

MentUwell. Preserving Youth Mental Wellbeing in Wartime Migration Crisis

Case Study

Caterina O., 17 y.o., registered as pupil since 2023, Art Highschool, Cluj-Napoca

Subject and objectives:

Testing the tool “Recipe of Me” in a mixed class of 22 pupils (8 boys, 14 girls), vocational profile, multicultural backgrounds (1 Ukrainian, 4 Hungarian, 2 Roma), Caterina was the first to offer as volunteer for completing, as a journal, the 30 themes we proposed as a creative way for self-exploration and self-reflection. She answered the questions about themes she would be interested in, she filled the questionnaire about levels of interest for each of the 30 themes in “Recipe of Me”.

Described by her teachers as compliant and conscientious, quiet and not overly enthusiastic about her creative practice, she fully agreed to test the tool and share her results.

Her Romanian language level is advanced, level B1, she was registered as an audient for the first year (April 2022- September 2023) and as a pupil since September 2023.

Objectives:

1. Completion of as many themes “Recipe of Me” proposes as possible
2. Declared level of interest
3. Increased time spent on creative activity of answering the theme

Data:

We conducted two interviews, in Romanian and English, with Caterina (April 2024 and June 2024), at the beginning and at the end of the task, on a period of 12 weeks. The interview was assisted by the school counselor and the Headteacher of her class. We asked open questions that were meant to register the way she feels, the relation with her peers, her options of vocational school, her integration; larger context questions were answered also by her mother.

The following interview was meant to register what she considered “Recipe of Me” managed to do for her, what were the aspects that challenged her and what we can improve.

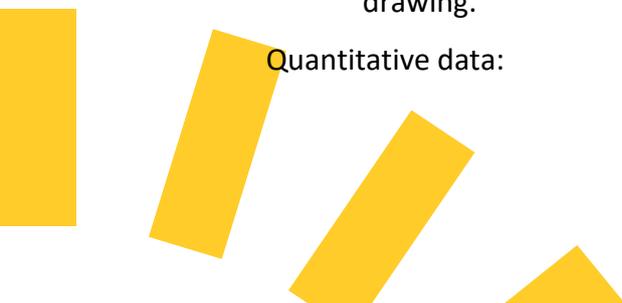
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Data before “Recipe of Me” (April 2024):

- She came to Cluj with her mother from Vylkove, a very close to the border Ukrainian city that was in a war conflict area, her parents were divorced and her father is military. They keep contact weekly. Her older sister (22 y. o) studies music in Berlin. They stayed with friends, at the beginning, her mother is from Solotvino, a city very close to the Northern Romanian border and she speaks Romanian.
- In Ukraine, Caterina was studying humanistic sciences but she was going to painting classes.
- They intended to stay a few months until the war was over and, in August 2023, Caterina’s mother decided they will stay in Romania indefinitely.
- She feels isolated and misunderstood.
- She likes the school but she misses her friends
- She made friends in Cluj only after they decided they will stay
- She makes her homework at school but she doesn’t do anything art related at home
- She doesn’t have other interests

Data after “Recipe of Me” (June 2024)

- “I felt free” was what Caterina said. Asked to elaborate, she pointed a few aspects
- She started to think about the themes
- She liked to share with her peers
- She remembered aspects of her personal history that she wanted to share and express
- She started working at home
- She declared her interest to peak in a different way, at the same subject, after a while
- “Most of us [in the class] liked the ideas and the themes, so we started to choose, joke about it, share. I’ve got better at drawing but also in my thoughts. I liked the most the preferences category and the fact I could say I hate bell peppers in a drawing.”

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Quantitative data:

- Caterina completed 20 out of the 30 themes, she repeated 4, 19 out of 22 classmates responded to the test, she shared (with us and with her peers) 23 out of the 26 completed themes.
- Caterina spent, in average, 3 more hours drawing/ painting daily.

The general opinion of her peers was that the themes were very interesting (3,8 on a 1 to 5 Likert scale).

- 17 out of 22 pupils from Caterina's class said they would complete "Recipe of Me" as a journal, every year.

Conclusions:

The teachers noticed that Caterina communicated more often with her peers, became more interested in learning painting and developing her own ideas and projects. In her case, the objectives were fulfilled, she said she feels more connected to her peers, she feels free to express ideas she cannot express in words, she spends more time with her creative activities and she has a higher interest in her thoughts, plans, ideals and beliefs. "At first, I thought is just a homework and that theme – "What colour is your favorite song?" [from "Recipe of Me"] – made me think all day. I thought it's a bit stupid. Then, in the evening, I suddenly knew – it's pink, it's a pink song. I hate pink but it seems I don't hate it all the time. I found out stuff about myself."



