

Connecting for Empowerment

Group-based support empowering marginalized adults

AIEJI 2025, Copenhagen

Workshop programme

- Introduction
- Who are you?
- Our work and process
- Shared dialogue and reflection on practice
- Q&A

Who are **we**?

Michael

- Social educator
- Degree in public sector management
- 20+ years working with socially disadvantaged adults
- Manager

Steffen

- Social educator
- Master of Arts in Education
- 10+ years working with socially disadvantaged adults
- Consultant

Who are **you**?

- Our hope is that this workshop can centre on dialogue between professionals from different countries and cultures.
- So, we would like to ask that some of you* present yourself, where you're from and why you chose this workshop.
- (*Depending on how many we are gathered)

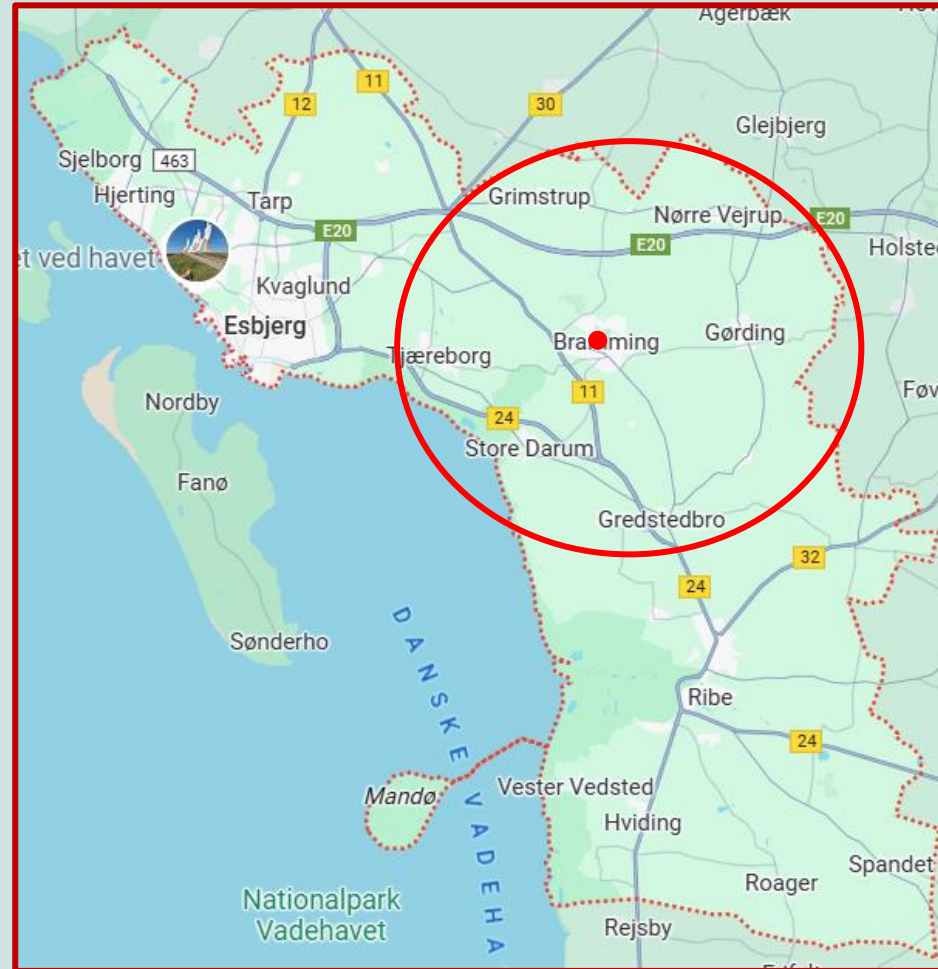
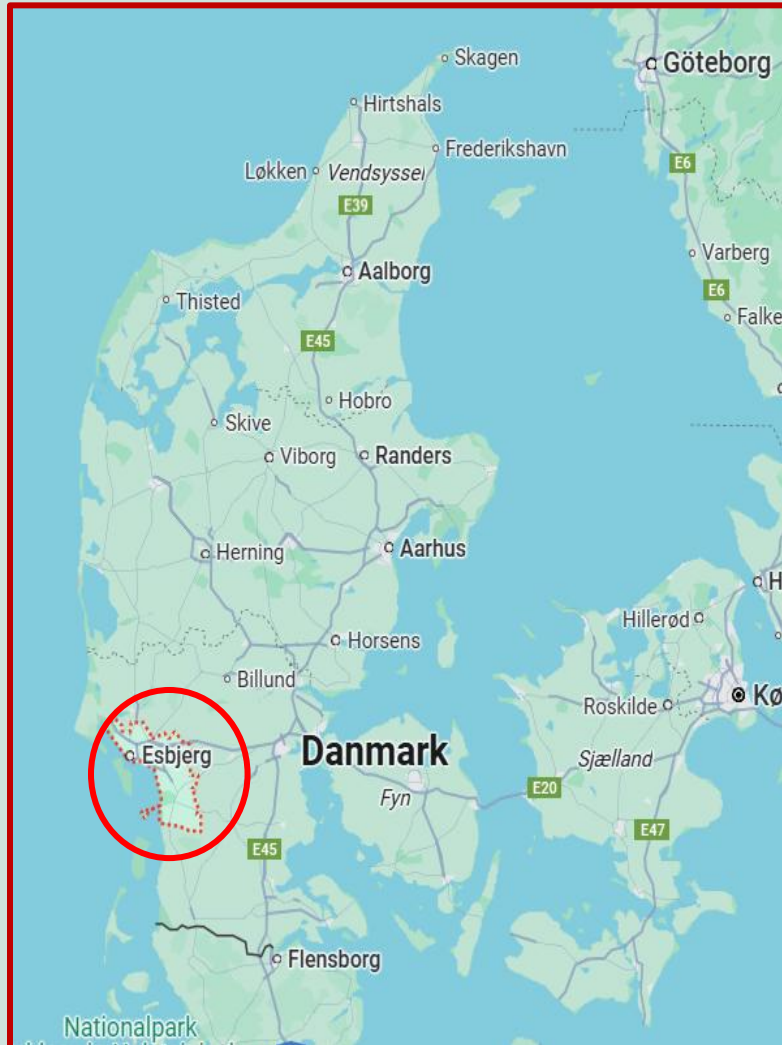
The people in our care

When we describe our target group as marginalized adults, it covers a broad group. The group consists of adults aged 18+ and includes people living in their own homes and people living in supported housing.

They have different reasons for needing support, for example

- Substance abuse
- Homelessness
- Psychiatric challenges (anxiety, depression, schizophrenia etc)
- Personality disorders
- Brain injury (caused by accidents, blood clots etc)
- Age-related and neurological diseases (dementia, Parkinson's etc)
- Social challenges (caused by tough upbringing, criminal behaviour etc)

Geographical context



Facts:

Size: 170 km²
Citizens: 15.000

People in our care:
110-120

"Social educators":
55

Context of process

- Michael assumed leadership of multiple teams supporting marginalized adults at various levels (2021-2023).
- Nearly all individuals in their care reported feelings of loneliness and a desire for connection.
- Our entire sector in the municipality faced budget cuts while being expected to improve outcomes, reflecting a classic "NPM" logic.
- Through network groups with other municipalities, it became clear that many claimed to prioritize empowerment but few actually did.
- We decided to adopt a different, more genuine approach to empowerment.

Our vision: Joint co-creation & Empowerment

Our goal was to integrate a conventional Empowerment approach with a collaborative co-creation model – why?

Co-creation empowers:

- Gives marginalized adults a direct role in decision-making.
- Validates their expertise, fostering agency.

Empowerment supports co-creation:

- Equips individuals with skills and confidence for meaningful participation.
- Ensures their contributions are impactful.

Feedback loop:

- Co-creation builds solutions tailored to real needs.
- Empowerment enables individuals to sustain and expand these solutions.

Impact:

- Synergy dismantles systemic barriers by centering marginalized voices.
- Equips individuals to drive change, leading to equitable, sustainable social impact.

Managing social educators towards an Empowerment and Co-creation mindset

Alignment



Guiding star:
Emp./Co-creation

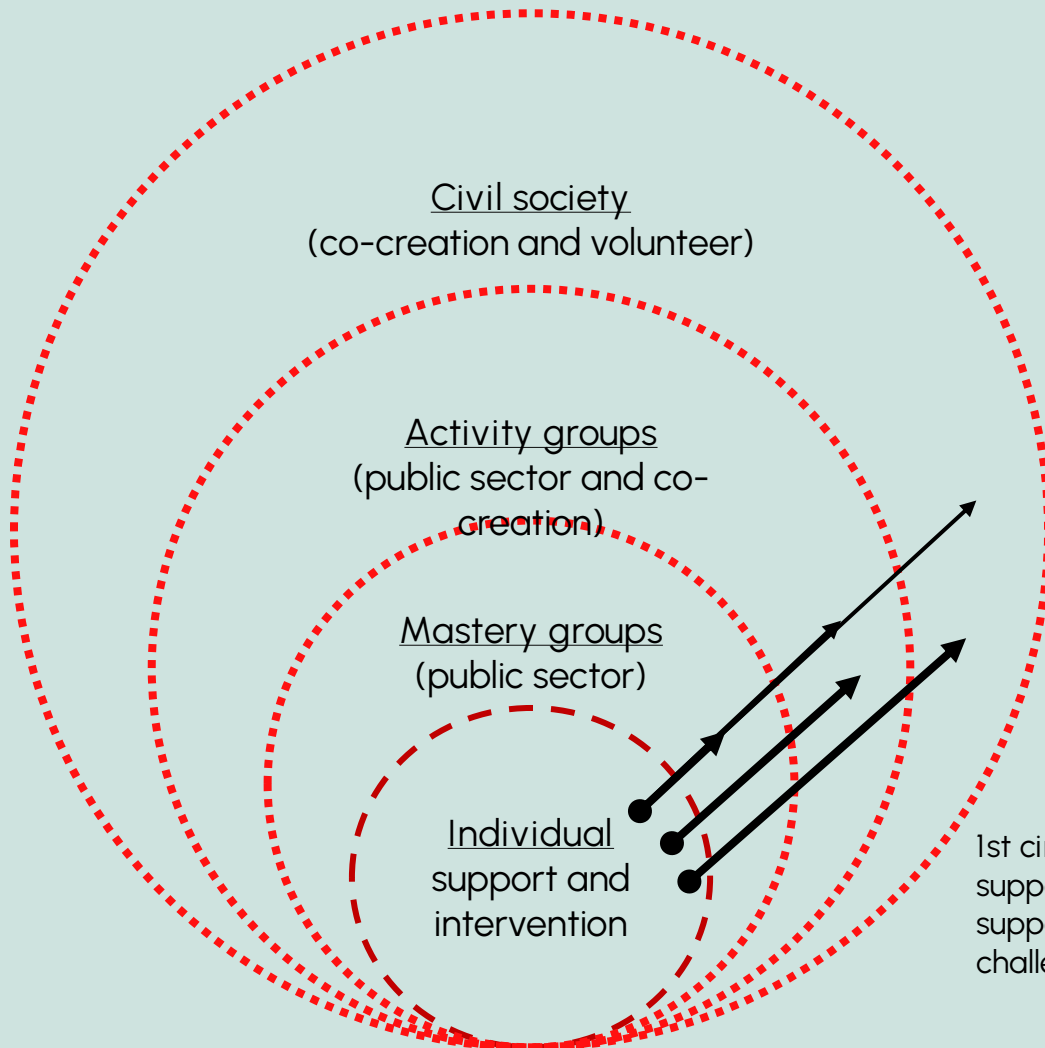
Autonomy

Bungay: The Art of Action

Practice what you preach – as a manager and social educator.

- Alignment in this context
- Autonomy in this context
- The desired outcome
- "Good enough understanding"

Visualization of "mobility"



4th circle: represents communities in civil society where the facilitation and operation is handled by voluntary organizations. We are available for consultation if they need it, in relation to welcoming the specific group of people in their communities and activities.

3rd circle: represent activity groups that we were partly responsible for - but also that were created in co-creation between civil society actors, the people in our care and professionals. The groups we were responsible for were also created with a focus that allowed for a smooth transition to civil society communities and activities.

2nd circle: represents mastery groups that we were responsible for starting, quality assuring and facilitating. All groups we started were in demand among the people in our care and the form, time perspective and number of participants had been decided jointly.

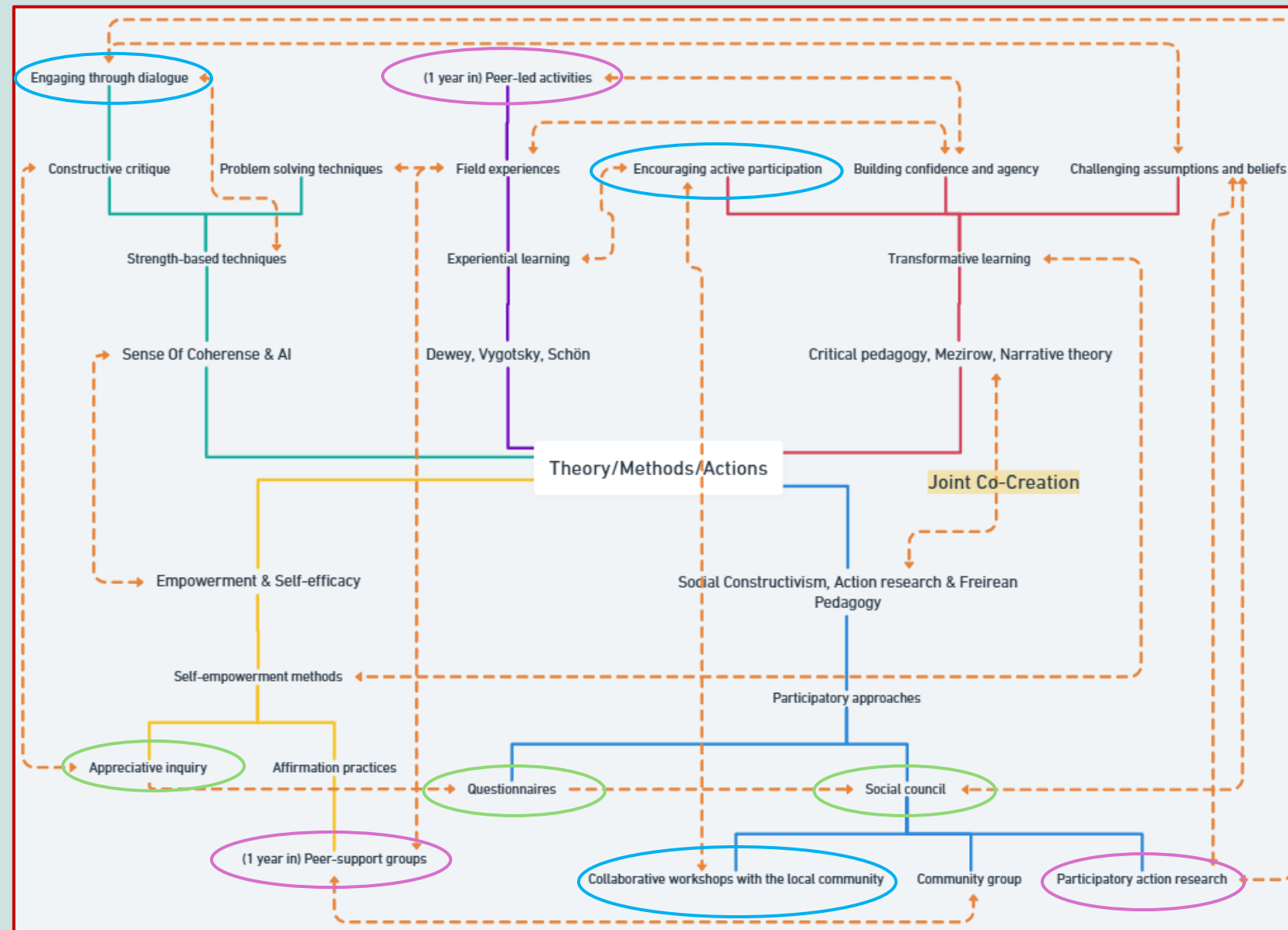
1st circle: representing where we started, but also the individual support that people in our care still receive. Some individual support and intervention is still the best option for certain challenges.

Our choices

What we want to demonstrate here, is how established theories and approaches, drawn from different fields of study, helped guide our decisions.

It outlines most of our process, but not all initiatives/interventions.

We want to highlight a few areas where Joint co-creation and Empowerment are "stand out" to us



When $2 + 2 = 5$

We wish to highlight two, out of many, experiences, where something "more" happened - outside our influence.

From Loneliness to Companionship: *A Christmas Connection*

Two individuals, long supported by our care, expressed loneliness but needed encouragement to join group activities.

Meeting for the first time at an event, they connected and planned to meet outside the group.

This blossomed into more plans, including spending Christmas Eve together instead of alone.

Empowering Voices:

How a 20-Minute Break Sparked a Community-Led Peer Group

During a workshop with local community organizations, a volunteer center's representatives explored the social needs of marginalized adults.

Over a 20-minute break, the dialogue continued, they agreed to start a biweekly peer group at the center, which the people would host and facilitate independently.

Shared dialogue and reflection

on Co-creation and Empowerment

How do you balance your role as a professional with the need to co-create solutions with the people you support? Can you share an example of a method that worked well or didn't, and why you think that was?

How do you involve the people you work with in shaping the goals and processes of your projects? Can you share an example where co-creation led to unexpected outcomes, positive or negative?

In your experience, what is one method or practice in social pedagogy that fosters empowerment across different cultural or social groups? How do you adapt it to fit the unique needs of those you work with?

How do your local or national policies shape the way you approach empowerment and co-creation in social pedagogy? Are there ways you've worked around limitations to stay true to your values?

Q & A

What does the future hold?

If we by some miracle have time left – we will share some of our thoughts on where we go from here

Additional questions to ask oneself *on Co-creation and Empowerment*

What is a specific moment in your work where you saw a person or group truly feel empowered? What actions or methods made that possible, and how did your cultural or national context shape your approach?

What does 'empowerment' mean to you in your daily practice, and how does it look different when working with people from backgrounds unlike your own?

What challenges have you faced when trying to empower individuals or groups in your community? How did your national or cultural background influence the way you addressed those challenges?