

The Contribution of Socio-aesthetics to the Inclusion of Young People with Disabilities.

An applied research project with young people experiencing behavioral and developmental problems and specific language and learning challenges.

SYNTHESIS



“Young people have access to new discoveries of lots of images about beauty and well-being...They are exposed to lots of images that they do not have access to or feel free to use. For me, above all, they discover that they are able to say, ‘me too, I have the right to do that, me too, I have access to it.’ In addition, what this does for them and what I always see, is provide a sense of relief and well-being.”

Sandrine, socio-esthéticienne.

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DySoLab

Laboratoire des dynamiques sociales



1. Forward

This synthesis describes a participative applied research project and presents key findings. The study was conducted at the *Institut Départemental de l'Enfance, de la Famille et du Handicap pour l'Insertion* (IDEFHI) [Departmental Institute for Childhood, the Family, and Disabilities for Insertion], under an agreement (April 2020-April 2022) between FIRA and the L'Oréal Foundation. The project centered on the experience of cohort of young people enrolled in several medico-social facilities in the IDEFHI during a series of socio-esthetic workshops. The study also assessed outcomes of participation on their sense of self-esteem, well-being, and more broadly, on social and educational inclusion.

A participative project. The programs used during the project were developed and implemented collaboratively by a team of medico-social researchers and professionals, beauticians, and videographers. Special educators, teachers, and psychologists also worked assisted the principal investigator and a public health official in selecting participants and conducting the study.

The cohort of young participants was the key component of this project. They were warmly encouraged to help choose the topics covered by the esthetic workshops and, to some extent, the collective interviews. The decision to use video to extend the project similarly reflects our desire to include their points of view and contributions in the research process. We also decided to include some participants' parents, two of whom joined the project's oversight committee.

The project allowed many participants to discover both socio-esthetics and the research process, including every aspect of producing and performing in the eight video tutorials.

Applied research. Professionals from several disciplines, including socio-estheticians, special educators, teachers, psychologists, videographers, the principal investigator, and a public health official, supported the project's design and methodology. They concurred that the project introduced the team and our participants to educational issues related to self-care and well-being. Many colleagues also noted participants' enthusiasm for the socio-esthetic workshops and the focus on well-being and the body.

Several special educators and teachers also reported using project findings and video materials in their own teaching. A number also voiced their appreciation of the relevance and accessibility of the project's principles and methods for professionals, participants and families, and other audiences.

The socio-estheticians also responded positively to the reflexive nature of the study results and their impact on their own practices. They also praised the group dynamics during project workshops and indicated that the findings will be of great interest to fellow estheticians.

Camille Couvry, Nathalie Boulet, and Ludovic Jamet wish to warmly thank participating professionals from the various services – the Centre François Truffaut, the ITEP Vallée de Seine, and the IME Chant du Loup – and from National Education as well as the project partners – the socio-estheticians, the videographers, Normandie Images and the RSVA Normandie (Services Network for Independent Living in Normandy) – who collaborated on the project, for their availability and their involvement.

The project leaders are also very grateful to Yannick Le Hénaff (MCF, University of Rouen, Dysolab Laboratory) for participating in supporting this project and to all the members of the steering committee for their enlightening insights.

We also offer our profound gratitude to our young project participants and their families for their enthusiasm, dynamism, and openness. This project would be impossible without them.

2. Project summary

The institutional setting of this applied, participative sociology study was the IDEFHI (*l'Institut Départemental de l'Enfance, de la Famille et du Handicap*) [Departmental Institute of Childhood, the Family, and Disabilities], which encompasses several medico-social facilities.

Our goal was to document the contributions of socio-esthetic practices to the growth and reinforcement of a sense of well-being and self-esteem among individuals with disabilities who were engaged in mainstreaming and insertion processes. The study included participants exhibiting three categories of disability: patients at the Chant du Loup IME [Medico-educational Institute] exhibiting developmental disabilities, young people at the Vallée de Seine ITEP [Educational and Pedagogical Therapy Institute] presenting behavioral disabilities, and patients at the Centre François Truffaut IDEFHI with specific language and learning disabilities.

A series of 8 socio-esthetic workshops was created to accompany 5 participant groups, which consisted of 59 young people between 8 and 19 years of age, including 23 females and 36 males. The majority of the participants were enrolled in academic or preprofessional mainstreaming programs.

The study approach was three-fold:

- ✓ Participative, because it involves the active participation of young people and professionals in a range of decisions
- ✓ Research-oriented, in seeking to contribute to the scholarly knowledge-base
- ✓ Applied, by producing supporting materials and videos in partnership with the participants for future use with similar groups

The project employed qualitative research techniques that included two data collection methods:

- ✓ Observations of socio-esthetic workshops by the principal investigator
- ✓ Focus groups (which were labeled “collective discussions” for the purposes of the project) conducted by the principal investigator with small groups.

The study included a total of 55 socio-esthetic workshops, 41 focus groups, and 27 video sessions.

Results indicated that the socio-esthetic workshops represented a positive experience for these groups of young people because they offered:

- Sensitization to gestures, techniques, and knowledge about bodily norms and hygiene
- Enjoyment of a subjective, sensorial sense of well-being by often creating periods of sociability between peers and between young people and professionals
- Active commitment to a socializing, collective activity
- Improved self-knowledge, particularly with respect to the body and the sensorial aspects of the workshops, as well as affirmation of individuality and being recognized by others

The workshops were also beneficial for relationships between the participants and professionals because they experienced new relationships, shared sensory experiences, and occasionally played different roles. Limitations of these positive outcomes include the fact that, although nearly every participant reported satisfaction, few spontaneously suggested possible medium- or long-term benefits of the workshops. We also found that the positive effects varied according to types and degrees of disabilities, as well as individual dispositions towards schooling or educational institutions, and hence towards different levels of exposure to mainstream populations. As a function of these variables, each study group and individual participant internalized bodily norms in different ways.

The study culminated in the collaborative production of supporting materials and media, including:

- 8 videos, created by and for the young study participants, each with a specific theme.
- A manual to help professionals use the videos.
- A report entitled “*La socio-esthétique en pratique. Regards croisés sur un projet de recherche*” [Socio-aesthetics in practice: Perspectives on a research project].

These tools were co-produced by the project’s team members, participants, and videographers. These materials are open-source and situated at the crossroads between applied research, health education, and techniques for nurturing a positive self-image. They are available to all interested families and professionals.

3. Research objectives

The broad objective of the project was to assess the effects of learning socio-aesthetic practices on young individuals experiencing disabilities, nearly all of whom were enrolled in academic or preprofessional mainstreaming programs. The study documented the contribution of these practices to the development and/or reinforcement of a sense of well-being and self-esteem among young people experiencing disabilities ranging from intellectual and behavioral disabilities to specific language and learning issues who were enrolled in different types of mainstream education.

The core question underlying the study was: Can socio-aesthetics offer young people experiencing mental, psychological, or cognitive disabilities a means of developing self-esteem and a sense of well-being and social belonging and, more broadly, of constructing a positive sense of self through meaningful social relationships?

Working hypotheses, co-developed by the project team to guide the research process, were grounded in relevant scholarship concerning populations experiencing disabilities, particularly in school settings, as well as the literature surrounding socio-aesthetics. These hypotheses in turn guided the following insights:

- ✚ Examining the process of participants’ identity formation and how their relations with others are influenced by their experience of living with disabilities.
- ✚ Participants, who live with and attempt to manage mental, psychological, or cognitive disabilities, are vulnerable¹ and are therefore in danger of exhibiting low levels of self-esteem compared to similar aged, non-disabled young people, which can potentially limit their sense of well-being.
- ✚ The everyday experience of living with a disability (e.g., complicated academic careers, daily social interactions potentially marked by stigmatization, or avoidance of a sense of liminality, limitations tied to inaccessibility, etc.) can be experienced negatively by young individuals experiencing disabilities, influencing feelings of self-satisfaction and inclusion and hindering the identity construction process,² and more broadly “becoming adults.”³

¹ Ébersold S., Cordazzo P. (2015), Passage à l’âge adulte, handicap et configurations inclusives, *Agora débats/jeunesses* 71/3: 55-67.

² Ébersold S., Cordazzo P. (2015), Passage to adulthood, disability and inclusive configurations, *Agora débats/jeunesses* 71/3: 5567; Chevallier-Rodrigues E., Courtinat-Camps A., & de Léonardis M. (2020), Relation entre parcours scolaire et représentations de soi chez des élèves en situation de handicap: rôle modérateur du sens de l’expérience scolaire sur cette relation, *Psychologie Française*, 65, n°2: 15772; Chevallier-Rodrigues E., Rodriguez N., & Courtinat-Camps A. (2019), School experience and self-representations in students with disabilities. *Revue francophone de la déficience intellectuelle* 29: 88-108.

³ Van de Velde C. (2008), *Becoming an adult. Comparative sociology of youth in Europe*. Paris Presses Universitaires de France, “Le Lien social.”

- ✚ The prospect of (re-)entering a mainstream setting, i.e., “inclusive” schools, that accommodate “unique educational needs”⁴ have the potential to (re)activate certain kinds of discomfort or other concerns⁵ that can potentially hinder an individual’s ability to positively project themselves into these environments or to deploy the necessary resources to interact constructively with others, including emotional resources (e.g. emotional management), bodily resources (e.g. comfort level, self-presentation), cultural resources (e.g. social codes, knowledge and awareness), or social resources (e.g., with peers, professionals, or friends and family).
- ✚ Socio-esthetics, in which the body is at the core of the process, helps address certain facets of young people’s self-esteem and sense of well-being.
- ✚ Socio-esthetic care helps young people respond to mainstream social expectations by reinforcing their emotional, bodily, cultural, and social awareness and skills.
- ✚ The effects of socio-esthetic workshops as a mechanism for inclusion and insertion vary according to specific backgrounds, disabilities, and/or academic experience.

The project was an extension of a broader IDEFHI program focused on the health of populations with disabilities as it relates to their independence and inclusion. This applied research project is based on socio-esthetic workshops for children and adolescents. On completing the workshops, additional age-appropriate tools were developed by participants and team members (children, young people, families, as well as educational staff) for the purpose of extending the benefits of the program to wider audiences.

4. Methodology

4.1. Presentation

As previously noted, study centered on a **series of 8 socio-esthetic workshops** with groups of young participants from three institutions: the Le Chant du Loup IME, the IDEFHI Centre François Truffaut, and the Vallée de Seine ITEP. The sample consisted of 59 individuals between 8 and 19 years of age (23 females and 36 males), most of whom were enrolled in academic or preprofessional insertion programs.

A total of **four classes** (external teaching units)⁶ participated in the project (one from the CFT and three from the IME), as well as a **more heterogeneous group** of participants enrolled in individualized academic or preprofessional insertion programs at the ITEP. When possible and appropriate, a subsample of each group participated in in-depth analysis of the workshops’ effects in order to facilitate inter-group comparison. Each class or group was assigned to a weekly one to one-and-one-half hour workshop. Data from **observations of socio-esthetic workshops and from collective group interviews** were collected and analyzed using qualitative techniques.⁷

4.1.1. Observations of socio-esthetic workshops

Workshops were observed using participant observations to varying degrees. The researcher participated in an entire workshop alongside the young participants and other professionals or observed without

⁴ Ébersold S., Armagnague M. (2021), “Introduction” of “La fabrique du besoin éducatif particulier,” *Agora débats/jeunesses*, 87/1: 39-49.

⁵ See for example the work of Hugo Dupont on the subject of young people educated in ITEP: Dupont H. (2016), “Ni fou, ni gogol!”, Fontaine, Presses universitaires de Grenoble.

⁶ External teaching units allow children enrolled in medico-social institutions to pursue schoolwork (partially or completely) via adaptive teaching in mainstream school settings.

⁷ Self-esteem was assessed using the Toulouse Self-esteem Scale (E.T.E.S questionnaire) and the multidimensional self-esteem scale (EMES questionnaire). Due to problems interpreting the results and data collection and tool-use biases, these data were not included in the final study report. We nevertheless wish to thank our psychologist colleagues who conducted these valuations and participated in our study, including Amélie Belguise and Lucie Colzy at the IME, Mathilde Rouge and Lucile Grémont at the CFT, and Céline Nossin at the ITEP.

participating in workshop activities, although we did accompany the participants in performing certain acts of following directions.

The principal investigator's role often varied, including at times that of researcher, by explaining academic research and the profession of sociologists to the participants, for example. At other times, the researcher played a more professional role with the study participants in activities, while also coordinating the project with the professional colleagues involved in the project, both as a researcher and member of the institution (for example by collectively planning the project calendar or the educational value of the workshop contents or by participating in the recruitment of socio-estheticians). The principal investigator and also regularly attended the workshops and participated in setting up sessions and accompanying participants during activities.

4.1.2. Group interviews with participants

A collective interview format ("collective discussions") was used to follow up the workshops. After extensive consultation, the team chose this format as the safest, most positive environment for our participants. This is consistent with methodologies used in other studies with young people experiencing disabilities.⁸ The purpose of the discussions was to prompt participants to talk about their social and physical experience and sense of well-being in different aspects of their daily lives. The research objective was to improve our understanding of how socio-esthetics contributed to their perspectives as well as any difficulties that they experienced. Four themes were explored in the discussions:

- ✚ The relationship with one's body and appearance
- ✚ School
- ✚ Relations with others
- ✚ Projecting oneself into mainstream spaces

How participants experienced the workshops—what they said about them, how they assimilated their content, and how they influenced their relationships to their bodies, their sense of well-being, and their mental health was also regularly noted during informal exchanges during the workshops as well as collective discussions.

4.2. Analysis

Data from observations and collective discussions were primarily analyzed using ethnographic methods through an **inductive process**. This approach differs from deductive analysis in seeking to generalize observations and using real-time, situational understanding based on working hypotheses to generate contextualized understandings that can subsequently be translated into findings and theories. As a consequence, our research process was iterative, meaning that the researcher "constantly interprets, throughout interactions, observations, and interviews, although in a more latent than explicit manner that is also more discontinuous than continuous, with more routine phases alternating with more intensive, conscious phases as well as others that are more informal."⁹

Data collection was aided by analytical rubrics for collective discussions and workshop observations. Data from these two settings were then entered into spreadsheets and thematically studied. To support writing observation reports, collective discussions were also audio-recorded and transcribed. Based on our working hypotheses and prior research, we identified themes and other items for further analysis. The

⁸ For example, Claire de Saint Martin (2016) pay close attention to the way in which CLIS 1 students related their experience and role in the school during collective discussions. De Saint Martin C. (2016), L'empan liminal, un outil conceptuel pour penser la scolarisation des élèves de Clis 1, *La nouvelle revue de l'adaptation et de la scolarisation*, 73/1: 239-51.

⁹ Olivier de Sardan, J.-P. (2008). *La rigueur du qualitatif. Les contraintes empiriques de l'interprétation socio-anthropologiques*. Paris: L'Harmattan, p. 83.

principal investigator used an iterative process to examine the many intersections between the data and relevant prior studies, which allowed the analysis to evolve and hypotheses and inferences to be refined.

5. Results

The sample populations of children and adolescents presented medico-social problems categorized as developmental (IME), behavioral (ITEP), and related to language and learning (CFT). Participants were also enrolled in distinct educational environments that ranged from a specialized internal class to external educational units.

The study explored the effects of socio-esthetic workshops on these three populations. Observed effects were related to the body and emotions, to attitudes towards the self, and group dynamics. Preparation for the project involved examining the specific characteristic of each participant population, with particular attention to schooling (i.e., the ways in which they experienced their physical presence in their respective specialized institutions, in external academic institutions for some participants, their relationships with the organization of academic schedules, and to the pedagogical values and the importance of the subject matters to which they were exposed, etc.). Our primary findings regarding these dimensions are presented below.

5.1. Specialized institution *versus* ordinary school and external learning *versus* individual inclusion: contrasting academic experiences and settings

The education of young people experiencing mental, cognitive, or psychological disabilities in specialized facilities and mainstream academic settings (or who have previously attended them) is two-fold. In other words, the experience in a specialized facility cannot be understood without consideration of that of mainstream institutions, and vice versa.¹⁰ This study considered a variety of aspects of the school experience, including the class atmosphere, academic knowledge and learning contexts, peer relations, relationships with time and space (spatio-temporal markers), extra-curricular experiences, and implicit rules governing adult supervision. We emphasized similarities, but also variations, in how the specific disabilities represented in the study, various school mainstreaming approaches, and when possible and appropriate, age and gender influenced the experience of the participants.

The experience of adapted settings:

- ✚ Participants experience specialized settings as protective environments.
- ✚ Participants perceive supervision by professionals as contributing to their understanding of their disabilities and uniqueness with respect to the mainstream environment, with the exception of elementary students in the IME, who view the mainstream school environment as being as protective as specialized settings.

Experiences in mainstream settings are notable for:

- ✚ A greater sense of freedom and independence, particularly among young people experiencing DYS disabilities.

¹⁰ De Saint Martin C. (2019), *La parole des élèves en situation de handicap: "on sait marcher droit mais de travers!"* Fontaine: Presses universitaires de Grenoble; De Saint Martin C. (2016), *L'empan liminal, un outil conceptuel pour penser la scolarisation des élèves de Clis 1, La nouvelle revue de l'adaptation et de la scolarisation*, 73/1: 239-51.

- ✚ Occasional difficulties in building new reference points (humans, spatio-temporal) and managing their autonomy, particularly among some middle- and high-school students exhibiting developmental disabilities.
- ✚ Past experiences experienced as highly negative by participants exhibiting behavioral disabilities.

Several findings were revealed by participant self-reports during mainstream class time and instructional settings:

- ✚ High value was attributed to instruction and learning in mainstream environments by DYS and DI participants, in stark contrast to ITEP participants' marked disillusionment with their experiences and with the adult staff in mainstream schools.
- ✚ Mainstream instructional experiences also presented occasional challenges for DYS and DI participants in terms of interactions with other students during classes. These challenges also presented some difficulties in managing relational and emotions for DI participants.
- ✚ Instructional and pedagogical environments appeared better adapted to the needs of participants, particularly DYS, in specialized settings as opposed to mainstream academic environments.

Peer relationships in mainstream school setting present the following characteristics:

- ✚ Expanding potential peer relationships through access to same-aged young people who are diverse in terms of gender and across specialized facilities such as IME, the CFT, and the ITEP.
- ✚ The quality of relationships developed with young people beyond external education units, which remain difficult to evaluate due to the prevalence of quantitative over qualitative observations in participant discourses.
- ✚ Inclusion of peers in groups who seem more at ease with DYS than with individuals with developmental disabilities, who generally exhibit greater anxiety and distance than in relationships with other students.
- ✚ The mainstream experience of participants in specialized facilities may have been easier for those with prior contact with acquaintances (family members or friends) with prior mainstream experience or who played an intermediary role.
- ✚ Relationships with young people in External Educational Units influenced by shared/non-shared class time, in individual or group mainstreaming with other students, in other classes, and by social and individual factors (good relationship skills, social capital, popularity).
- ✚ Relations marked by being mocked for young participants from the IME and by forms of ordinary mockery with no apparent connection to disabilities for CFT participants, and occasionally related to the level of visibility of the disability (leading to stigmatization or exclusion) among CFT students and particularly those from IME.
- ✚ Complicated relationships compensated for by group solidarity among IME students and collective emotional work (Hochschild, 2017).¹¹
- ✚ A sense of peer belonging and identification in ordinary school expressed by some participants who exhibited awareness of their recognized disability that was nevertheless infrequently referred to in their discourses.

¹¹ Hochschild A. Russell (2017). *Le prix des sentiments: au cœur du travail émotionnel*. [Translated by Salomé Fournet-Fayas and Cécile Thomé]. Paris: La Découverte. According to A. Hochschild (2017), emotional work refers to the way in which an individual manages his or her emotions and/or those of the other to procure a positive feeling.

5.2. Experiencing socio-esthetic workshops

Socio-esthetic workshops provided spaces that fostered socialization¹² to bodily norms that are necessary for integration into the general population. Several aspects of these norms were included, depending on varied objectives and methods:

- ✚ Learning to care for the body and understand health and social implications of these gestures and practices.
- ✚ Sensitization to physical hygiene.
- ✚ Socialization to working on one's appearance¹³ and esthetic care in order to encourage the development of higher self-esteem.
- ✚ "Learning by body,"¹⁴ [as opposed to "by heart"] which also suggests learning through repetition.

Socio-esthetics encourages self-awareness and the expression of individuality, in particular:

- ✚ Awareness and representation of the body and physical habits; sensitization to the boundaries of private space related to health education and emotional and sexual life; listening to the body and emotions.
- ✚ A reflexive approach grounded in the body and physical feelings that takes a holistic approach to the body and health, which in turn encourages expressions of dissatisfaction about the body that could be taken into account throughout the process by professionals.
- ✚ Participants learn to better understanding their personal sensitivities and sensorial preferences by exploring the senses.

Socio-esthetic activities are a source of subjective¹⁵, multidimensional well-being – physical, sensorial, interactional, and emotional – dimensions respectively associated with:

- ✚ Relaxation and relaxed muscles.
- ✚ Calling on the five senses and the experience of pleasant sensations. Beyond smell and touch, it also means learning to appreciate one's image in the mirror, for example.
- ✚ Socialization to well-being whose definition and attainment, as an objective, include a relational and collective dimension.
- ✚ An experience of emotional calm during workshops and socialization into emotional management that is transferrable to other times and places in daily life.

Observations of group dynamics during socio-esthetic workshops are a potential mechanism for improving the relationships between young people and professions. The workshops:

- ✚ Provided convivial periods that potentially encourage group cohesiveness.
- ✚ Allowed different relationships to develop between young people and professionals, who reported that the workshops helped them deepen their knowledge and understanding of the participants.

¹² Darmon M. (2007), *La socialisation*, Paris: Armand Colin (coll. 128).

¹³ Court M. (2007), La construction du rapport à la beauté chez les filles pendant l'enfance: quand les pratiques entrent en contradiction avec les représentations du travail d'embellissement du corps, *Sociétés & Représentations*, 24/2: 97-110.

¹⁴ Faure, S. (2000). *Apprendre par corps: socio-anthropologie des techniques de danse*. Paris: La Dispute. "Learning by body" corresponds to the fact that during the workshops, young people repeated gestures, accompanied by socio-estheticians who performed the same gestures themselves, verbalizing and describing them and explaining and contextualizing their utility. This process fosters internalization of gestures and corporal techniques.

¹⁵ Pawin R. (2014), "Le bien-être dans les sciences sociales: naissance et développement d'un champ de recherches," *L'Année sociologique*, 64 (2) [Michel Forcé and Simon Langlois (Eds.), *Sociologie du bien-être*]: 273-294.

- ✚ Represented a refreshing professional experience for socio-estheticians and other team members, and consequently a potential tool for enhancing their own sense of well-being at work.

Finally, the socio-esthetic practices offered through this study were appropriated by the participants in the following ways:

- ✚ Shared pleasure and satisfaction concerning the project, although at times expressed in somewhat rudimentary language.
- ✚ Observed appropriations of socio-esthetic practices, although these were difficult to evaluate with any accuracy.
- ✚ The concrete, practical nature of the activities, as well as the cosmetics fabricated by participants during workshops.
- ✚ Participants, professionals, and families' discourses suggest some degree of short- and medium-term transfer of the use of techniques, tools, or products to other contexts of daily life.

6. Supporting materials and media

The study produced three types of materials:

- ✚ A report
- ✚ Videos
- ✚ A video user manual

These open-source materials are available on the project page on the FIRAH site (<https://www.firah.org/>) and will also be posted on IDEFHI's LinkedIn site.

6.1. The Report

The 20-minute report "*La socio-esthétique en pratique – Regards croisés sur un projet de recherche*" describes the project from beginning to end, including objectives, methodology, and the overall process. The report is addressed to all audiences and provides a clear, illustrated overview of the study that is consistent with our core goal of broadly distributed, highly accessible research findings.

6.2. Videos

Participants, videographers, and the research team produced a total of eight 2- to 4-minute videos and complementary material. The videos are tutorials on topics covered in the socio-esthetic workshops such as daily hygiene, self-care, fabricating cosmetics, and managing emotions.



6.3. Manual for professional use of the videos

We developed a booklet to accompany the videos to encourage further professional use of the 8 videos. It summarizes the production of the videos, describes the project, and presents the goals of each workshop.