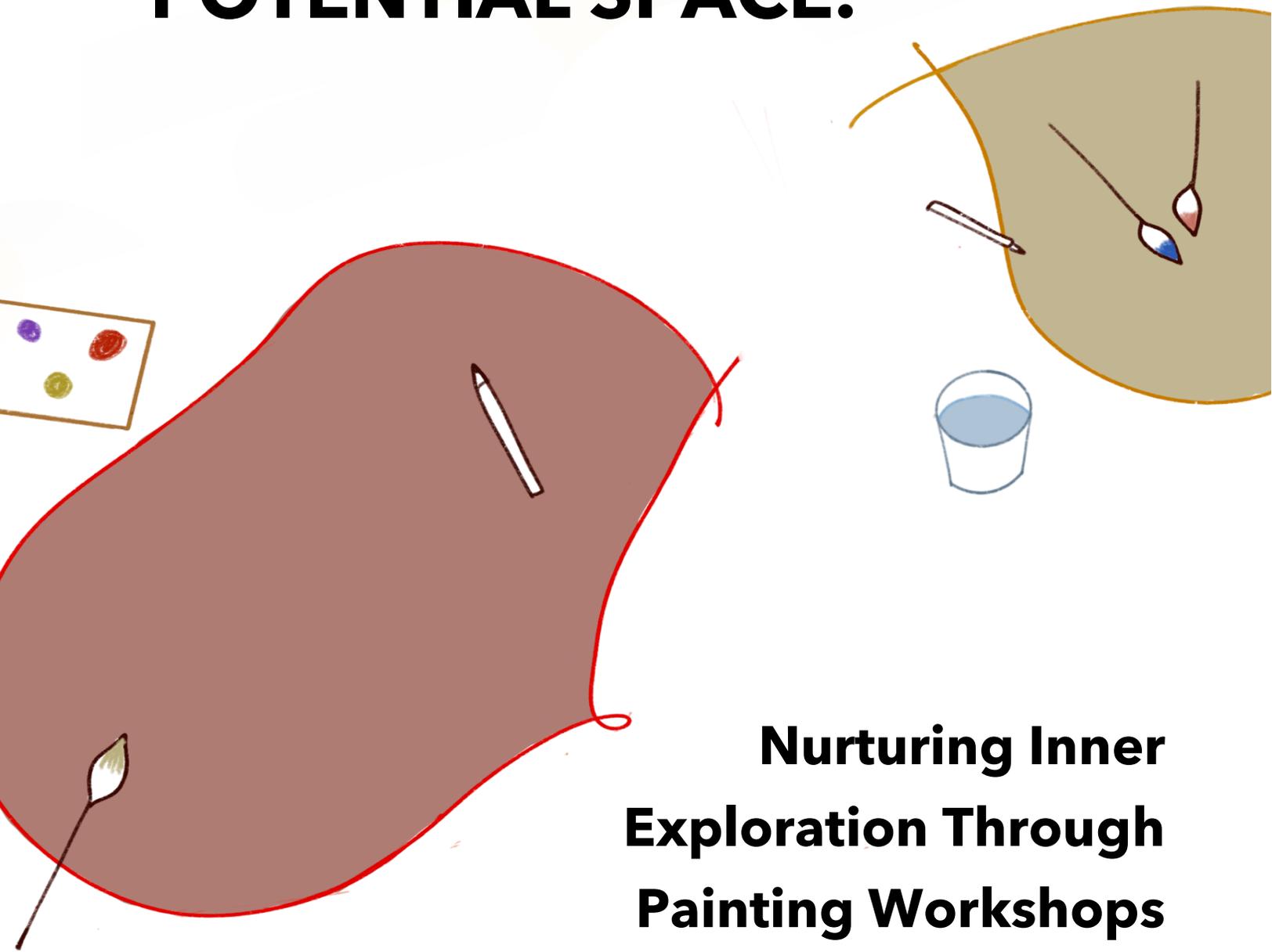
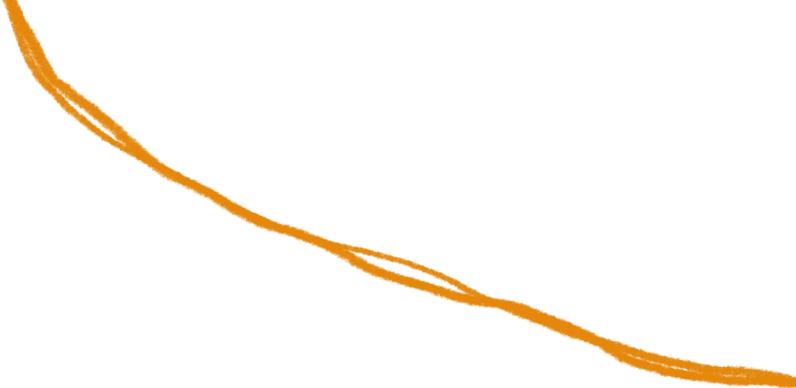


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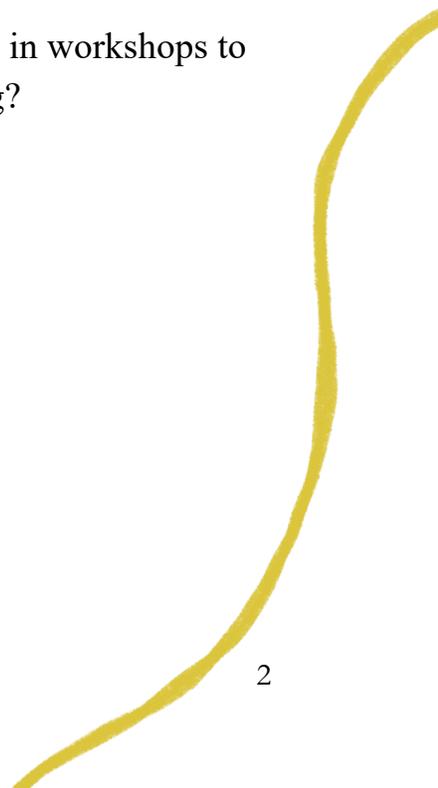
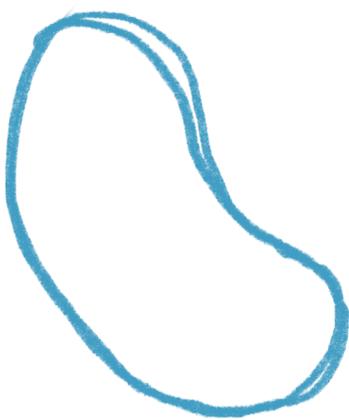
**Nurturing Inner
Exploration Through
Painting Workshops
for Children**



HOLDING TO POTENTIAL SPACE:

Nurturing Inner Exploration Through Painting Workshops for Children

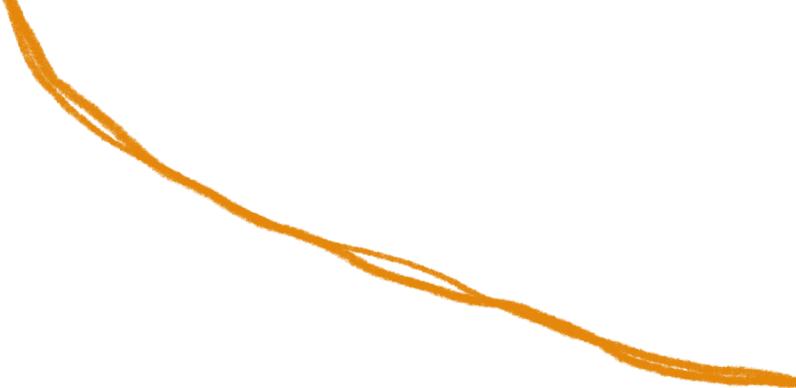
How and in what environment can potential space be cultivated in workshops to support inner space exploration through painting?



Kanna Hakama

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1. Introduction

1.1 research question

How and in what environment can potential space be cultivated in workshops to support inner space exploration through painting?

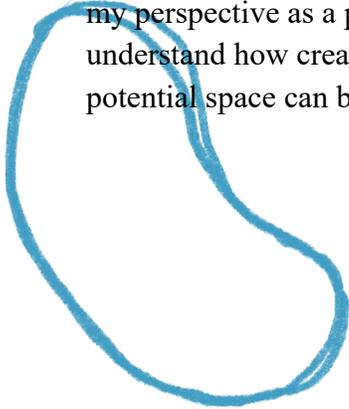
Everyone has an inner space, a mental and emotional place where we begin to explore who we are, what we feel, and what brings us joy or sadness, without the need for external validation. For young children, this space holds particular significance. It is where early experiences of imagination, emotion, and identity gradually develop and take shape. In this research writing, I am interested in how such inner space can be supported and communicated through creative processes like painting.

To access and share this space, children need an environment that offers a sense of safety, trust, and freedom. This kind of environment may resemble what Winnicott described as a "holding space", a setting that allows for open expression without judgment, supported by open-ended materials and gentle guidance through spontaneous play or art making.

Connected to this is Winnicott's idea of "potential space," which I understand as the space between a child's inner world and the outside world. It is in this space that play, creativity, and imagination emerge. Potential space is not fixed; it exists in the relationship between the child and their environment, and its presence allows the child to move fluidly between internal experience and external communication.

When a child paints, tells a story, or engages in imaginative play, they may be giving form to something felt but not yet spoken. These moments of bringing the inner world into the external world can offer insight, coherence, and a sense of connection, not only to the self but also to others and to the surrounding world.

In this research, I explore how this holding space can be cultivated and how painting might serve as a way to support the movement between inner and outer worlds, fostering a dialogue that helps children feel seen, heard, and grounded in their own experience. I approach this topic from my perspective as a painter and workshop organizer working with children, seeking to understand how creative processes can nurture children's inner spaces and in what environment potential space can be cultivated.



1.2 Me as a Painter and an Educator

Painting has always been more than just a creative act for me. It is a way to connect to the world through what already exists inside. It gives form to emotion, memory, and curiosity, and creates space for reflection and discovery, rather than simply producing something to be seen. In this research, I explore how painting can be used as a form of personal engagement. I focus on how it helps individuals, particularly children, connect with their inner world, and express it outwardly in ways that support both self-understanding and connection to the world around them.

My focus lies in how painting can help children find and amplify what they already carry within whether it is something they love, are drawn to, or feel curious about. In doing so, painting can offer access to a safe internal space where questions arise naturally and self-inquiry begins. This space, I believe, is essential for the development of a strong sense of self. In this sense, painting becomes a way to access inner space, a mental and emotional environment where children can safely explore what matters to them. This space is not only important for self-discovery but also serves as a foundation for authentic connection with others and the world. Belonging, then, begins not with fitting into a group, but with feeling at home in oneself.

^[SEP]My own experience as a painter has shaped this perspective. In my third year, my mother was diagnosed with cancer, and since then my focus became toward capturing moments of joy, love, and presence, particularly memories shared with my mother. My mother was in Japan, and I was studying in the Netherlands, so painting became a way to stay close to her. I painted memories of joyful moments we had shared. These paintings gave me a sense of reassurance and belonging when I felt far away. Painting became a deeply personal space where I could feel safe and connected. It helped me hold on to what I valued most. During this time, painting created a deeply personal and grounding inner space. Through color, movement, and memory, I accessed a part of myself that felt stable and authentic. It allowed me to reflect on what mattered to me and on what I wanted to protect. It helped me to not only preserve memories but also make sense of my emotions. I began to think of painting as a space of emotional truth.

My artist statement

"Painting transcends physical reality, using color and texture to convey emotional truth. Layers of color represent time, while shadows and textures add depth and affirm existence. Through painting, memories merge past and present, shaping our perception of self and the world. Our connections with others define what truly matters, as shared moments of affection shape our being. By reflecting on genuine contentment, we gain insight into what we love and appreciate. Unlike a photograph that captures a fleeting moment, painting layers color to explore memory's essence.



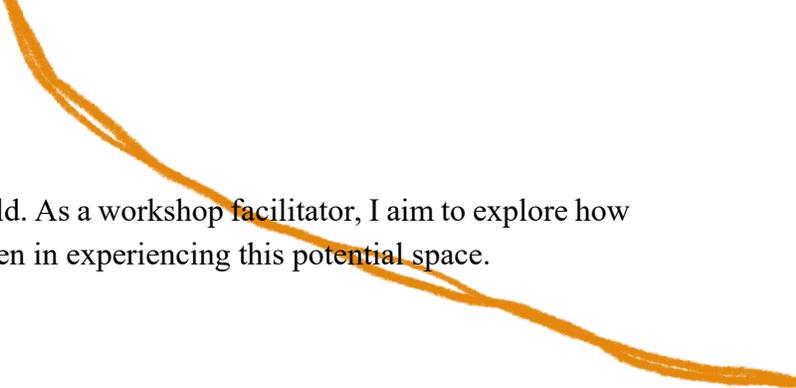
This layering process becomes both a question and an answer, revealing the significance of painting memory”

When my mother passed away, I lost touch with that space. I struggled to paint. The memories that had once brought me comfort now made her absence feel even more real. I longed to return to the sense of connection that painting had once given me, but I could not find a way back. For a long time, I avoided painting altogether. When I eventually returned to it, it was painful. Yet even in that pain, I could sense something meaningful. Painting remained a place where something essential could still be reached. It reminded me that creating was not just about producing beautiful images. It was about listening to what was alive inside me and staying in touch with it.

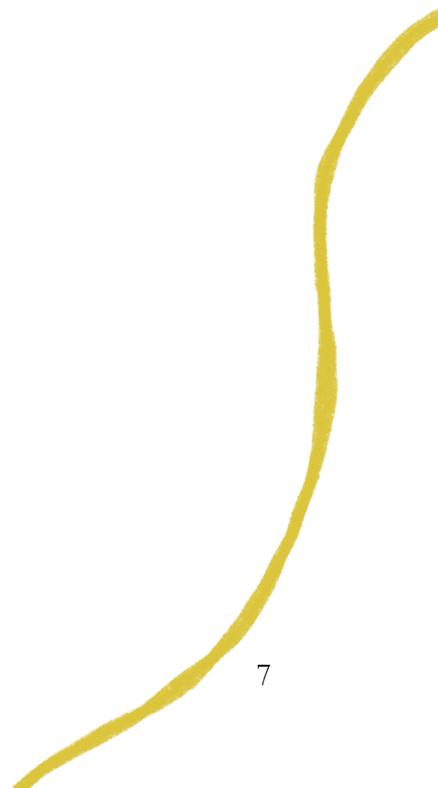
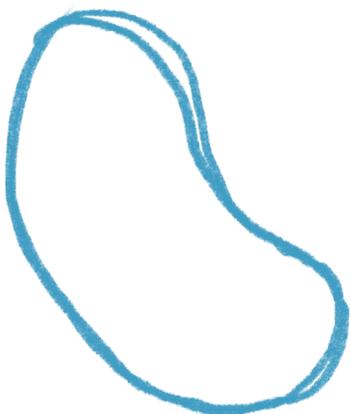
It took me some time to discover this almost therapeutic way of painting, entering into inner space by questioning myself. Now, I wonder whether this approach can also be meaningful for younger children. I currently conduct workshops in two different environments: one is a sensory-based workshop for children aged two to four, and the other is a community-focused workshop for children aged six to ten. These two spaces differ significantly in terms of setting and age group, yet both rely heavily on painting as a central activity. In each, I focus on helping children find their own way of engaging with art materials. I encourage them to follow their interests and to discover their own creative language. In the sensory-based workshops, the emphasis is on exploration. Children use water, paint, brushes, sponges, and other tools to manipulate and interact with the materials. There is no expected outcome or product. The process is the focus. They follow their instincts and create patterns, shapes, and movements that are meaningful to them. In doing so, they begin to recognize the value of their own choices and expressions. They start to trust their preferences and take pride in what they create. In the community workshops, the goal is to foster connection among families and children. We organize painting activities that are fun and inviting, but I also use these sessions as an opportunity to support deeper engagement.

Through both workshop settings, I have come to understand that what interests me most is not the final artwork, but the internal space that is created during the act of painting. I am curious about how children begin to notice what they enjoy, how they reflect on what they have done, and how they make sense of their own process. I believe this kind of personal dialogue is crucial for developing self-awareness. It is also essential for cultivating a sense of belonging. When children feel connected to what they love, and when they see that what they create has meaning, they begin to feel that they belong to themselves. From there, they are more able to connect meaningfully with others.

Ultimately, this research is both a personal and professional journey. It is rooted in my belief, as a painter, that painting offers more than an aesthetic experience. It can be a space for honesty, curiosity, and transformation, a space where children and adults can connect to ourselves, to our



identity, and to how we are embodied in the world. As a workshop facilitator, I aim to explore how I can create an environment that supports children in experiencing this potential space.



2. Theoretical Framework: Winnicott's Concept of Potential Space and Its Relevance to Painting

The British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott introduced the concept of “potential space” to describe the intermediate area of experience that exists between the internal world of the individual and the external reality of the environment (Winnicott, 1971). This potential space is not a physical location, but a psychological zone where subjective experience and objective reality begin to meet. It is where creativity, play, and symbolic expression emerge, allowing the individual to explore personal meaning while also remaining in contact with the external world.

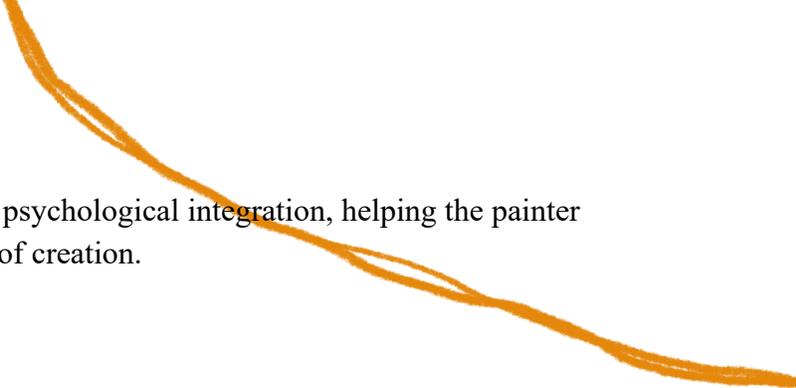
Winnicott saw potential space as emerging in early infancy through the quality of the relationship between the infant and their primary caregiver. When the caregiver is attuned to the infant's emotional states and provides consistent, responsive care, the infant develops a sense of safety and trust. This experience creates what Winnicott called a “holding space”. In this secure context, the child is able to begin exploring the difference between internal and external realities through spontaneous play.

Play, for Winnicott, is a primary way that potential space is accessed and maintained. It is through play that the child engages with symbols, tests boundaries, and constructs meaning. In these moments, the self is not fully alone but also not fully merged with the other. There is a creative tension that allows new forms of expression and understanding to arise.

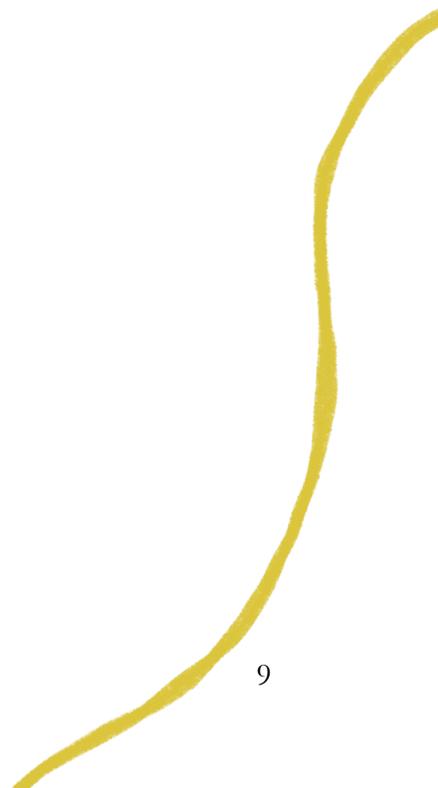
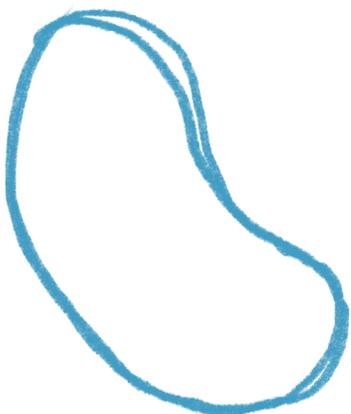
Importantly, Winnicott did not view this capacity as exclusive to children. He believed that the same psychological space supports adult creativity and cultural activity. Potential space becomes the foundation for all meaningful expressions of individuality within a shared reality, including art, religion, and philosophy.

Painting can be understood as one such form of engagement with potential space. It enables the painter to navigate between inner experience and the outer world through a visual and symbolic language. When painting intuitively or expressively, individuals often begin with an emotional impulse, a memory, or a sensory experience. As these internal elements are externalized through colour, form, and texture, they take on new shape and meaning. The canvas becomes a reflective surface where a personal dialogue can emerge. This dialogue is grounded in internal truth but takes form in a way that can be shared, seen, and responded to.

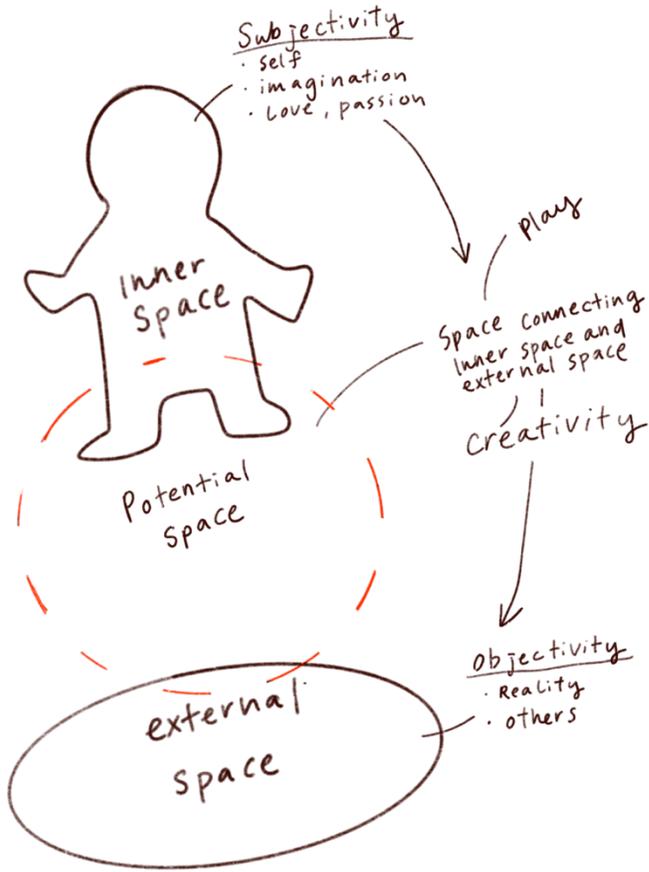
In this sense, painting can be considered a modern form of transitional activity. It allows individuals to remain anchored in their own inner space while also making contact with the external world. The act of painting does not demand that one choose between inner reality and outer expectations. Rather, it provides a way to hold both at once, creating coherence and



continuity between them. This process supports psychological integration, helping the painter make sense of their inner world through the act of creation.



Process of Externalizing Inner Space Through Potential Space

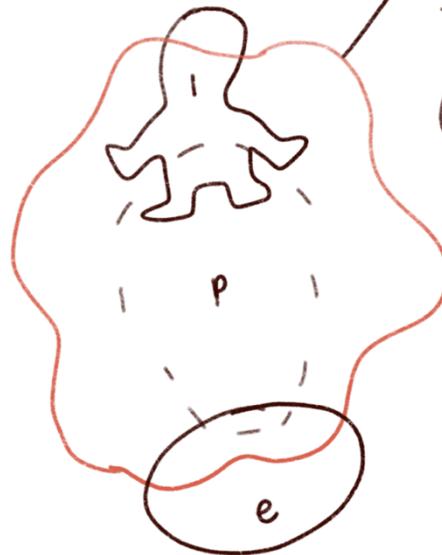


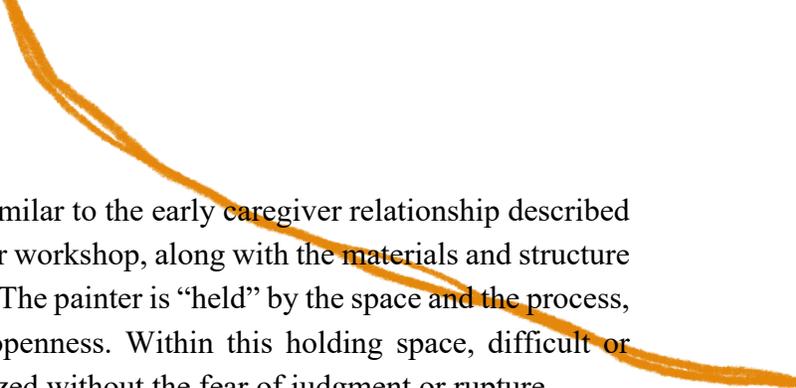
Holding Space

Physical environment

- Safe space
- free expression
- comfort
- Joy

- (tool
- painting
 - game





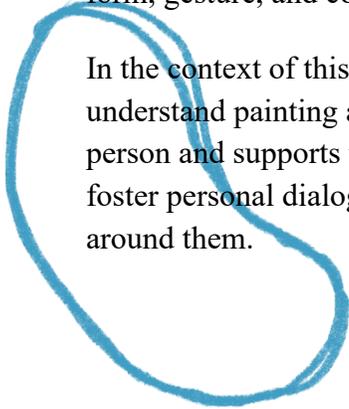
Painting can also function as a holding space, similar to the early caregiver relationship described by Winnicott. The physical space of the studio or workshop, along with the materials and structure of the activity, can offer a sense of containment. The painter is “held” by the space and the process, creating conditions for emotional safety and openness. Within this holding space, difficult or abstract emotions can be explored and externalized without the fear of judgment or rupture.

When this kind of holding is present, painting can support what I call the securing of inner space. By translating internal experience into external form, painting helps individuals organise, clarify, and process their thoughts and feelings. Repeated gestures, the return to particular forms or colours, and the freedom to revise or layer imagery can all create a rhythm that fosters inner stability. The painting becomes both a record and a container for inner life. It captures a moment in time but also holds space for what is not yet fully understood.

Moreover, painting as a relational or communal act brings Winnicott’s theory into further relevance. When painting is done in the presence of others, such as in a group workshop, each participant brings their own inner material into the shared space. These expressions, once visible, invite curiosity, dialogue, and recognition. The presence of others does not interrupt the inner process but rather supports it. Participants respond to each other not only through conversation but also through the sensory and emotional resonance of the paintings themselves. This creates a dynamic potential space that is simultaneously personal and collective.

In such settings, painting becomes a way of being in the world. It is no longer just about self-expression but also about forming connections. The act of painting and being seen can validate one's internal experiences. It affirms the idea that personal truth is worthy of attention and capable of fostering relational meaning. This contributes to a sense of belonging, not in the sense of conformity, but in the sense of being recognised and valued for one's unique way of seeing.

Winnicott’s idea that creativity is central to psychological health, rather than a luxury or a talent possessed by a few, supports this approach to painting. He believed that the ability to play, imagine, and create was essential for a full and satisfying life. When these capacities are compromised, the self may become false, rigid, or disconnected. Painting can reawaken and nurture these capacities. It provides a protected space where authenticity can emerge, not through explanation but through form, gesture, and colour.



In the context of this research, Winnicott’s theory offers a valuable lens through which to understand painting as more than a technique or a product. It is a process that engages the whole person and supports the integration of inner and outer life. Through painting, individuals can foster personal dialogue, secure their inner space, and participate meaningfully in the world around them.



3. Inner Space

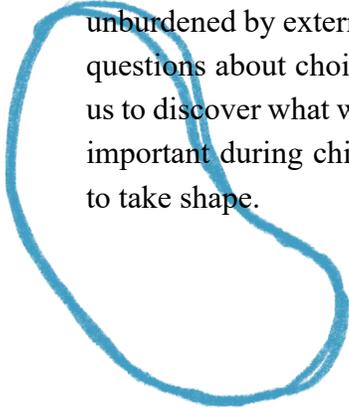
3.1 What is “Inner Space”

"Inner space" means in this context, refers to the mental environment where individuals can explore new ideas, question themselves, and discover aspects of their emotional and cognitive selves. Everyone possesses this inner space, a space where thoughts and reflections occur without being immediately shared with the external world. Inner space is crucial for self-understanding and well-being. It is where you can learn who you are and ask yourself meaningful questions without needing external validation. As we grow and begin to understand the importance of belonging and communicating with others, our true selves can become less visible. We often unconsciously adjust ourselves to fit into groups, which can come with subtle pressures to change who we are. In such cases, inner space becomes invaded by thoughts shaped by external standards, ideas of what is right or wrong, what is beautiful or not, and who we are supposed to be.

This idea of inner space is connected to Donald Winnicott's concept of *potential space*. He saw potential space as the site where creativity, play, and cultural experience emerges, a space where the individual is able to bring internal experiences into interaction with the outside world. It is within this space that the self can come into being and express itself authentically.

In the context of this research, painting becomes a way for children to enter this inner space and to explore and express what is already inside of them, what they enjoy, what they remember, what they question. It provides a medium through which personal dialogue can occur. As in Winnicott's potential space, where play allows for the integration of self and other, painting allows children to connect with their internal world while simultaneously engaging with their environment, peers, and community. Inner space, then, is a holding space for the self. It is a space that allows for authenticity, agency, and the possibility of belonging, not by fulfilling external expectations, but by becoming more aware of one's own experiences and values.

At a young age, children are often remarkably innocent and open-minded. From my experience, they tend to follow their instincts and develop their own sense of what is good or bad, often unburdened by external expectations. For me, *inner space* is the place where we can ask ourselves questions about choices we make and take time to find answers. It is an environment that allows us to discover what we truly value. While this space is valuable at any age, I believe it is especially important during childhood, when self-discovery and emotional development are just beginning to take shape.



In one of the sensory-based painting workshops I conducted with children aged two to four, the focus was not on producing a finished outcome but on discovering individual ways of interacting with paint. My role in this setting was to gently guide the children through different ways of engaging with the materials, offering possibilities, staying present, and ensuring they felt safe and comfortable as they explored. For the children, their inner space served as an intuitive ground for learning what they enjoyed and what they did not. Painting became both a potential space and a holding space, a place for personal discovery and emotional security.



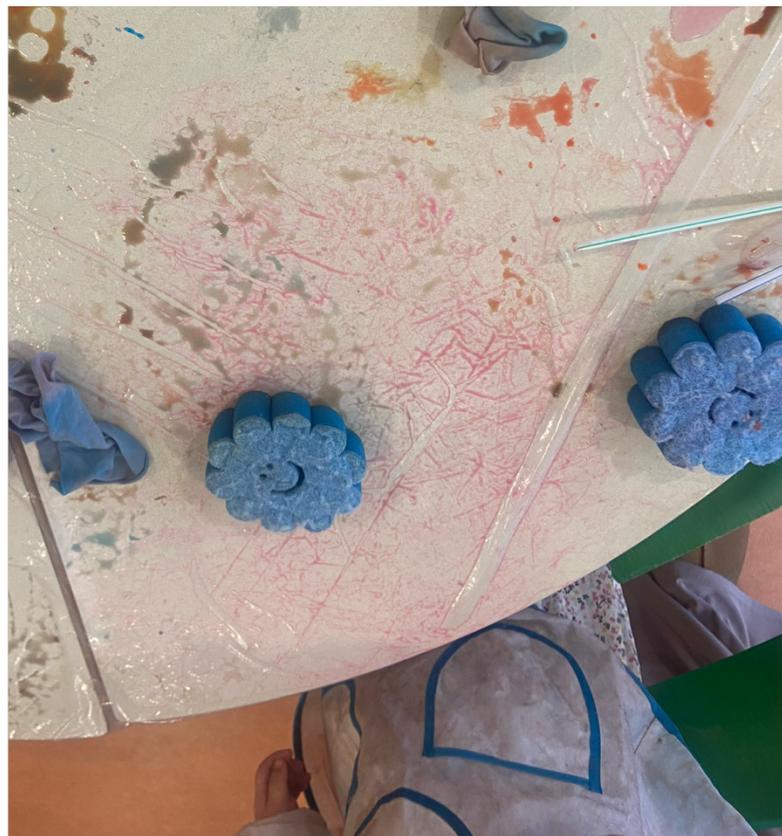
Sensory-based workshop for earlier aged children

3.2 Fostering Inner Space Through Painting: Pursuing Personal Interests

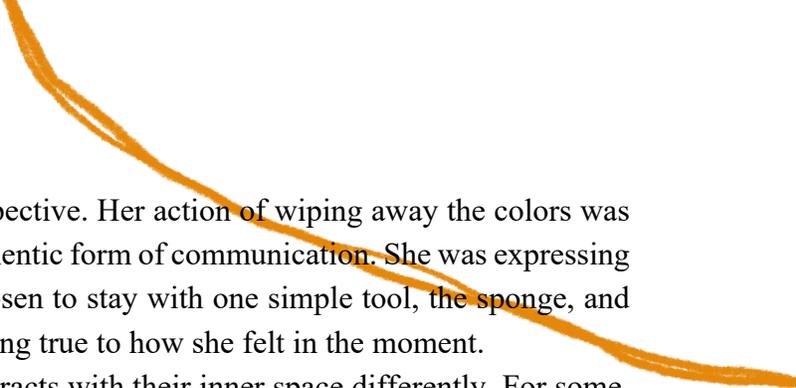
The sensor-based workshop was held in a classroom with six children, two teachers from the school, and myself. At the beginning, I was surprised by how quiet the room was. Even when I splashed water onto the table to draw their attention, the children remained still. I could sense their hesitation and skepticism. A few of them avoided interaction with both the materials and myself. In that moment, I knew that what was needed most was patience. Rather than trying to convince all the children at once, I focused on engaging with one child who seemed less afraid. As this child began playing freely, others slowly started to join.

One girl, in particular, had been avoiding eye contact with me and seemed unsure of everything. She stayed back, observing her peers play. Eventually, she whispered something to a teacher she trusted. The teacher told me that she wanted more water and a straw. I handed them to her, and she used the straw to drag colored water across the table. It wasn't the intended use of the straw, but it didn't matter. I encouraged her, saying, "Goed zo!" (Well done!), and she lit up. From that moment on, she became more playful and engaged, taking ownership of her experience with the materials.

Another girl in the group had a very different response. She appeared visibly upset and unwilling to communicate. I gently asked if she wanted a sponge or specific colors, but she refused each offer. I tried placing different tools and colors in front of her, hoping to spark curiosity. But each time, she quietly wiped the colors away with her sponge. Though she didn't engage in the activity as I had hoped, I decided not to pressure her and gave her space instead. Later, a teacher shared that the girl was feeling unwell



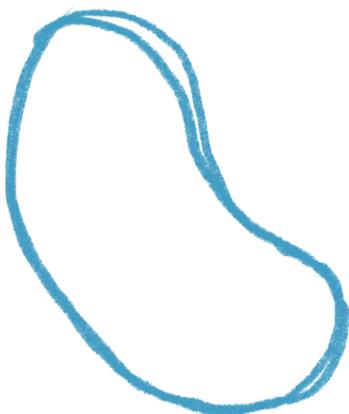
The act of wiping



and missing her parents. This changed my perspective. Her action of wiping away the colors was not refusals to participate, but rather a quiet, authentic form of communication. She was expressing her emotional state without words. She had chosen to stay with one simple tool, the sponge, and used it in her own way. In doing so, she was being true to how she felt in the moment.

These moments highlighted how each child interacts with their inner space differently. For some, it opens quickly through curiosity and play, for others, it requires time, trust, and the right emotional conditions. Knowing what they enjoy and what they do not is a foundational step in entering the inner space. Children learn so much through physical, sensory-based experiences, and painting, as a flexible and responsive medium, allows them to express emotions, interests, and decisions freely.

When children feel comfortable to explore and express what matters to them, they begin to externalize elements of their inner space. This act of sharing does not just express individuality, but it also creates a personal space within the group. It fosters a sense of belonging by being seen and accepted as they are. In this way, painting supports not just personal dialogue, but also emotional autonomy and relational connection.



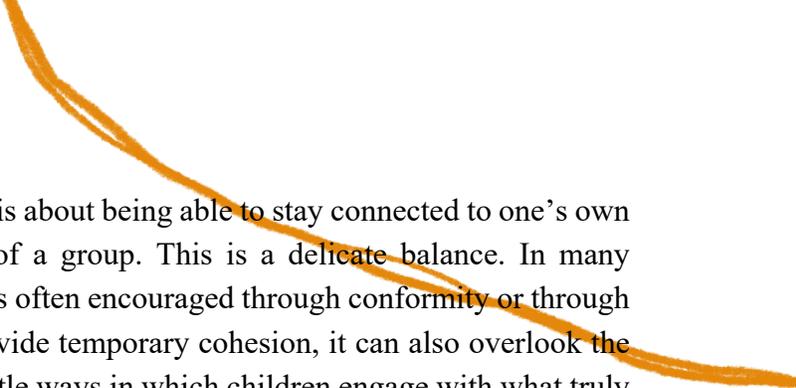
3.3 Personal Engagement: Connecting Inner Space to the External World, Fostering a Sense of Belonging

The concept of personal engagement refers to the ongoing, active connection between an individual's inner space and the external world. As Adam F. C. Fletcher suggests, personal engagement is not limited to self-reflection or internal awareness. It also includes how individuals interact with the world around them, forming relationships that lead to growth and change. Personal engagement is a dynamic process through which individuals begin to understand themselves more deeply by recognizing how their inner experiences relate to their surroundings. In this way, engagement involves both connecting with your inner world and actively participating in your external environment, with each shaping and reinforcing the other.

In the context of this research, I define personal engagement as the sustained connection a person has to the world within themselves and the way they use this connection to relate meaningfully to others and to their environment. Children, for instance, are not only capable of profound internal experiences but also have the capacity to express and externalize these experiences through creative processes such as painting. When a child engages with their own thoughts, memories, or interests during the act of painting, they are not just making something visible; they are forming a bridge between their inner world and the outer one. This connection, when nurtured in a supportive environment, can help them feel seen, validated, and more connected to the group or space they are in.

Personal engagement, therefore, is not only an individual act but also a social one. Children's emotional truths such as what they love, what they are drawn to, what they resist, often emerge through their interaction with materials. In this sense, painting serves as a tool that enables children to pursue what is already inside them and to share it in a form that others can witness. A child's fascination with a specific color, texture, or gesture is never random. It is tied to their personal world of memories, sensations, and attachments. When children are given time and freedom to explore this engagement without interruption or judgment, they begin to form a strong sense of connection to themselves. This internal grounding, in turn, allows them to connect with the world more authentically.

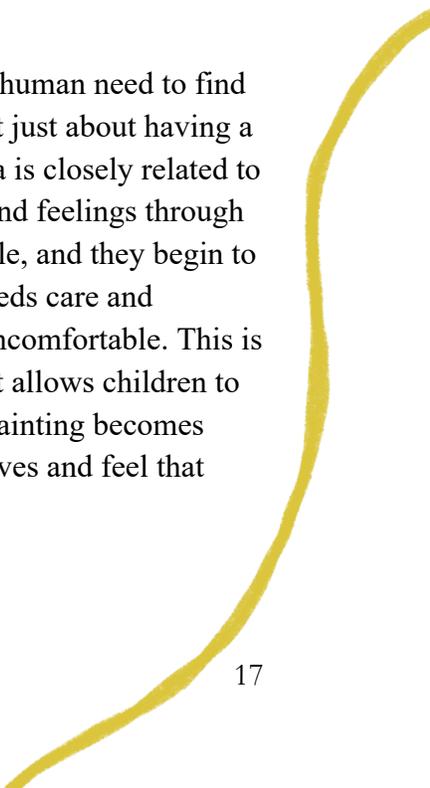
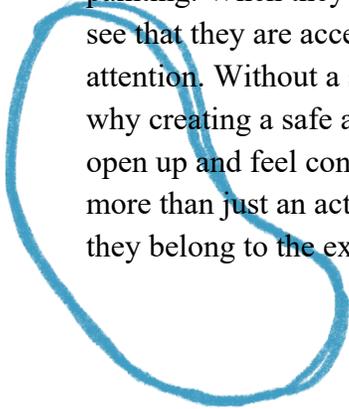
In practice, this understanding of engagement shapes how I approach my role as an educator. I aim to create an environment that supports the development of a meaningful and personal engagement with their own creative process. This does not mean that every child must produce a certain kind of outcome. Instead, it means that each child is encouraged to follow their own curiosity and instinct. In doing so, they begin to construct a space where they can belong by remaining connected to their inner truth.



Belonging, in this way, is not about fitting in. It is about being able to stay connected to one's own interests and emotions while also being part of a group. This is a delicate balance. In many educational or social settings, group belonging is often encouraged through conformity or through shared tasks and outcomes. While this may provide temporary cohesion, it can also overlook the importance of individual expression and the subtle ways in which children engage with what truly matters to them. Painting, as a non-verbal and intuitive form of expression, offers an alternative pathway. It allows children to show rather than explain, to explore rather than perform. This kind of personal engagement can foster a deeper sense of belonging that is not based on external approval, but on being able to share one's inner world with others in a meaningful way.

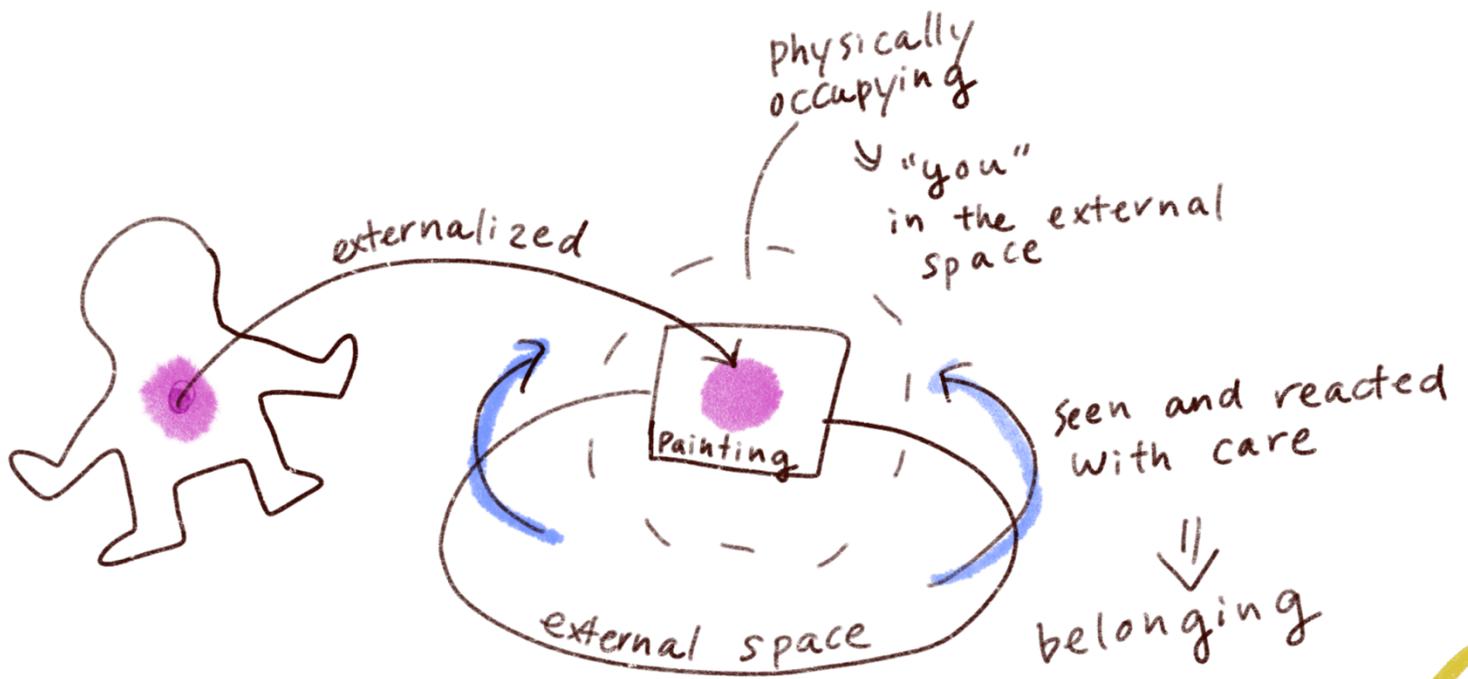
For example, in my workshops, I have observed that children often return to specific materials or gestures that bring them joy or spark curiosity. A child might repeatedly swirl water into paint or layer colors in a particular way. These actions, although simple, often reflect something deeper, an internal sense of rhythm, pleasure, or fascination. When these interests are noticed, supported, and allowed to develop without pressure, the child begins to build a stronger connection to their own inner space, what they enjoy. At the same time, sharing these actions with others either by showing a discovery to a teacher or by inspiring another child to try something new, creates a bridge to the external world. This is where personal engagement meets community.

This understanding is important for this research because it shows how painting can be a form of personal engagement that connects a person's inner world with the outside world. When a child paints, they can create a personal and secured space in the external environment. This space helps strengthen the connection between what they care about and the world around them. As their interests and creative expressions are noticed and supported, what they are doing becomes more meaningful. This can help them feel a true sense of belonging. They begin to feel that there is a space for them in the world where they can be themselves.



In her book *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, bell hooks writes about the deep human need to find a place where we feel whole and accepted. She explains that belonging is not just about having a space, but about feeling free to be fully ourselves within that space. This idea is closely related to what happens when children are given the chance to express their thoughts and feelings through painting. When they are supported and not judged, they feel more comfortable, and they begin to see that they are accepted just as they are. Hooks also says that belonging needs care and attention. Without a supportive environment, even familiar places can feel uncomfortable. This is why creating a safe and welcoming space in art workshops is so important. It allows children to open up and feel connected to others while still staying true to themselves. Painting becomes more than just an activity. It becomes a way for children to discover themselves and feel that they belong to the external world through inner exploration.

Externalizing and Belonging



3.4 The Impact of External Space on Inner Space: Nurturing Creativity

The process of accessing and securing inner space takes time, patience, and commitment. It can be nurtured and protected through a safe and supportive external environment. Especially in group settings, this sense of inner space can be easily disrupted without mutual respect and understanding. The sensory-based workshop has been very successful in introducing art media to help children develop their creative language. However, I have often witnessed situations where being in a group setting and securing one's inner space cannot easily coexist. In one workshop with 15 children, there was noticeably less physical space for each child than usual. I could also sense that this particular group was very energetic.

One boy was especially happy during the session. He was excited when he discovered he could make colorful bubbles using a pipette. He wanted to share his discovery with me, and I was thrilled for him. I told him, "Hele mooie bubbel, goed gedaan!" (Very beautiful bubble, well done!). However, he soon got carried away and began using colors from other children's spaces, which created discomfort and tension among them. A teacher had to intervene, scolding him and taking away his pipette, giving him a different tool instead.

He tried the new tool, but after a few minutes, he stopped. Then, he attempted to take off his painting clothes. I asked him, "Ben jij klaar?" (Are you done?), and he nodded. I helped him remove his painting clothes and let him go play with something else.

This kind of situation often leads to a chain reaction, when one child finishes, others suddenly insist that they are done too. I felt disappointed that the physical setting and overall environment did not provide a safe enough space for the children who left the table and was not able to continue exploring their interests.

This experience reminds me of Gaston Bachelard's idea in "*The Poetics of Space*" he emphasizes that physical space is never just about dimensions or function, it deeply relies on our emotions, memories, and inner experiences. He writes about intimate spaces (like the house, a drawer, a corner) as places where the imagination can rest, grow, and flourish. These spaces protect and nurture what he calls the "daydreaming" self, the self that reflects, imagines, and becomes. When there is not enough room, physically or emotionally, the space loses its potential to nurture imagination and reflection. In this case, the child's engagement was disrupted, not because he lost interest, but because the environment could not hold his creative energy or protect his inner space.

4. External Space

4.1 Painting as a Method of Personal Dialogue

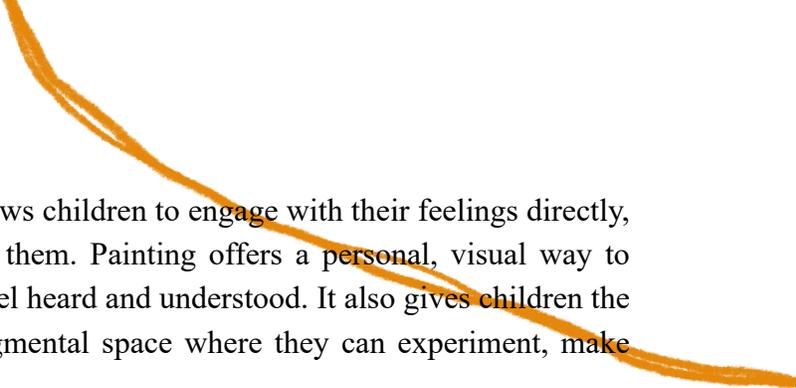
Painting is often one of the first forms of creative expression introduced to children in school. Its familiarity makes it less intimidating, helping children feel at ease when they begin creating. Painting is an open and flexible medium, allowing children to explore various techniques. There is no single correct way to paint, children can mix colors, add water, experiment with movement, and use different surfaces like paper, cloth, or even tables. These possibilities make painting an exciting tool for creative play and self-expression.

Painting engages many senses at once. Children see the bright colors, feel the texture of the paint, and move their hands and arms as they apply it. This combination of seeing, touching, and moving helps keep children focused and engaged while supporting their development in creativity, emotional awareness, and problem-solving. Touch is especially important in this process. From a very early age, we learn about the world through touch, such as holding hands, hugging, feeling different surfaces, and exploring with our hands. These early experiences form strong memories and help us connect with our emotions. When children interact with paint, whether with their fingers, brushes, or sponges, they express their feelings and thoughts through their bodies. This creates a direct link between their inner world and the outer world.

Painting also supports emotional processing by activating parts of the brain that manage emotions and store memories. The physical actions involved pressing, smearing, and dabbing which help children express feelings they may not be able to put into words. In this way, painting becomes a type of conversation, offering a safe space for children to explore their thoughts and feelings in a personal, non-verbal way. This makes painting much more than just a creative activity; it becomes a meaningful way for children to connect with themselves.

Engaging in painting is a powerful way to connect more deeply with emotions, thoughts, and surroundings. It helps us focus on what feels meaningful, supporting our ability to understand ourselves and the world around us. Painting often taps into feelings and thoughts that are difficult to express verbally, strengthening emotional awareness and nurturing creativity and problem-solving skills. The physical and sensory aspects of painting, choosing colors, moving the brush, and exploring textures engage both mind and body, helping children connect with their feelings and interests. As young children are still learning to express themselves verbally, painting offers them a vital tool to communicate their inner world. Reggio Emilia approach, describes painting as a “secret language for children,” as it allows them to communicate emotions and experiences they may not fully understand or have the words for.

Through painting, children can process their emotions, express themselves, and make sense of the world in a safe, natural way. The creative act becomes an internal dialogue between the child and



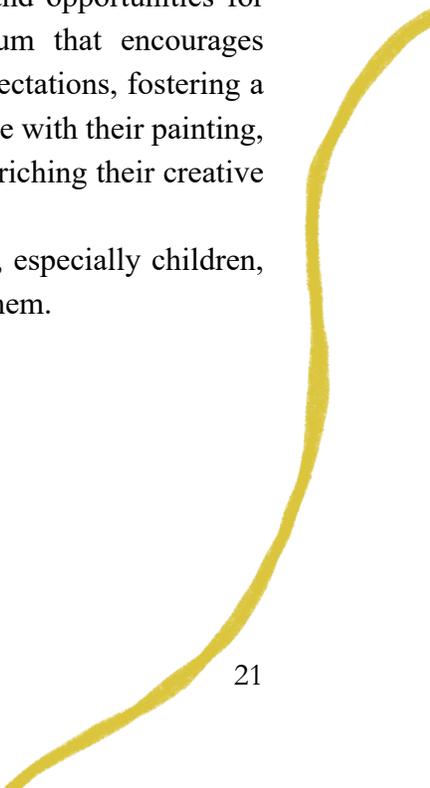
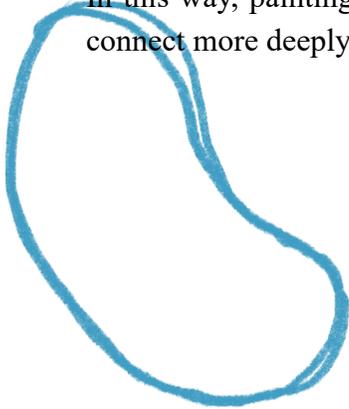
their emotions. The physical act of painting allows children to engage with their feelings directly, giving them space to explore what matters to them. Painting offers a personal, visual way to express thoughts and emotions, helping them feel heard and understood. It also gives children the chance to explore their creativity in a nonjudgmental space where they can experiment, make choices, and grow.

The idea of painting as a method of personal dialogue is further explored by Shaun McNiff, who emphasizes the therapeutic potential of painting. McNiff suggests that painting enables individuals to engage in a conversation with their inner selves, leading to emotional healing and self-discovery. He believes that painting offers a nonverbal form of expression that can be deeply revealing, helping individuals connect with parts of themselves that might be inaccessible through words alone. In this sense, painting not only fosters personal dialogue but also facilitates emotional regulation and growth. McNiff argues that painting serves as a bridge between the unconscious and conscious mind. By engaging in painting, individuals often bypass verbal language, which can be limiting when expressing complex or deeply buried emotions. Instead, painting allows them to communicate through color, shape, texture, and movement, elements that have their own language and can reveal hidden truths about a person's emotional state.

In his book *“Art Heals: How Creativity Cures the Soul”*, McNiff explores how the act of painting becomes a conversation between the self and the artwork. He speaks about the "emotional wisdom" gained through painting. As individuals engage with the medium, they learn to trust their intuitive responses and express feelings and thoughts that might otherwise remain unspoken. The very act of painting, choosing colors, making marks, and responding to the surface of the canvas becomes a dialogue with the materials and, more importantly, with oneself. This process encourages self-awareness, emotional regulation, and a deeper understanding of personal experiences.

McNiff also explores the cyclical, evolving nature of the creative process. He believes that creativity is dynamic and ongoing, both internally and externally. As individuals engage with their creative practice, they often find that it brings new insights, challenges, and opportunities for growth. For children, painting provides an organic and flexible medium that encourages exploration and playfulness. It allows them to experiment without rigid expectations, fostering a deeper sense of autonomy and self-expression. Through this ongoing dialogue with their painting, children develop a stronger connection to themselves and their emotions, enriching their creative and emotional growth.

In this way, painting is a method of personal dialogue, helping individuals, especially children, connect more deeply with their inner selves and navigate the world around them.



4.2 Painting: Externalising Your Inner World

I have previously explored how painting can serve as a bridge between inner space and external space, helping to foster a sense of belonging. When individuals engage in painting, they bring aspects of their inner world which is their emotions, memories, and thoughts into a shared and visible form. This act of externalising one's inner experience allows for authentic expression. It transforms something deeply personal into something that can be seen and potentially understood by others. When such expressions are received with curiosity, respect, and care, they contribute to creating a safe and supportive environment. In these conditions, people feel more comfortable sharing their true selves. Painting in this way does not just express something private; it helps to secure a space in the external world for that inner reality. This sense of being seen and acknowledged can strengthen a feeling of comfort, validation, and ultimately belonging.

But what does it really mean to externalise one's inner space? And how does this act affect individuals, particularly within a group setting?

John Berger, in his book "*Ways of Seeing*", speaks to the idea that the act of creating images is one of the oldest forms of bearing witness to one's inner life. He writes that "every image embodies a way of seeing," suggesting that painting is never just about what is depicted on the surface. Rather, it reveals how individuals experience the world from within. A painting may contain objects, people, or landscapes, but it also holds within it the perspective of the person who created it, their feelings, thoughts, values, and associations. In this way, when someone paints, they are not only showing what they see, but how they see. This process makes their internal world visible and allows others a way in, a path to connect with them more deeply.

In a group setting, the visibility of these internal worlds creates a shared visual language. Although each person may paint something different and deeply personal, the act of seeing each other's creations invites mutual recognition. Viewers may not always fully understand the meaning behind someone else's painting, but they can sense the presence of care, effort, and honesty. This recognition can support empathy, understanding, and a gentle form of connection. For the person who painted, being witnessed in this way can reinforce their own sense of identity and give them the feeling of being part of something larger. Through painting, the boundaries between self and other, inner and outer, can begin to soften. The group becomes not only a collection of individuals but a responsive environment that encourages reflection and dialogue.

In my workshop experiences, I witnessed how the children's creative processes gradually influenced one another in subtle yet powerful ways. Painting becomes a method of personal dialogue, a means of showing oneself to the world, and a way of building bridges between people. Through painting, the act of making something from within and sharing it with others supports emotional growth, mutual understanding, and a genuine sense of belonging.

5. Case Study: Socie Tijd de Gezelligheid

5.1 Painting as Personal and Collective Process

This collective painting workshop (conducted twice), focused on encouraging children to follow their instincts and to use paint as a way of externalising their inner space. The workshop aimed to support intuitive expression, allowing participants to explore and give form to their internal worlds through the act of painting. A central part of the session involved observing how the process of creating on a shared surface shapes group dynamics, how individual gestures interacted, overlapped, or responded to one another within a collective painting space.

The children were provided with a range of materials to invite tactile and sensory engagement, including a large sheet of paper measuring 1 by 2.5 meters, acrylic and watercolor paints, brushes, sponges, and natural elements such as leaves, flowers, and branches. Palettes, tape, string, paper towels, and water.

The workshop took place outdoors around a large rectangular table with chairs, creating an open and inviting atmosphere. Thirty reflective questions or prompts were offered to spark curiosity and deepen the children's engagement with the process. Snacks were provided to help build a relaxed and communal environment, encouraging both focused individual expression and moments of connection within the group.



Setup of the collective painting workshop



5.1.2 Creating Safety and Trust

I have conducted two workshops under this condition. There were four children in the first workshop and one child in the second. Through my research and practical experience, I have come to understand the importance of the physical environment as a kind of holding space, a space where children feel emotionally safe to explore their creativity. Simply providing materials is not enough to support this.

For this workshop, I prepared a single large sheet of paper measuring 1 meter by 2.5 meters, placed flat on a table. All materials were available on the table, which unintentionally created divisions within the space. The materials were shared among the children, which led to conversations as they passed materials to each other. The flat paper surface made each child's creation visible to the others.

I wanted to observe the relationship between the children and their creations, as well as their interactions with each other, and how this shared surface influenced those dynamics. I was curious to see how the physical environment, especially the act of sharing a paper, might affect group dynamics and each child's sense of inner space. Would it limit their sense of personal safety and make it harder to explore freely? Or would it create a sense of unity that encourages a supportive and fun atmosphere?

Regarding safety and trust in the workshop, which are important for cultivating a potential space, I had a few concerns. From my experience with sensory-based workshop, I have noticed that it can be difficult, especially for young children, to pay attention to others' space and be respectful. Painting is a very playful and flexible activity. The acrylic and watercolor paints I used in the workshop dry quickly, which encourages children to move around the paper and find new spots to continue their paintings.

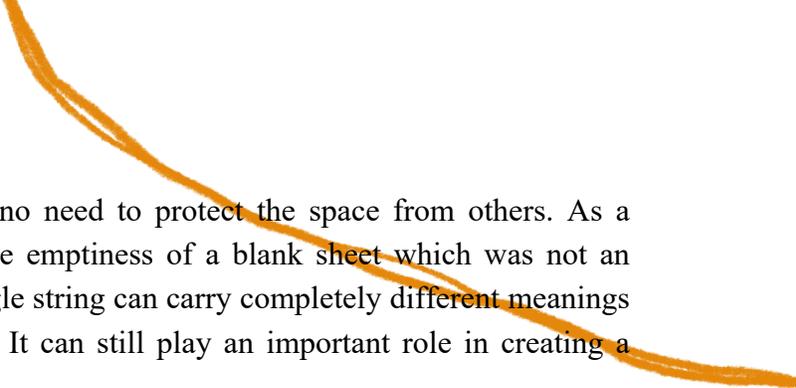
5.1.3 Securing space

My main concern was that participants might get carried away and unconsciously take over someone else's space. To help prevent this, I prepared pieces of string that the children could use to define their own space. They could choose the length and place the string on the paper to claim a spot. The string was flexible and temporary, children could adjust its shape and size as they painted and simply remove it when they felt satisfied and were ready to move to a new area.

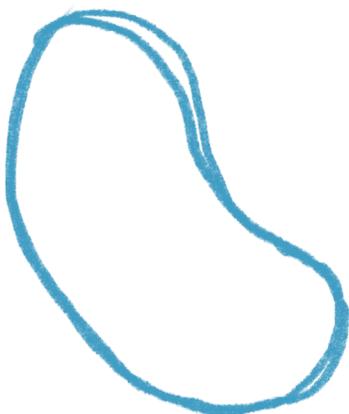
I liked this idea and wanted to witness the moment when individual spaces merged into a shared, communal space at the end of the workshop, when all the strings were removed. Since this was a volunteer-based workshop, I couldn't control how many children would attend. For example, there were four children in the first workshop and only one in the second. It is a very open and casual setting. Because there were fewer children than expected, securing physical space on the paper was not a big issue. However, I still asked them to use the string at the beginning.

The children moved around their strings as they painted. By the end, three out of four stopped using the string for reasons such as it becoming too short as their creations expanded, or because there was plenty of space. However, one girl continued using the string. Once she finished her painting, she removed the string and painted the area where it had been. She also wrote her name next to it. Perhaps the string helped her become more aware of her own space and gave her a sense of ownership.

On the other hand, in the second workshop, there was only one child, a 6-year-old girl. She was very hesitant throughout the session. Her mother was present with her and helped translate, as the child did not speak English well. I explained the purpose of the string, and they were open to using it, even though there was plenty of space for just one child. At the beginning, they had fun playing with the string. However, it took her a long time to start painting. I offered her several prompts and questions, but she waited until her mother chose one for her. They decided on the prompt: "Look around you and get inspired." She began painting a tree, but shortly after, she decided to take a break. When she returned, she tried to reconnect with her painting. She added a deer next to the tree and completed her artwork. I noticed that she kept the string on the paper throughout the entire workshop, and all of her painting remained inside the area defined by the string. Seeing her work within such a large surface, yet choosing to stay within the boundary, made me reflect on how the string functioned differently in this context. In her case, it seemed to act more as a limitation. The question is whether this limitation functions as a source of comfort or as a form of sabotage to a child's freedom. As I mentioned earlier, securing space offers not only protection but also a sense of ownership. The children were given a gentle sense of responsibility for the area defined by the string. Narrowing down and dividing space within a large surface can give children a helpful nudge to begin painting without hesitation, and it can offer a sense of comfort as they explore their creativity. Therefore, even in the case of a one-participant workshop, the use of string



can be beneficial, even though there may be no need to protect the space from others. As a facilitator, it is easy to feel discouraged by the emptiness of a blank sheet which was not an intention. However, I was able to witness a single string can carry completely different meanings depending on the situation and the individual. It can still play an important role in creating a holding space.





Painting secured with lines and name after the string was removed



Creation of the workshop participant

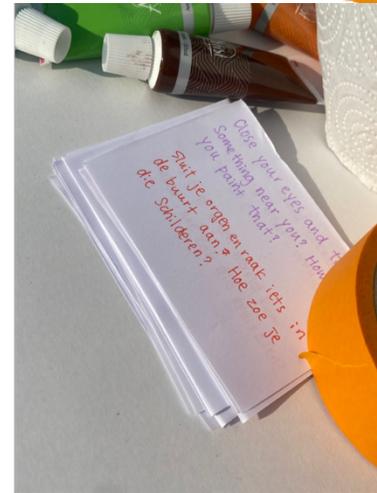
5.1.4 Questioning, Answering and Making Choices

Another concern that I had was how to guide or encourage children to reflect their inner space through painting. My role within this workshop had a significant influence on their creation. For this workshop I have prepared 30 questions and prompts for children to start a painting. These questions are made to encourage children to be intuitive but leave a space for children to ask question to themselves.

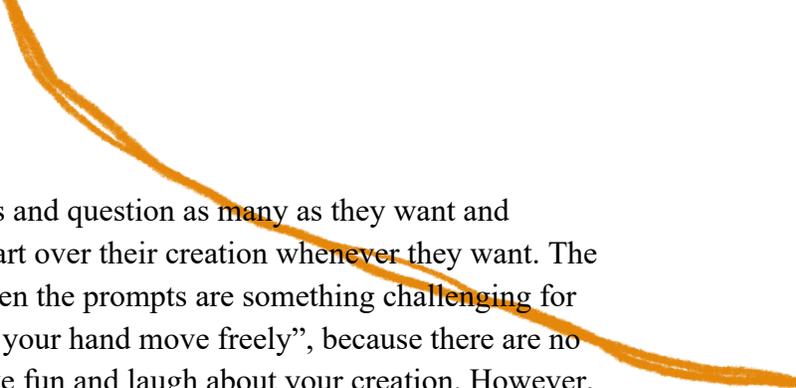
In my artistic practice, I almost always use photograph and when I take photograph it is very much based on my intuitive feelings. When I am with someone I care or just walking on the street something brights up my feelings and bring me a joy. My senses are picking up elements that I cannot even describe why it makes me happy. When I have that feelings, I capture the moment with my camera.

Moment can be a very short term and my feelings can change very quickly, therefore the role of taking a picture in my art practice is allowing myself to reflect back and remember the moment later. As I paint from the photos, I stare at the photo and try to bring myself back to the moment to understand why this moment matters to me. In this process, I ask so many questions. Painting to me is questioning, figuring out and making choices. When the painting has been completed, and my inner space is externalised, the connection that I had to the objects, place or person that I might did not share of before even stronger.

In this workshop, I have tried to let children experience this questioning and realisation, and I wanted the questions and prompt as build up to questioning, answering and making choices, therefore, I was hoping that after a question/prompt children will find their own way to continue painting. Most of questions I have made encouraging children to be intuitive, 1. So the children do not feel pressured to create something “good”. 2. So the children can question themselves why they make these choices. For instance, question like “Listen to the sounds around you and turn them into colors”, this could be a difficult for adult, from my experience we tend to overthink before you create something and find a reason why and how the sounds and colours are connected, but through my experiences, I found that children are very much intuitive and they are good at enjoying and externalising their intuition. This tactic of using their intuition as a starter can decrease a fear of making mistakes and being “bad” at painting, and from the the intuitive painting, since it is very abstract and open there are a lot of space to ask question. Why did they use that colour? Because they like them? Or because it reminds of you something? If it is their favourite colour, does it mean the sounds they hear is pleasurable to them? Throughout



Questions/prompts prepared for the workshop



the workshop I let children to pick their prompts and question as many as they want and whenever they want, so if they want they can start over their creation whenever they want. The children seem happy with prompt especially when the prompts are something challenging for them such as “Try closing your eyes and letting your hand move freely”, because there are no right or wrong way to do it and you can just have fun and laugh about your creation. However, they refuse to continue the painting from what they have made. This could be because the prompt is too abstract that children felt it is out of control at the point that they cannot relate to their creation afterwards. Meaning it is very difficult to come up with questions.

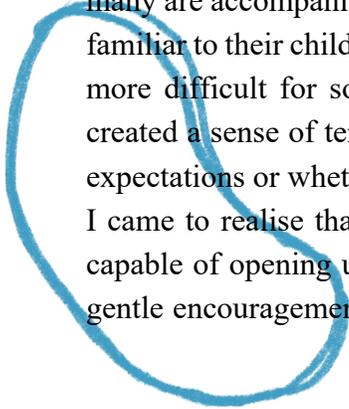
5.1.5 Guidance

In this workshop, I decided to take on the role of an observer. At the beginning of the session, I introduced the tools I had prepared and explained the steps the children could follow during the workshop, such as choosing a prompt as a starting point for their painting and continuing the creation based on what they had made. This continuation could be something they were reminded of from the initial painting or simply an extension of their first creation.

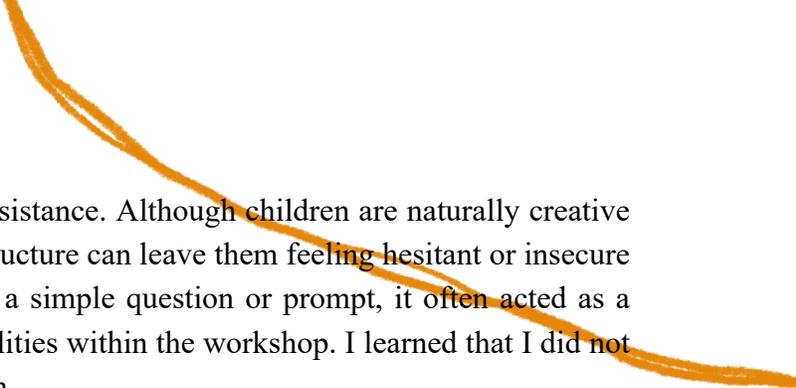
In the first workshop I conducted, I intentionally chose not to explain the deeper intention behind the session, which was to encourage self-reflection and personal inquiry through the creative process. I made this decision because I was still questioning whether this process of internal questioning, decision-making, and creation could happen naturally, especially for children who tend to have intuitive and flexible mindsets. I was unsure how much my involvement would support or interfere with this process. I often wonder where the line is, between offering guidance and stepping back to allow children to explore their inner space without restriction.

Although I had casual conversations with the children when they initiated them, my main approach was to step back and let them experience a sense of freedom. I am aware that my presence and actions during the workshop can significantly influence the children's experiences and their creations. I often worry that offering too much instruction or guidance might limit their access to inner space, which would go against the purpose of the workshop.

Additionally, because each session includes different participants, I felt uncertain about how present I should be in the workshop in order to make the children feel comfortable, especially since many are accompanied by parents who can help interpret or guide the experience in ways that feel familiar to their children. However, I soon noticed that my lack of active involvement made it even more difficult for some children to begin creating. The openness of the workshop sometimes created a sense of tension. It seemed that the children were unsure whether there were unspoken expectations or whether they were doing something right or wrong.



I came to realise that children, even when meeting a stranger like myself for the first time, are capable of opening up quite easily. They often appreciated receiving a few guiding questions or gentle encouragement. As soon as they discovered an idea that interested them, they were happy



to pursue their own direction without further assistance. Although children are naturally creative and intuitive, too much openness or a lack of structure can leave them feeling hesitant or insecure about starting something new. When I offered a simple question or prompt, it often acted as a gentle push that opened the door to new possibilities within the workshop. I learned that I did not need to fear influencing their creations too much.

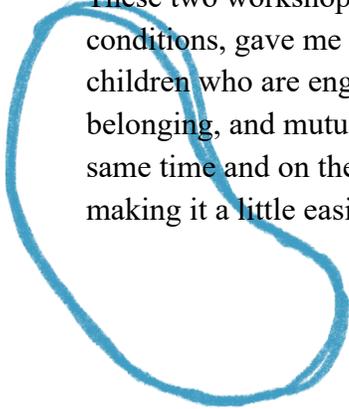
Furthermore, I came to understand the importance of external validation in the process. At the beginning of my research, I believed that validation could have a negative impact on children by restricting their freedom of thought and expression. However, I have now seen that positive affirmation can help create an even safer and more open space. It can encourage children to explore their inner world with more confidence and joy. When they feel seen and supported, they are more willing to externalise their inner space and engage more deeply with their creativity.

On the other hand, during the workshop where there was only one child, it became even more challenging to decide how I should present myself and engage in the session. With fewer children, my presence felt much more prominent than in the first workshop. Additionally, there was a language barrier, which made it difficult for me to have casual conversations with her. She seemed nervous, and I realised that simply watching her while she worked did not help her feel at ease.

In this case, her mother's presence was crucial. I imagine that without her mother there to support and translate, the girl might have felt completely unfamiliar with both the space and the workshop experience. After I explained the basic structure of the session, I initially chose to observe quietly. However, I noticed that the child would often stop what she was doing and wait until her mother suggested something. She also frequently looked over at me, possibly seeking approval or reassurance.

I began to sense that my physical presence, sitting directly in front of her and watching might have been creating unnecessary tension or pressure. So I decided to start painting myself, and to interact with her more casually through her mother. This small shift changed the atmosphere. She became curious about what I was painting and stopped her own work for a moment to observe mine.

In contrast to the first workshop, where multiple children were present, the energy of doing something collectively even among strangers naturally encouraged participation and creativity. In a group setting, children seem to draw joy and motivation from the shared activity. But when working alone, it can feel as though the full responsibility to create something "good" falls entirely on the individual child.



These two workshops, conducted in the same physical environment but under different conditions, gave me clear insight into the importance of group dynamics, especially for young children who are engaging in a new activity. Being in a group fosters a sense of playfulness, belonging, and mutual encouragement. In the solo session, I believe that seeing me paint at the same time and on the same surface offered her a small sense of companionship and safety, making it a little easier for her to explore her own creativity.

5.2 Painting What We Carry Within

The focus of this workshop is to help children amplify what they already carry within. Whether it's something they love, feel drawn to, or are curious about. From my own experience as a painter, I've learned that the joy and love I receive from the people around me become more accessible and meaningful through the act of making art. Creating something allows me to recognize and reflect on how things make me feel, deepening my appreciation for those feelings. It doesn't always have to be so personal or



A participant painting flowers

emotional. Sometimes, I often paint cats simply because I love them. While painting, I begin to understand more clearly what it is I love which are their beautiful eyes, their fluffy fur, and their calming presence. Painting is a continuous process of decision-making. Every brushstroke involves a choice what to paint, how to paint it, and what colors to use. When we begin to pay attention to these decisions, we also start to understand more about ourselves and our relationship with the world around us.

In this workshop, I prepared a canvas or sheet of paper for each child, which allowed them to focus on their own creations. This setup may have encouraged the children to ask more questions of themselves. Instead of offering 30 prompts like in the previous workshop, I provided one simple and open-ended question: "What do you like? Let's paint it." While this question is broad and vague, it served as a starting point for exploring my research topic. However, for this kind of question, follow-up questions are crucial. My role in the workshop was to act as a guide, someone who asks questions and helps the children reflect on what is inside them and why it matters.

Before the workshop, I was quite concerned because I had no idea how many children would attend or whether there would be any new participants. Fortunately, there were three children in the session, which gave me the opportunity to spend more time with each of them individually and ask more personal questions.

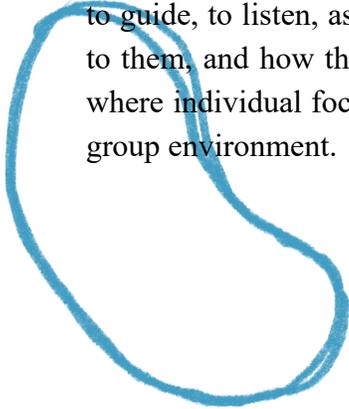


5.2.1 Individuality Among the Group

Providing children with their own space, where they have full control, gives them a sense of ownership. This functioned similarly to the use of string in the previous workshop. However, the difference is that in the previous workshop, the string was used to secure each child's space within a shared large sheet of paper. That arrangement gave all children access to one another's spaces and creations, which was very beneficial for creating a sense of unity and building community. Still, building community requires time and commitment from each child, which can be difficult to achieve in a one-time workshop where participants usually do not know each other. The priority of my workshop is the individual, where focusing on and reflecting upon one's inner space is encouraged rather than forming connections with others within the space. Therefore, providing personal space for creation may be a better way for children to feel safe and concentrate on their thoughts. However, in my previous experience, I have witnessed that being in a group setting can energize children and that positive encouragement from me, parents, and fellow participants has great benefits for their freedom of thought and creativity. For this reason, in the second workshop, I wanted to create an environment where being in a group setting and securing individual space could coexist. One of my main concerns before the workshop was the potential lack of interaction between the children, since each would be working in their own space. This meant that my role as a facilitator would become even more important. I didn't know how many children would attend, or whether there would be any new participants, which made it difficult to plan in advance. However, I knew that in order to support each child in reflecting on their inner space, it would be essential to engage in one-on-one conversations throughout the session.

Fortunately, three children joined the workshop, which created an intimate setting and allowed me to spend meaningful time with each of them. This smaller group gave me the opportunity to ask more personal questions and guide their process more attentively. Compared to the previous workshop, where I offered 30 different prompts, this time I chose to begin with just one open-ended question: "What do you like? Let's paint it." Though simple and broad, this question served as a gentle entry point into self-reflection and creativity, aligning with my aim to help each child connect with their inner world.

With such an open prompt, follow-up questions became essential. My role was not to instruct, but to guide, to listen, ask, and encourage the children to reflect on what they liked, why it mattered to them, and how they could express it through painting. In this way, I aimed to create a space where individual focus and personal meaning could be supported within a quiet but encouraging group environment.



5.2.2 Questioning

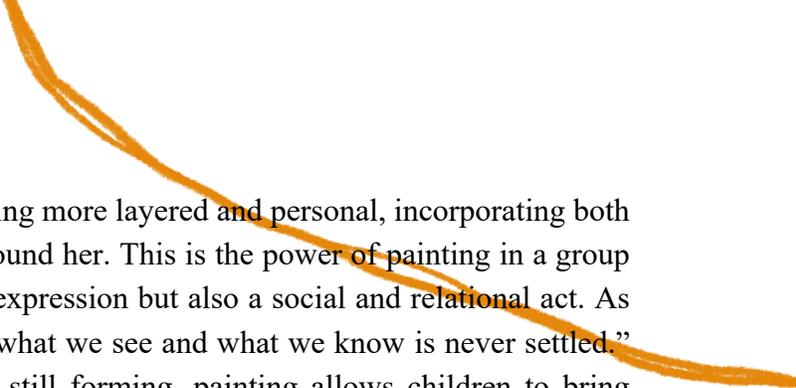
This workshop can be continuation of previous workshop, the first workshop was focus on seeing the power that fellow participants gives to others and very much about intuitive expression. And the second workshop is focusing on questioning and making choices. Which consumes more time and requires commitment to the process. Based on the observation, I realised the question “What do you like?” was very easy entrance for children to start painting. Probably this question has been asked to them before a lot of times, and even one of the participants were hesitant to start, the specific follow up questions such as “what is your favourite animal?” Instantly gives her idea and energy to create something.

During the workshop, at first, the children worked quietly and independently. There was little conversation, as each child focused on their own painting and responded to the prompt in their own way. For example, I asked one of participants what she liked to do. She told me she enjoyed watching movies and had recently watched *La La Land*. I suggested she might paint something she liked about the film. Initially, she seemed hesitant. I sensed that she felt pressure to recreate a detailed or accurate scene from the movie, which may have felt overwhelming or too difficult. As we continued talking, I encouraged her to

think not about the exact scenes, but about the emotions the film evoked in her. She began to speak about the romance in the film and how she found it cute. I invited her to paint what a happy or sweet romantic moment might look like to her. As she painted, her artwork began to take shape. It referenced a scene from the movie but also carried her own emotional tone and interpretation. Her painting became a blend of inspiration and imagination, drawing both from the film and from her personal feelings and experience. While she was painting, her mother and a friend came over to look at her work. At first, they commented on the movie, but the conversation quickly became more personal. They asked her questions about who the characters might be, whether they represented anyone she knew, and what the different elements meant to her. This dialogue had a visible impact on her creative process. She began to add new details to her painting based on the



Creation of one of participants: Starting from a favourite movie



conversation. The painting evolved into something more layered and personal, incorporating both her inner imagery and the influence of those around her. This is the power of painting in a group setting. It is not only a solitary journey of self-expression but also a social and relational act. As John Berger reminds us, “the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.” In this space where thoughts and feelings are still forming, painting allows children to bring forward what they feel and what they remember. And when their paintings are seen, responded to, and reflected upon by others, a deeper form of recognition occurs.

5.3 Reflection: Creating a Holding space for Children to Explore Their Inner Worlds

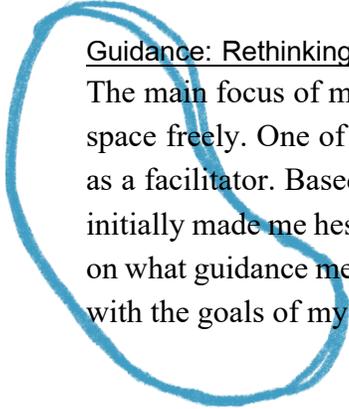
Through this research on how we can create a holding space for children to explore their inner space, I have identified two key elements that influence the creation of an appropriate environment: security and guidance.

Security: Safe Space for Expression

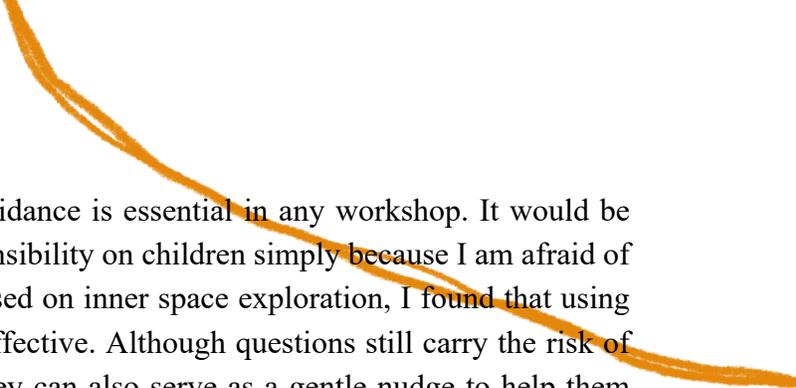
Externalising internal thoughts and emotions is a beautiful way for children to connect with themselves, others, and the world around them. However, this process always involves certain risks, such as external judgment, interference from others, and pressure from their own expectations. Therefore, creating an environment where children feel safe to paint their inner space is crucial.

Throughout my research, I concluded that securing each child's physical space is a highly effective approach. Even in a group setting, treating each child as an individual and providing them with their own space fosters a sense of ownership. Once an individual's space is secured, the group setting can offer additional benefits. Seeing others' creations can be inspiring and motivating. Positive feedback from other participants, parents, and myself as the facilitator can also provide a great source of comfort and encouragement.

Guidance: Rethinking the Role of the Facilitator



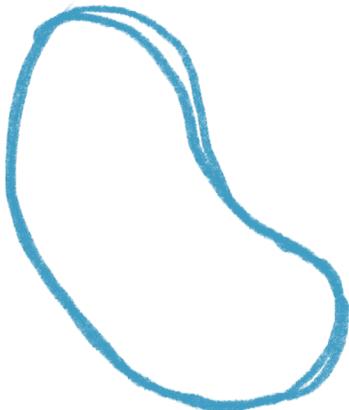
The main focus of my research is creating an environment where children can explore their inner space freely. One of the challenges I encountered during this process was understanding my role as a facilitator. Based on past experiences, I am aware of the influence I have on children, which initially made me hesitant to give them too much direction. However, I had to shift my perspective on what guidance means to me as an educator, and more importantly, what kind of guidance aligns with the goals of my research.



I came to the conclusion that some form of guidance is essential in any workshop. It would be irresponsible to place all the pressure and responsibility on children simply because I am afraid of controlling the participants. In workshops focused on inner space exploration, I found that using questions as a form of guidance is especially effective. Although questions still carry the risk of unintentionally steering children's thoughts, they can also serve as a gentle nudge to help them begin questioning themselves. More importantly, asking questions leaves space for children to make their own choices about how they wish to engage with the workshop.

I also noticed that in workshops where parents are present, they often have an even greater influence on the children than I do as a facilitator. Children frequently seek approval from their parents, which can impact what they create and sometimes hinder their ability to connect with their inner space. At the same time, parents can be a strong source of comfort and encouragement. Their positive reinforcement can be incredibly motivating, especially in workshops where children are participating for the first time.

Therefore, as a facilitator, it is important to clearly communicate the intention of the workshop to both the participants and their parents or any other supporters involved. It can also be helpful to suggest ways they can support the children. For example, by encouraging them to ask questions rather than offering suggestions about what to do.



4 Tips to Secure Emotional Environment

Creating a Solid Starting Point :Begin with simple, broad questions such as “What do you like?”, “What is your favorite thing to do?” and Who is your favorite person?”

Providing Positive Affirmation and Support



Using Open Questioning as a Gentle Guide (Encourage parents, volunteers, and others involved to use open-ended questions as well instead of giving them order what to do)

Balancing Interaction and Independence: Give children enough time to reflect and explore on their own but also interact thoughtfully, providing guidance without taking over.

4 Tips to Secure Physical Environment

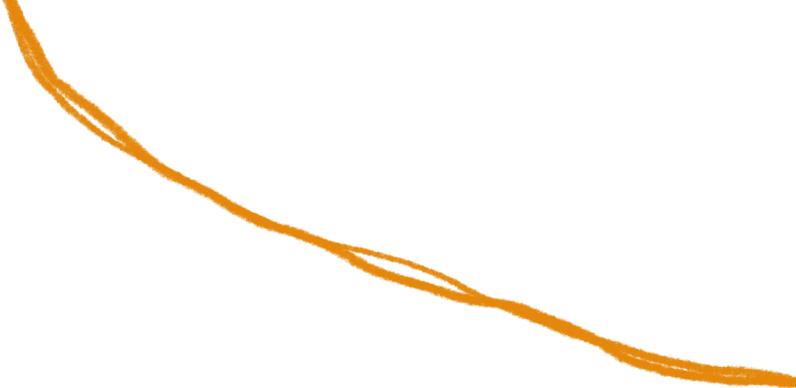
Accessible Materials e.g. Paint. Flexible interactable materials. Common & familiar materials. Stimulating multiple senses gives the opportunity of inspiration, inspection, and independent decision making.

Providing space for individuals within a shared space.



Autonomy: Freedom for them to move around and take a breaks whenever they want to.

Allow children to have someone who they are familiar with(such as parents, friends or etc...)



6. Conclusion

6.1 Insights and Next Steps

Throughout my research, I have worked to create a new format or prototype for a workshop, using insights from previous sessions. As a result, this new version is more controlled and structured. The workshops I previously conducted were very flexible in terms of time, space, and the people involved. During those trial workshops, having fewer participants allowed for closer and more intimate communication with the children. I was able to provide an appropriate amount of guidance and ask meaningful questions.

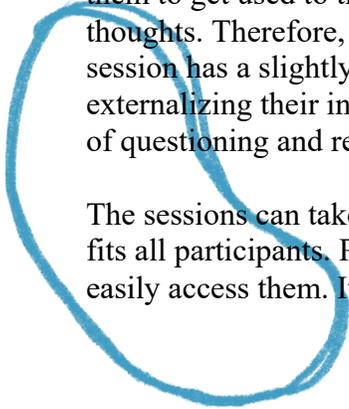
However, I am curious to see what might happen in different conditions, such as with a larger group, without parents present, or with a shorter time frame. For this reason, I have designed a new, more structured workshop that still encourages children to question, explore, and make, and suitable for a wider range of settings.

At this point, I have not yet tested this workshop. Therefore, I am using this research space to document my progress and thoughts for future reference.

This workshop is fully focused on the individual process of inner exploration, using the group setting as a support system for each child's personal activity rather than as a way to create a sense of unity. The aim of the workshop is to create a potential space by externalizing the child's inner world through painting. My role is to provide a holding space where children feel safe to experiment and engage in the process.

6.2 PAINTING WORKSHOP

ACTS OF INNER SEEING: TOUCHING WHAT MATTERS



Through my experience, I have noticed that workshops requiring intense questioning and decision-making during painting can be overwhelming for children. It can also be challenging for them to get used to the process of connecting colors, textures, and shapes to their feelings and thoughts. Therefore, in this model, I decided to divide the workshop into three sessions. Each session has a slightly different focus, but the main goal remains the same: to guide children in externalizing their inner world through painting and gradually getting accustomed to the process of questioning and responding. These sessions are conducted in a group setting.

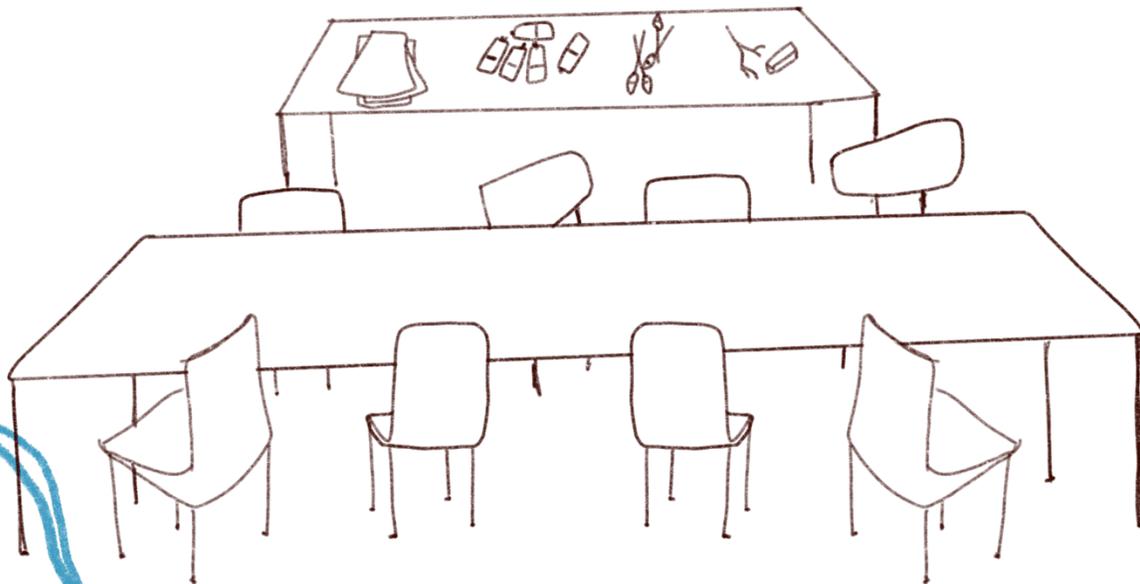
The sessions can take place in a shared space, such as a large table or a room that comfortably fits all participants. Place materials like paint, brushes, and other supplies where everyone can easily access them. It's important that everything is clearly visible, and that children are

encouraged to go to the material station themselves and choose what they need. This allows them to think more naturally about their choices, for example, why they are drawn to a particular color over others.

It is also crucial to provide a way to secure individual space within the shared environment. Ideally, the materials and setup should be flexible so that children have the option to expand, connect, or completely start over if they wish. For instance, if each participant begins with a single sheet of paper, be prepared to offer additional sheets that can be connected to create a larger surface.

Participants are allowed to take breaks whenever they need and return when they are ready. It is natural to feel overwhelmed or lost when focusing deeply on something. Taking breaks can offer space for reflection and may lead to new inspiration or insights from the surrounding environment.

If third parties, such as parents, are present during the workshop, it is important to explain that the purpose is to support children in exploring their inner space. Adults should be encouraged to use questions as a form of gentle guidance rather than directing or imposing expectations. They should also provide positive reassurance and respect each child's individual process.



Session 1: Creating Your Own Color Palette

This session is dedicated to connecting your emotions and thoughts to the material (painting) itself.

1. Begin by following your intuition. For example: *yellow feels happy, orange feels warm, blue feels like flying.*
2. Reflect on your choices. Why does a color feel a certain way to you?
3. Adjust and refine your palette to align with your reasoning. Let your emotions and thoughts guide the process.

Session 2: Applying Color Without External Reality

This session focuses on interpreting meaning through internal perception.

1. Choose a photograph of something that holds personal meaning to you.
2. Convert the photo to black and white.
3. Using your personal palette, apply color and texture based on your inner thoughts, not based on how the subject looks in reality, but on how it feels to you.

Session 3: Painting a Subject of Significance

This final session deepens the connection between yourself and the inner space

1. Choose a photograph of something that holds personal meaning to you.
2. Convert the photo to black and white.
3. Using your personal palette, apply color and texture based on your inner thoughts, not based on how the subject looks in reality, but on how it feels to you.

This workshop does not have a fixed end, as it is fully focused on each individual's progress. Some children might take 30 minutes, while others may need days. It is possible that you will never feel fully satisfied with your creation, but the main focus is the process of inquiring, answering, and making choices. Committing to the process of understanding yourself, and creating a space where your love or interests can exist in the external world through painting, is what truly matters.

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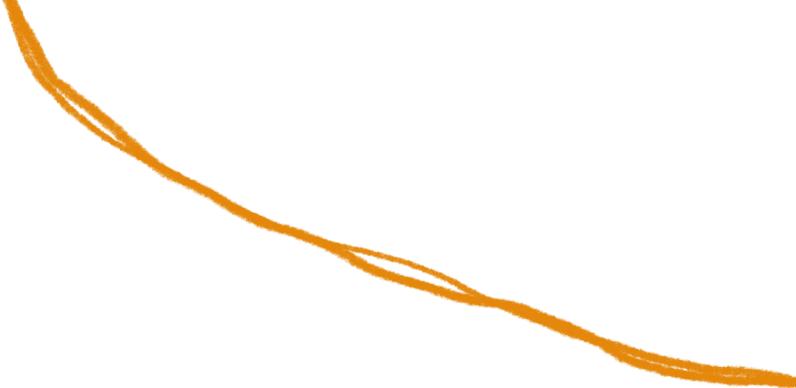
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8. Appendix

Appendix 1. Sensory-Based Workshop (45 minutes to 1 hour)^[SEP]

Format:

This workshop is conducted in a different school and class each time.

Materials:

Plastic sheet, water, watering can, straws, sponges, pipettes, six colors of diluted taste-safe paint, white cloths, and towels.

Preparation (after arriving in the classroom):

Cover a table with a plastic sheet and provide painting clothes. Keep all art materials with you and introduce them one by one.

Preferably, the workshop should be conducted on a table. This setup helps children stay focused and prevents discomfort from getting wet.

Step 1: Introduce Water (5 minutes)

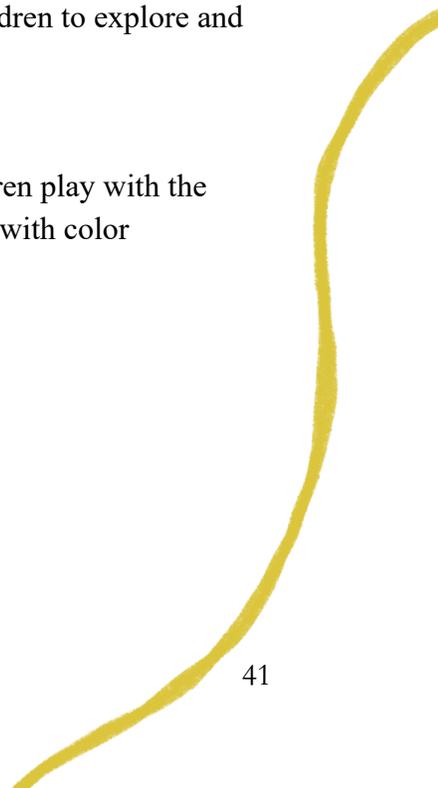
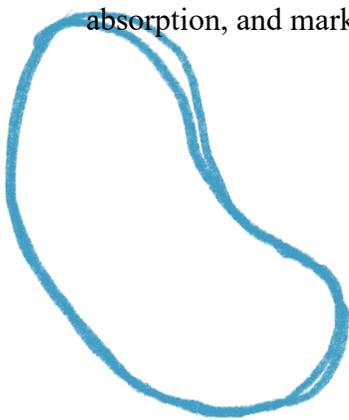
Start by introducing water using a watering can. To help children become familiar with the water, pour it on their hands if they are comfortable. Let them play by blowing or dragging the water on the surface.

Step 2: Introduce Tools (20 minutes)

Introduce the tools (straws, sponges, and pipettes) one by one. Allow the children to explore and experiment freely with each tool.

Step 3: Introduce Colors (20 to 35 minutes)

Introduce the colored water (diluted paint) one color at a time. Let the children play with the paints using the provided tools. Then, give them white cloths to experiment with color absorption, and mark-making.





Appendix 2. Painting Workshop

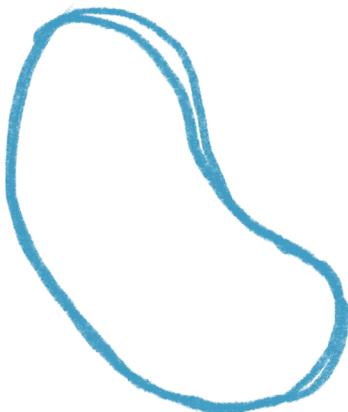
Both workshops were conducted at the same location in Amsterdam Noord; however, they involved different children and a different number of participants.

Collective painting workshop

Conducted on the 7th and 28th of April

Painting workshop: What We Carry Within

Conducted on the 5th of May



Appendix 3. 30 Questions and Prompts for the Workshop:

Look around you and get inspired.	Let your hands move freely and see what appears.	Imagine a world made of your favorite colors. What does it look like?
Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and paint what you feel.	Listen to the sounds around you and turn them into colors.	Turn a feeling into a painting without using any words.
Make a mark, then follow it with another.	Start with a color you love and see where it leads.	Can you paint a place you've never been but would love to visit?
What would happen if animals could paint? What kind of art would they make?	What does your name look like as a painting?	If you could paint a dream you once had, what would be in it?
What color is your mood right now? Can you mix new colors to match how you feel?	Can you paint the way you feel when you wake up in the morning?	Close your eyes and touch something near you. How would you paint that texture?
Make a painting that tells a secret story only you know.	Make a painting that tells a secret story only you know.	Try closing your eyes and letting your hand move freely.
If your favorite song turned into colors/ shapes, what would they be?	What makes you happy?	What do you feel like painting today?
If you close your eyes and listen, what images come to your mind? Can you paint them?	How are you feeling today? Can you use colors and shapes to express it?	What sounds do you hear right now? How could you turn those sounds into a painting?
What do you see around you? What shapes, colors, or patterns stand out to you?	If you could paint the smell of something nearby, what colors or shapes would you use?	Use your whole arm to make big sweeping strokes—what does your painting start to look like?
Dance with your paintbrush! Let it move to an imaginary rhythm.	Imagine the softest, fluffiest thing in the world. How would you paint it?	If you could create your own world, what would it look like?