting was a welcome supplement to Module 5.

It was observed that the participants were improving their ability to raise questions, to take active part in discussions and to tackle taboos, like sexual issues.

2.3 Observations by the facilitator and her assistants

A set back in The Hague has been the fact that a well-functioning informal day care centre established by Stichting Mooi in the same building had to be closed after some months, on the order of the municipality, because of an intruder reported in another day care centre, but without the municipality bringing about other solutions. As a result some mothers took their babies and toddlers to the meetings, causing some disturbances and loss of attention. Fortunately and with the help of her assistants the facilitator could somehow cope with the disturbances, by appointing one of the assistants to take care of the children in another corner of the large classroom. But this unforeseen change in modalities still remained tiresome.

On self-confidence and self-esteem:

These are fundamental aspects of the psycho-social participatory methodology of IDEAL. Especially the role plays in Module 4, on effective communication, have had a tremendous positive impact on the growing self-confidence and self-esteem of the participants.

In the beginning it was observed that the participants did not dare to make eye-contact with outsiders, now they do. Giving and receiving explicit complements and encouragements has helped a lot as well, throughout the IDEAL-course (including celebrating birthdays with the participants giving compliments to the person whose birthday it was): the participants experience, for the first time in their lives (!), appreciation when they try to carry out a task, as well as the fact that people are willing to assist if you ask. This experience gives them some freedom to reflect on their own behaviour and to discuss issues more in the open. Crucial aspects are however: a safe and secure atmosphere and explicit trust into each other. On these issues Module 2 (on gossip) appeared to be very important, apparently making them aware of the negative impact of gossip. Further the safety is also guaranteed by the contract signed in Module 1 (highly appreciated by all), and by the attitude of the facilitator.

According to the facilitator and her assistants, this approach differs largely from other courses for immigrants. IDEAL in their view is learner centred, playful and taking the mental framework of the participants as starting point. Thus it is creating the necessary safe and conducive learning environment needed by these women, especially since they suffer from a low self-esteem and self-confidence, and a lack of effective expression skills. The well developed and selected pictures, role plays and discussions in combination, made the women feel safe and confident, allowing to open up themselves for acquiring new knowledge and understandings, and thus to become aware about their options and opportunities for transforming their own environment.

It would be better not to allow new participants to join soon after the start of the group, because together and step by step they build this safe and secure environment, which they have not experienced before.

On the lesson plans:

The lesson plans are well developed and easy to understand for the facilitator. She still needs time for preparations, but the regular supervision sessions were very effective in pointing out the core issues.

In the beginning, because of not being used to such an approach, many participants found it difficult to accept the methodology (since they are used to being commanded). But by an imperturbable moving on by the facilitator the participants learned to appreciate the approach and later on they fully embraced it. It appeared that many lessons took more time than envisaged, especially when discussions and role plays were involved. These are time consuming but very relevant and even crucial aspects of the approach. Sometimes it

appeared to be necessary to explore a relevant side path more thoroughly, like on FGM. Time needs to be allowed for such crucial extensions.

It appeared that those women who have had at least a few years of formal education in their home country advanced much faster than the others: they have learned to learn. For the others keeping concentration and focus, esp. in the beginning, appeared to be quite problematic. Linking the two types of participants, when working in groups, has had a positive effect on the conduciveness of the learning environment, and it gave them some responsibility for their own learning processes.

Giving space to sometimes unforeseen aspects also gave weight to the involvement of the participants, making them realise that they could influence the contents and that they are real participants in their own learning processes, thus creating ownership being necessary for becoming intrinsically motivated.

The physical exercises on the basis of Pilatus (developed by a Danish facilitator, who is a Pilatus teacher herself) have been used partially and only in the earlier stages, because the facilitator did not feel enough confident. Both the facilitator and the supervisor are of the opinion that these lessons also take too much time relatively. It appeared that the relaxation exercises already provided for in the modules were sufficient.

On language acquisition:

In the beginning the mother tongues were almost exclusively used (Berber and Arabic), but at the end Dutch (L2) had become the language of instruction for explaining and implementing the exercises, as well as for most general conversations. Still sometimes further explanations in L1 were given if found necessary, but in a very limited manner. Of course emotion related and / or more complex issues were still in L1. Thus they are showing that the command of the Dutch language had improved significantly. Especially Module 4 made a difference, creating better communication skills and not the least important: self-esteem and self-confidence, being necessary ingredients for active oral usage of the language. Even the weakest among the participants have improved their Dutch language skills.

It is observed that the participants make use of the L2 words learned, and that most of them are able now to express full sentences in Dutch (instead of just one or two loose words at most, like in the beginning). It appears that the participants understand the meaning of their expressions in Dutch. Testing was at CEFR A2 level only (orally), but it is quite well possible that at least five among them are (close to) B1. It is assumed that a "hidden but already existing vocabulary" in Dutch is also activated, because of improved self-confidence and self-esteem. Generally the participants have moved from ("advanced") A1 to A2, or from A2 towards an "advanced" A2 level. Officially the differentiating connotation of "advanced" does not exist in CEFR, but the progress appears to be relatively significant within the A2 category and therefore the Dutch staffs have taken the freedom to add the differentiation. For an explanation of the unofficial category of "advanced" see remarks below. The illiterates moved to A2:

No.	Baseline	Final	Remarks
1	A2	A2+	Can easily make correct full sentences now
2	A1+	A2	Can make correct full sentences now
3	A1	A2	All words used are correct
4	A2	A2+	Can easily make correct full sentences now
5	A1	A2	All words used are correct
6	A1	A2+	Can easily make correct full sentences now
7	A2	A2+	Can easily make correct full sentences now
8	A2	A2+	Can easily make correct full sentences now
9	A1+	A2	Makes sentences, with some mistakes
10	A2	A2+	Can easily make correct full sentences now

On participation:

The following results on participation are reported (with reference to baseline outcomes):

- 8 out of 10 participants now consult the doctor for more simple issues, without an interpreter. Before they made use of an interpreter (husband, daughter), except for one.
- 9 out of 10 participants now report more effective contacts with the school of their children. Before they made use of an interpreter (husband, daughter, sister in law), except for two.
- 10 out of 10 participants report effective contacts with Dutch people. Previously contacts were limited to Moroccan people only, except for one who already maintained contacts with one Dutch woman.
- 6 out of 10 participants (those with A2+, all literate) express their wish and motivation to continue their education in a more formal manner (MBO 1 level – the lowest level of advanced formal education in the Netherlands, enabling to acquire the least basic competences for paid labour). Stichting Mooi is willing and able to address this wish.

3. LESSONS LEARNED

Some of the implementation modalities at precondition level differed, comparing Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden, due to choices made in these respective partner-countries. The nature of this pilot project allowed for these differences. Since the outcomes in the Netherlands appear to be the best (participation, language acquisition, and parental approach) it would be interesting to observe as to whether these differing implementation modalities have had an effect on the respective outcomes. The schedule below provides for a concise overview of the respective implementation modalities:

Modalities	Denmark	Netherlands	Sweden
Composition of the participants group at completion	participants from different countries, three different mother tongues	Berber / Moroccan participants, all from Morocco	Arabic participants, from different countries
Mother tongues (L1)	Arabic, Urdu, Turkish	Berber (and some Arabic)	Arabic
Target languages (L2)	Danish	Dutch	Swedish
Cultural background of facilitator(s) / assistants	Arabic, Pakistani, Danish respectively	Berber Moroccan	Iraqi (Arabic)
No. of facilitators / assistants per group	3 facilitators, one for each language	1 facilitator, with 2 volunteer assistants	1 facilitator
Education background of facilitator(s)	Higher education	Higher education	Higher education
No. of participants (start / end)	14 / 11	13 / 10	12 / 7
Gender of participants / facilitation	female / female	female / female	female / female
Recruitment of participants	compulsory participation	voluntary participation	compulsory and voluntary participation
Supervision frequency	weekly	three-weekly	weekly

Extracurricular activities	one activity	five activities	no activities
Contact hours (in class)	approx. 250	approx. 350	approx. 350
Frequency of lessons on average	3 p/w	3 p/w	3 p/w
Module 5 (parenting)	Scandinavian version	Themis version	Scandinavian version
Pilates exercises	Implemented	Not implemented	Implemented

1. It is well possible that the level of homogeneity of the group of participants correlates positively with the outcomes. The same could apply to the cultural background of the facilitators.
2. There could be a positive correlation as well between the recruitment of the participants (attending classes on a voluntary basis) and the outcomes.
3. It has been realised by all partners involved that regular supervision meetings of IDEAL-staff with the facilitator(s) appear to be indispensable and essential for the efficient and effective implementation of the lessons. Further implementation of IDEAL elsewhere, should therefore include supervision trainings. Also for maintaining the quality and thus the reputation of the method.
4. The intensity of IDEAL asks for additional support to the facilitator: same background volunteers assisting her could be an advantage. Supervision meetings on a regular basis appear to be effective and supportive.
5. Offering literacy lessons for illiterates in extra meetings, starting during Module 4, when empowerment is making its take-off, could further enhance the outcomes.
6. Extra-curricular and follow up activities in a general participatory mode could further enhance the outcomes and the perspectives on active participation as well.
7. Safety appears to be a crucial aspect of the IDEAL approach. Therefore it is imperative to make use of a dual language approach and of female facilitation, being fully acquainted with the mother tongue and the social / cultural background of the participants. This would also allow the facilitator to act as a role model. Her education background should be equal to higher education standards, because of the analysing capacity needed when implementing the lessons. She should also have a cheerful attitude and not be suffering from mental hindrances and be very moderate and even reserved in expressing her personal opinions.