



“I understand more what works”: Evaluating an intervention developed to support dramatherapists in writing their first clinical case study[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Despite increasing implementation, the field of dramatherapy continues to have a limited evidence-base. Although publications have steadily grown, contributions remain concentrated among a small group of researchers, while structural barriers alongside confidence- and skills-based barriers restrict practitioner engagement. Consequently, programs that aim to develop research capacity have emerged, including the EFD Case Study Project, from the European Federation of Dramatherapy (EFD), the *Dramatherapy Journal*, and the British Association of Dramatherapists' research committee. The objectives of this project were to support practicing dramatherapists ($N = 10$) in sharing their experience, to diversify the voices active within dramatherapy research, and to advance the development of the field. This convergent mixed-methods study evaluated the initial iteration of the project in regard to its impact and perception by participating dramatherapists. To assess changes in research skills and perceptions of the intervention, the study employed adapted versions of the Perceived Research Competencies Scale and the Perceived Characteristics of Intervention Scale. Session satisfaction was measured using a self-developed questionnaire and post-intervention interviews were analysed qualitatively. Participant satisfaction was high ($>71\%$ workshops; $>83\%$ mentoring) and improvements in perceived research competencies were observed post-intervention ($\beta = .70$, $SE = 0.20$, $p = .002$) and maintained at four-month follow-up ($\beta = .64$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = .004$). Qualitative findings indicated a greater integration (“bridging”) of research and practice, enhanced research confidence and a strengthened professional role. Notwithstanding, fewer case studies were submitted for peer-review than originally intended. Continued efforts to support sustained practitioner engagement in research are recommended.

The creative arts therapies are uniquely situated within the intersection of arts and health (Jones, 2021; Willemsen et al., 2024), a field that, in recent years, has received increasing attention in communal, education, and clinical settings as well as policy agendas (Sajani & Fietje, 2023). Dramatherapy, for instance, is a creative arts therapy that “intentionally utilises the transformative qualities of drama and theatre, integrating insights from psychotherapy as well as other related human sciences [...] to enhance health and wellbeing” (Willemsen &

Pitruzella, 2025, p.174). Despite its successful implementation in a number of sectors (Mayor & Frydman, 2021; Oster & Melches, 2018), and with growing evidence towards its effectiveness (Orkibi et al., 2025) and positive perception (Constien et al., 2025), a limited evidence base still prevails which limits the further advancement of the field at a policy and implementation level (Armstrong et al., 2019; Frydman et al., 2018). Congruently, there have been repeated calls for increased research into dramatherapy in order to promote the visibility, advocacy,

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and wider understanding of dramatherapy, and its potential to contribute to individual and population health outcomes (e.g., Jones, 2015; Klees, 2021; Sajjani, 2019).

Consequently, recent years have seen a steady increase in publications in dramatherapy (Korde et al., 2023). However, bibliometric analyses also show that most of the research being produced stems from a prolific yet small community of university-affiliated professionals (Constien & Junker, 2023; Fernández-Aguayo & Pino-Juste, 2018), indicating that a large number of practicing dramatherapists are, as of now, not engaged in research practices with the intention to publish among the profession (Frydman & Cook, 2025). This is broadly reflective of the creative arts therapies in general (Cruz & Hervey, 2001; Waldon & Wheeler, 2017). In the context of music therapy, Aigen (2015), for instance, argued that the limited number of music therapy researchers ultimately challenges the capacity of the field to generate the needed research to establish a robust evidence-base of practice. A comparable concern may be articulated for dramatherapy as well (Frydman & Cook, 2025). In turn, expanding research engagement with the intention to publish among dramatherapists could potentially strengthen the field's evidence base, enhance professional legitimacy, and foster innovations that bridge theory and practice, ultimately elevating clinical efficacy, policy influence, and interdisciplinary recognition.

However, realizing this potential seems complicated by significant variability in how dramatherapists are prepared for research engagement during their professional training. Training programs of dramatherapy differ widely in their focus on research and academic practices. Not everywhere in Europe university-based master-level dramatherapy programs are common, indicating that research curricula are also not uniform (Stolfi et al., 2021). In Switzerland, for example, dramatherapists train at a non-academic, private institute (Newman, 2025), while in Germany and the Netherlands undergraduate degrees in dramatherapy (in addition to post-graduate programs) are offered (Oster & Melches, 2018; Willemsen et al., 2024). In contrast, master-level programs are the norm across the UK. In a recent survey of practicing dramatherapist in Northern America, for example, Frydman and Cook (2025) showed that participants' educational level was closely linked to their engagement and attitudes towards research. Dramatherapists in training (i.e., with a bachelor's degree) were more likely to feel anxious, nervous, or even scared by research and, conversely, less likely to feel an affinity towards research in contrast to those with a postgraduate degree (i.e. master's, doctorate; Frydman & Cook, 2025).

These findings converge with previous survey results from the fields of music therapy (Waldon & Wheeler, 2017), and dance/movement therapy (Cruz & Hervey, 2001) that indicate that therapists' educational levels are linked to the extent they engage with and feel about research. Earlier research findings from across the creative arts therapies further illustrate therapist's perception that a lack of training poses consistent barriers to engage with research (Betts & Laloge, 2000; Waldon, 2015). Yet, a lack of research engagement may not necessarily reflect disinterest in field specific research. A recent survey conducted by the Dutch collective research centre KenVak, for instance, showed strong appreciation for research contributions by creative arts therapists (Ponstein et al., 2021). Consequently, a stronger emphasis on research skills during training or degree programs might capitalise on therapists' general interest towards field specific research and build broader research capacity within the field.

Beyond potential educational and attitudinal disparities, systemic barriers further compound the challenge of broadening research engagement in dramatherapy. Important research resources, including articles, databases, research supervision, and ethical review boards, remain inaccessible to many practitioners who lack academic affiliation (Constien, 2024). These barriers are particularly acute in the creative arts therapies, including dramatherapy, where many practitioners work outside academic settings and may not have received formal research training. A recent bibliometric analysis revealed that roughly two-thirds

of dramatherapy articles remain behind paywalls, rendering them virtually inaccessible to most practicing dramatherapists (Gromova et al., 2026). While other ways of knowledge translation, aside from academic journals, have been adopted within the field (e.g., conferences, peer-to-peer support, etc.), the absence of accessible research infrastructure continues to challenge even motivated practitioners to publish about their work. For instance, participants in a recent US mentorship program that paired dramatherapists interested in pursuing independent research with experienced mentors identified limited access to journal articles as a significant barrier to their research inquiries (Frydman & Cook, 2023). Survey results from across the creative arts therapies mirror these findings, which show, for instance, music therapists lacking access to relevant literature (Waldon, 2015), and dance/movement therapists being inhibited by a lack of funding and collegial support to engage in research (Cruz & Hervey, 2001).

Recognizing these barriers, multiple institutions and professional associations across the field have initiated efforts to make research more inclusive and accessible to a broader community of dramatherapists. Recently, for example, the North American Drama Therapy Association (NADTA) established training core competencies of dramatherapists, that include specific mentions to research (Wood et al., 2022). As per the NADTA, dramatherapists ought to demonstrate knowledge of research practices, including qualitative and quantitative research methods, finding and summarising previous literature, and showing cultural and ethical awareness in research practices. Similarly, in the UK, educational standards applicable to dramatherapists have been defined by the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC), which outline competencies to effectively use evidence to inform practice (Health and Care Professions Council HCPC, 2017). Crucially, these core competencies or educational standards do not envision that all dramatherapists become researchers. However, they mandate an ability to actively engage with and apply research (Frydman & Cook, 2025).

Additionally, efforts have been made to make research and research tools more accessible to dramatherapists outside of academia in the form of open-access publications or by sharing publication lists and literature databases (Armstrong et al., 2019; Cook, Constien, et al., 2024; Cook, Griffiths, et al., 2024). Moreover, collaborations across the field and between practice and academia have been encouraged via co-led research projects (Cook et al., 2022; Doria et al., 2023; Elowe et al., 2022; McFann et al., 2024), mentorship programs (Frydman & Cook, 2023), research committees (Armstrong et al., 2019), and informal support networks (e.g., PhD Peer Supports, Early Career Research Networks). Exposing therapists to research, either via tools or collaborations, may alleviate concerns about research and introduce therapists to seeing themselves in the role of research consumer or even research producer. For example, in a qualitative exploration of art therapists, who were invited to participate in a longitudinal study on the use of art therapy in educational settings, Snir et al. (2024) found that participation, despite potential initial hesitations towards research, greatly improved the therapists' confidence and competence in research. Similarly, Cook, Constien, et al. (2024) argued to reframe research contribution in the form of thesis or final year projects by students in graduate degree programs from an education requirement to an entrance into the research role.

The most targeted effort thus far to encourage dramatherapists' research engagement and the wider research community was conducted in the US by Frydman and Cook (2023). They established a research mentorship program within a North American context, which paired early career dramatherapists with established dramatherapy researchers to develop new research projects or move a project towards publication. In their qualitative pre-post evaluation, Frydman and Cook (2023) identified strong motivation on the side of the emergent researchers to both develop their research ideas but also make connections in and around research. However, they also found that a lack of foundational research competence was limiting the effectiveness of the program, as it was not within the scope of the mentorship for the emergent researchers

to develop the necessary research skills. Congruently, they called for a renewed focus on foundational research training (Frydman & Cook, 2023), which can be addressed within educational programs, but also through continued education programs for dramatherapists following graduation.

The EFD case study project

Within Europe, the European Federation of Dramatherapy (EFD) was established in 2013, as a platform to promote the practice of dramatherapy, but also to encourage professional networks and the further development of dramatherapists across Europe (Willemssen and Pitruzella, 2025). In a recent pilot project, which is the main focus of the current paper, the EFD collaborated with the *Dramatherapy Journal* and the British Association of Dramatherapists’ research committee to further target these goals and add to the previously mentioned efforts to promote research and increase output from a greater diversity of practitioners. The project was designed as a series of workshops that were offered as a form of continuing education to dramatherapists to guide them in writing and publishing a case study based on their own work. It was offered by a team of dramatherapy researchers, who are also the authors of this paper, from a number of European countries. Overall, the project was aimed at experienced, practising dramatherapists who had not published before, as a way to open the dramatherapy research community and to introduce ideas and methods from experienced dramatherapists to the current academic discourse in dramatherapy. In brief, the objectives of this collaborative project were to support dramatherapists to share their experience, to diversify the voices active within dramatherapy research, and to advance the professional development of the field. Overall, the program offered six monthly, virtual workshops, in addition to individual supervision meetings and writing support. This project is referred herein as the EFD Case Study Project.

The present study

The current mixed-methods evaluation study sought to evaluate the reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation, and maintenance of the EFD Case Study Project in order to review it according to its pre-determined objectives. Theoretically, this study is based on the RE-AIM framework (Glasgow et al., 2019), which has found widespread adoption in the field of implementation science and is commonly used to identify the reasons why programs succeed or fail by identifying information on the context, mechanisms and outcomes. Across the implementation of the EFD Case Study Project, the current evaluation study collected a wide range of data, including a quantitative assessment of the program’s characteristics, and effectiveness, as well as a qualitative evaluation by its participants. The overarching research question for the current study was: *What is the impact of the EFD case study project on participating dramatherapists and what is their perception of its implementation?*

Methods

Evaluation design

The implementation and outcomes of the EFD case study project were evaluated within five distinct domains of investigation using a convergent mixed-methods evaluation design. The design was informed by the RE-AIM framework (Glasgow et al., 2019), which describes five key elements which are thought to support the successful implementation of a given program, i.e., reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation, and maintenance. Reach refers to the absolute number or proportion of individuals participating in a given program. Effectiveness refers to the impact of a program on key outcomes. Adoption refers to the possibility to initiate the program on a wider scale. Implementation refers to the delivery of the program, specifically to the fidelity to the

program’s protocol and goals. Lastly, maintenance refers to the extent to which a program can show lasting effects either at an institutional or, as it is the case in this study, individual level.

Elements from the RE-AIM framework were adopted in the current study as domains of investigations, with their own research question, and data. A protocol for this study, identifying a research question within each domain, was pre-registered (osf.io/869un) prior to the beginning of the program on August 16th, 2024. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethical Board of the Creative Arts Therapies at Nürtingen-Geislingen University on July 22nd, 2024 (24 C 27F105 W). Lastly, the current study is informed by the APA’s Mixed Methods Article Reporting Standards (Levitt et al., 2018).

Procedure

The EFD Case Study Program was advertised from June to August 2024 and implemented from September 2024 to February 2025. To participate, dramatherapists from dramatherapy associations from different countries affiliated with the EFD were invited to apply via an online form with an initial idea for their case study. All applications to the project were screened by the project team following pre-determined eligibility criteria for participants and with regards to the feasibility of the proposed case study idea. To be eligible, participants had to have completed their dramatherapy training in a program accredited by their country’s national dramatherapy association, had to have had experience working as a dramatherapist post-qualification for at least three years or more, and must not have published in a peer-reviewed journal before. Feasibility of a case study idea was judged based on ethical (e.g., is it possible to ensure informed consent, etc.) and practical considerations (e.g., can institutional access be obtained, etc.). Following the application deadline, the project team met to discuss each application according to these criteria and selected suitable applications. Successful applicants were then invited to participate in the project.

During the project phase, six virtual workshops were held monthly with invited participants. Each workshop was designed to cover the key parts of a case study, from ethical approval to data collection, discussion, and formatting (see Table 1). All materials (e.g., workshop slides, recordings, reading suggestions) were shared with participants to ensure access for all, even if they were unable to attend one of the workshops. Moreover, each participant was assigned a mentor at the beginning of the project phase and was offered individual mentoring meetings between workshops. To encourage participants to prepare their case study for publication, the mentee-mentor relationship was maintained, if requested by the participants, even after the conclusion of the workshop series. This was agreed upon on a case-by-case basis. The project team was comprised of experienced and research active dramatherapists from a number of countries affiliated with the EFD. The project team designed and delivered the workshops based on their experience of practising and researching in this field. The project team were also the research mentors for this project.

Participants

Participants were invited via a wide recruitment effort across the

Table 1
Workshop structure of the EFD Case Study Project.

Workshop	Topic	Month
1	Case study introduction and ethics	September 2024
2	Background and demographic information	October 2024
3	Case study methods and data collection	November 2024
4	Outcomes and results	December 2024
5	Practical and theoretical reflection	January 2025
6	Formatting and references	February 2025

Note. Materials from each workshop are provided on this study’s OSF project page.

EFD. A recruitment sheet was shared twice via the eighteen individual country representatives of the EFD. The online application was open for 50 days from the 17th of June 2024 to the 15th of August 2024. In that time, the online application form was accessed 252 times. In sum, 28 applications were received from 11 out of the 18 EFD member countries. Ultimately, 10 applicants were invited to participate in the EFD case study project. Participants were from eight different EFD member countries, including the UK ($n = 2$), Israel ($n = 2$), Czechia, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Malta, and the Netherlands (all $n = 1$). Participants ranged in age from 29 to 55 years ($M = 42.67$ years, $SD = 10.11$). Further descriptive demographics of participating dramatherapists are presented in Table 2.

Data collection procedure

Data was collected at three time points before, and after the workshop, as well as continuously throughout the project. This allowed a continuous monitoring of the project’s reach and implementation, as well as its effectiveness, adoption, and maintenance from before to after the project. Before the first workshop, participants completed an online survey, which was used as a pre-measure of their research competencies, and collected demographic information. Moreover, after each workshop, a brief online survey was sent to participants to document their satisfaction with the past workshop and their process in writing their case study. Immediately after the last workshop, a post-measure of participants’ research competencies was collected via an online survey. Lastly, a follow-up measure, collected four months after the last workshop, included a third measure of participants’ research competencies, as well as their rating of the projects’ intervention characteristics (i.e., Perceived Characteristics of Intervention Scale). Additionally, qualitative interviews were conducted with participants to assess their overall evaluation of the project. A flow-chart comprehensively outlining this data collection process is presented in Fig. 1.

Quantitative measures

Perceived research competencies scale. The Perceived Research Competencies Scale (PR-Comp) is a previously validated questionnaire, developed in the context of higher-education, that seeks to quantify students’ knowledge and skills of reviewing and conducting research (Marrs et al., 2022). In the current study, the 36-item PR-Comp was adapted into a 15-item version specifically to be used in the context of dramatherapy. The initially adapted version was reviewed in its validity by four experts in the field outside of the project team, with previous experience in dramatherapy but also quantitative methods and psychometric research. Following this review, items were slightly reworded (e.g., “empirical” added in item 7: “I have a good overview of the current

state of empirical research in dramatherapy”). The final version included 15 items which asked participants to rate themselves via a 5-Point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree – Strongly Agree) on a number of research skills. It was used as a pre- and post-, and a follow-up measure. The adapted PR-Comp (Dramatherapy) showed good internal consistency at each time point ($\alpha(T1) = .84$; $\alpha(T2) = .89$; $\alpha(T3) = .86$). The full scale is provided on this project’s OSF project page.

Perceived characteristics of intervention scale. The Perceived Characteristics of Intervention Scale (PCIS) is a previously validated questionnaire, developed in the healthcare context, that seeks to judge and compare treatment methods (Cook et al., 2015). It was adapted in the current study to be used by the project participants to rate the delivered case study project on key characteristics, i.e., relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, and observability. Relative advantage describes participants’ perspective whether or not the project is more effective than similar programs they have participated in in the past. Compatibility describes participants’ perspective whether or not the project suits their own goals and style of work. Complexity describes participants’ perspective whether or not participation and delivery of the project is clear. Lastly, observability describes participants’ perspective whether or not the outcomes of the project are noticeable to themselves and others. Each characteristic is rated by participants via two items (e.g., “The delivery of the case study workshops was clear and understandable”). In turn, the full scale included eight items, which participants completed at the follow-up measurement. The scale showed good internal consistency ($\alpha = .85$). The full scale is provided on this project’s OSF project page.

Continuous Evaluation Survey. Ahead of each workshop, participants completed a brief evaluation survey, which asked participants how satisfied they were with the previous workshop (five-point Likert scale ranging from *very satisfied* to *very dissatisfied*), if they had met with their mentor this month and how satisfied they were with the outcome of that meeting (five-point Likert scale), if they felt their case study is progressing well (five-point Likert scale), and, lastly, how much time they spent working on their case study this month (numeric response). Participants could also enter individual feedback. The data was anonymously submitted so that responses could not be traced back to participants, in order to encourage truthful responses. Across the project, five evaluation surveys were shared with participants.

Qualitative measures

Four months after the conclusion of the last workshop in February, participants were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews exploring the lasting effects of the project. Ultimately, seven interviews were conducted with the participating dramatherapists from June 18th to the 10th of July 2025. Interviews were conducted by four members of the research team [TC, EK, JB, and EB]. Comparability across interviews was ensured via a semi-structured interview guide (see Supplementary Materials). Interviews lasted between 22 and 38 min ($M = 27.63$ min, $SD = 5.18$).

Data analysis

Quantitative data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results from the continuous evaluation survey, which was completed by participants following each workshop, were summarised using descriptive statistics to allow comparisons across workshops. Similarly, participants’ ratings from the PCIS, which was assessed once at the follow-up measure, was summarised descriptively. Data from the PR-Comp, which was assessed at three time points, were analysed using a linear mixed model to identify change in participants’ research competence from before to after the workshop series (West et al., 2022). A linear-mixed model analysis was chosen, given that there was some missing data within the dataset (i.e., not all participants completed the survey at each time point). A linear mixed-model analyses group means

Table 2
Demographics of participating dramatherapists.

Demographics	n (%)
Gender	
Female	10 (100%)
Education	
Non-academic training	2 (20%)
Undergraduate degree	1 (10%)
Postgraduate degree	7 (70%)
Work Experience	
3–5 years	2 (20%)
6–10 years	4 (40%)
11–20 years	3 (30%)
More than 20 years	1 (10%)
Work Setting^b	
Private Practice	7 (70%)
Clinical Practice	4 (40%)
Educational Practice	3 (30%)

Note. $N = 10$. ^a At T1, one participant did not disclose their age. ^b some participants worked in more than one setting.

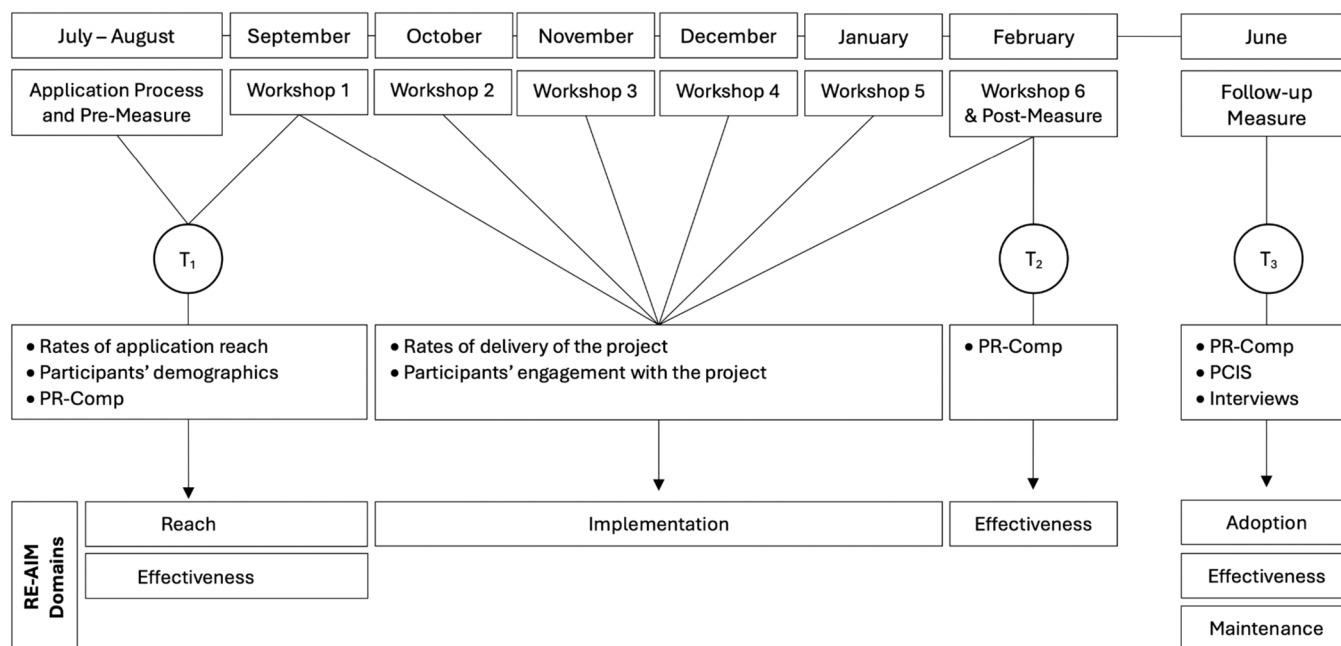


Fig. 1. Flow chart of the data collection process. Note. PR-Comp = Perceived Research Competencies Scale; PCIS = Perceived Characteristics of Intervention Scale.

as fixed effects (i.e., variation across time, Level 1), while also taking into account random effects (i.e., variation across participants, Level 2), which, unlike an ANOVA, allows the accommodation of missing data (Krueger & Tian, 2004). All quantitative analyses were conducted using R within R-Studio (Vers. 2025.09.0 +387). Specifically, the linear mixed-models analysis was conducted using the *lm4* package (Bates et al., 2025). The complete analysis script is provided on this project's OSF project page.

Qualitative data analysis

Data was analysed using a collaborative, descriptive-interpretative approach (Elliott & Timulak, 2021) by the first [TC] and second author [EK]. Interview transcripts were created using Zoom's automatic transcription feature and further refined by the first author. Transcripts were thoroughly read and re-read and then divided into meaning units (i.e., the smallest piece of text that can convey a meaning on its own), which were first sorted into a domain of investigation (i.e., long-term impacts or improvements) that was derived from the research question and then sorted by familiarity into emergent categories. A provisional category structure was developed by the first author [TC], which was audited by the second author [EK], who also had full access to the interview transcripts. Via a standardized audit sheet, the second author provided feedback and improvement suggestions to the first author which were collaboratively discussed and merged with the provisional category structure.

Results

Quantitative results

Implementation

Six workshops were delivered once a month from September 2024 to February 2025 as originally intended. The workshops provided an initial introduction and then covered different parts of a case study (i.e., introduction, methodology, results, discussion, references and formatting). Attendance was generally good (i.e., 8–9 participants per workshop), except for the last workshop, which was attended by five participants. Evaluation surveys following each workshop indicated overall high satisfaction with the delivery and content of the workshops.

Throughout all surveys, a majority of participants (i.e., >71%) reported they were satisfied or very satisfied with the previous workshop. Similarly, participants were asked to report prior to each workshop if they met with their individual mentor and how satisfied they were with the outcome of the meeting. Across all participants and five surveys, 34 individual mentor meetings were reported. Similar to the workshops, participants were generally satisfied with their mentoring meetings. Throughout all surveys, more than three quarters of participants (i.e., >83%) reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their mentoring meetings.

Moreover, participants were asked if they felt like their case study was progressing well. On this question, responses showed some variation with participants seemingly undecided how their case study was progressing. Only after the fifth workshop did a majority of participants (i.e., 57%) feel positive about the progress of their case study. Before, most participants (i.e., 56–77%) were dissatisfied or neither dissatisfied nor satisfied with their progress. Lastly, participants were asked in the monthly evaluation survey how many hours they dedicated to working independently on their case study. The data showed that participants, on average, spent an increasing amount of time on their case study, ranging from an average of 4.63 h after the first workshop, to 11.63 h after the fifth workshop. All results, showing participants satisfaction with the implementation of the EFD Case Study project are visually presented in Fig. 2.

Adoption

Participants' overall perception and evaluation of the EFD Case Study Project were quantitatively assessed using the adapted PCIS. The PCIS is an 8-item questionnaire that summarises a groups' perception of a program via four subscales, namely Observability (i.e., outcomes of the program for me and others are noticeable/observable), Complexity (i.e., participation in and delivery of the program is clear and straightforward), Compatibility (i.e., participation suits the groups goals and style of work), and Relative Advantage (i.e., the project is more effective and convenient than similar programs). Overall, participants rated the EFD Case Study Project high on all four subscales (see Fig. 3), indicating that participants deemed the project suitable for wider adoption.

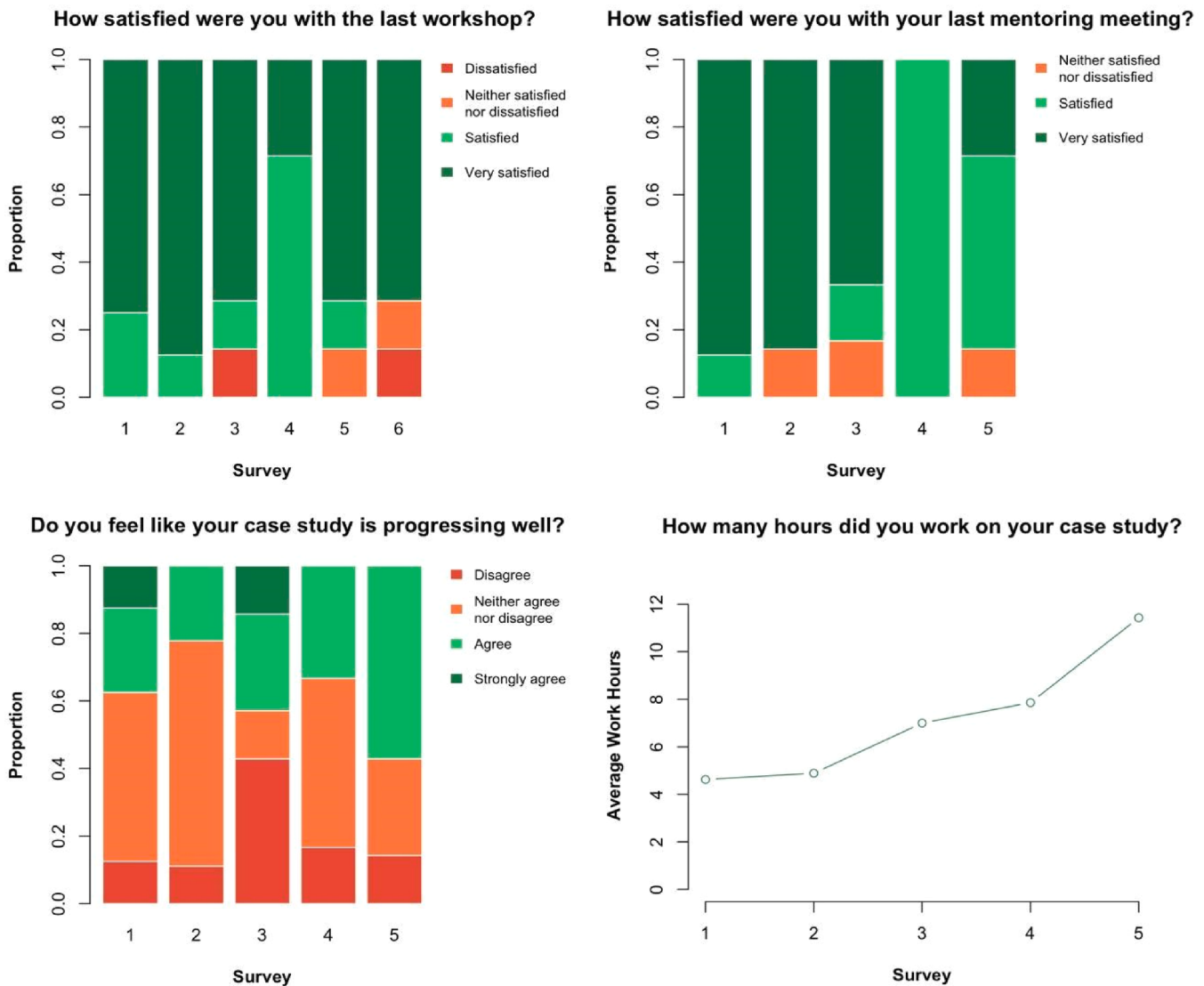


Fig. 2. Continuous evaluation survey results. Note. The sixth evaluation survey, following the last workshop, only included the first question, i.e., “How satisfied were you with the last workshop?”.

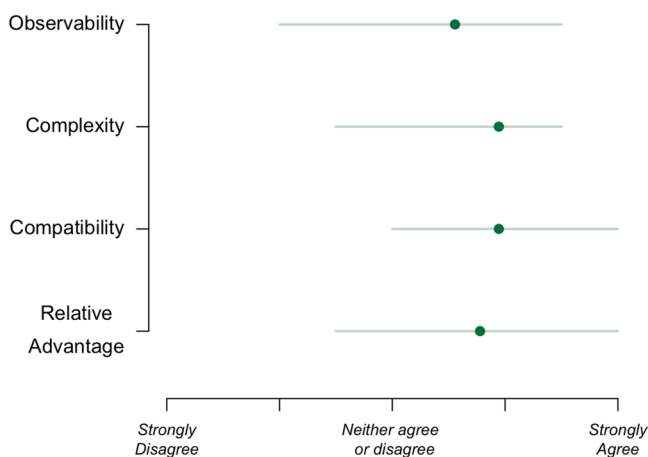


Fig. 3. Perceived Characteristics of Intervention Scale. Note. The green dot indicates the mean rating across participants ($n = 9$), whereas the green-shaded line indicates the range between minimum and maximum ratings of the group.

Effectiveness

A linear-mixed model was fitted to determine change in participants' research competence from before to after the workshop series. Prior to analysis, participants' research competence scores were standardised. Summary statistics, including estimates, p -values, and the effect sizes are listed in Table 3. Overall, the model shows that participants significantly increased their perceived research competence from before to after the workshop series ($\beta = .70$, $SE = 0.20$, $p = .002$, $d = 1.73$) and at the 4-month follow-up compared to baseline ($\beta = .64$, $SE = 0.19$, $p = .004$, $d = 1.58$). There was no significant difference between participants' research competence after the workshop series and at follow-up, indicating a lasting effect of the workshops. Effect sizes indicated a large

Table 3

Fixed effects from the model predicting Perceived Research Competence scores.

Predictor	β	t (df)	p	d
Intercept (i.e., Pre-Measure)	-.43*	-2.58 (18.80)	.02	-
Pre-Measure - Post-Measure	.70**	3.59 (15.97)	.002	1.73
Pre-Measure - Follow-up	.64**	3.42 (15.65)	.004	1.58

Note. Standardised coefficients are shown.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

effect of the workshop series on participants' research competence. Between-participant variability at baseline was substantial ($SD = 0.34$). These results are also depicted graphically in Fig. 4.

Qualitative results

In total, 41 meaning units (i.e., the smallest piece of text that can still convey a meaning on its own) across participants were identified within the domain of investigation of long-term impacts or improvements. Three categories were inductively formed from these meaning units, which identified the EFD Case study project as a bridge between practice and research, strengthening participants both in their professional role as well as in their academic research skills. Findings indicate that, as per its original intentions, the case study project trained participants in key research skills and encouraged them to draw on their clinical knowledge and experience for their case study. However, the interviews also showed, participation in the case study project had a lasting effect on participants' clinical work, in strengthening their professional role and the introduction of fresh ideas and new theoretical perspectives into their work. Ultimately, the case study project initiated a sort-of bidirectional relationship between participants' clinical experience and academic interests, where participants' clinical work informed their academic interests, while at the same time their academic interests informed their clinical work. This conceptual framework of a bidirectional relationship is presented in Fig. 5.

Bridging practice and research

This category describes participants' experience of the EFD case study project as having provided a bridge between their clinical work and their research interests. Participants reported that working on their case study stimulated further reflection and deepened their understanding of clinical work, which, in turn, stimulated fresh ideas or perspectives for their practice. Participants also voiced that participating in the case study project allowed them time to reflect on their clinical experience more thoroughly than is usually possible in their day-to-day work. One participant, for instance, reasoned this had to do with gaining more of a psychological distance to their work via an academic lens: "So, there's slightly some more from a distance, looking at my participants, perhaps in this way" (QPar3.4). Moreover, another participant described this experience as being from another world entirely:

"When you're [...] in the world of academia, I think you have more of that thinking space available to you. When you're in the working world,

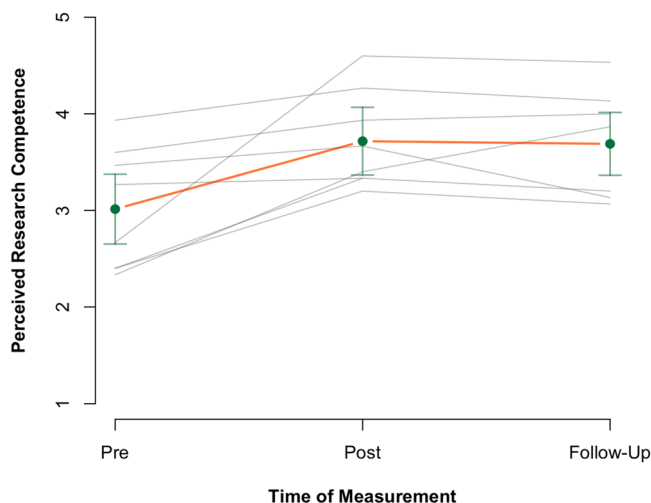


Fig. 4. String plot of participants' Perceived Research Competence scores across three time points. Note. Mean scores, including the 95% confidence intervals, are depicted via the green dots and error bars along the orange line. Individual participants' scores are shown via the grey lines.



Fig. 5. Conceptual map of categories from the qualitative analysis. Note. The three boxes identify the three main categories identified via the qualitative analysis.

the reality is, I'll go from session to session to session. And actually, there's not always that time to pause and process." (QPar4.4)

Moreover, participants named that through this "thinking space" (QPar4.4) they were able to deepen their understanding of both their specific case and their work more broadly. One participant, who used the dramatherapy method of Developmental Transformations in her clinical work, for instance, described this as: "For myself in the long term, I think, that I know I better understand what I am really doing in the playspace, in my practice with my clients. Like I understand more what works." (QPar5.1). This deepened understanding, in turn, helped participants gain a fresh perspective on dramatherapy, re-evaluate their practice, and allow new insights from the case study project influence their work. One participant, for instance, described moving from research to practice like this: "And then, because I have that sharpened awareness, it supports me to use this in a more focused way, as I continue to work" (QPar1.3). Similarly, another participant described their academic work taking form within their practice: "But through this writing I get to go so much into my theory that this becomes part of my practice. This becomes like dramatherapy" (QPar7.2).

Gaining confidence in research

This category describes participants building research skills, feeling more confident in their abilities, and connecting with peers in the academic community. Participants talked about the case study project expanding their knowledge of and skills in research. One participant, for instance, summarized this by stating: "I feel much more confident in what current research looks like and how to put that together" (QPar4.6). Similarly, another participant described gaining foundational research skills: "So, I think there's some sort of base which you can go back to if you'd like to write" (QPar3.2). Part of the knowledge gained, for some participants, included the new connections they made with peers in the academic community. One participant, for example, stated: "[Knowing] that it is possible. And that there are also colleagues in the world who would like to guide you" (QPar3.3).

Strengthening professional role

This category describes participants gaining new confidence in their clinical work and in their role as a dramatherapist through their participation in the EFD Case Study Project. Participants noted that by participating in the case study project, they were able to gain not only perspective on their work but, moreover, gain new confidence in their role as a dramatherapist as well. One participant, for instance, described moving from reflection, to comprehension, to embracing their therapeutic identity: "It's been really a chance to strengthen my understanding of how I'm working, how I'm thinking about my practice, and therefore how I'm choosing certain interventions or techniques within the context of my approach, my philosophy. Like really starting to own who I'm becoming as a practitioner" (QPar1.1.). Similarly, another participant emphasized that participating in the case study project allowed them to identify their own interests within their work and re-focus their academic as well as their clinical work towards those interests:

"And I think it's made me think about kind of my own journey to get to this point, really as a therapist and where my interests really, really lie. [...] And it's forced me to really kind of deep dive into that. So, I think that was - just by doing more of the reading and engaging in my own thought process around it as well" (QPar4.3)

Discussion

The current study sought to evaluate the reach, implementation, adoption, and effectiveness of a recent case study project from the European Federation of Dramatherapy, the *Dramatherapy Journal* and The British Association of Dramatherapists' Research Committee. The project invited experienced dramatherapists across Europe, who had not published previously, and guided them in writing a case study based on their work via a series of workshops and individual mentoring meetings. Overall, ten dramatherapists across eight European countries participated in the project. Data relating to their perceived research competence, progress in writing, as well as their satisfaction with the workshop series and their mentoring were collected at multiple time points and via quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The findings from the evaluation study showed that the dramatherapists valued their participation and the skills they learnt via the case study project. Across the workshop series, dramatherapists reported high satisfaction with the workshops and their mentoring experience. Their research skills significantly increased from before to after the workshops and were maintained up to four months after the workshop series concluded. Moreover, participants reported that the effects of the project extended beyond academia, and ranged from an increased confidence within their workplace, to new perspectives and inspirations that positively influenced their work with their clients.

Encouraging dramatherapists' research engagement

Previous surveys and bibliometric analyses have shown that the field of the creative arts therapies (Betts & Laloge, 2000; Cruz & Hervey, 2001; Waldon, 2015; Waldon & Wheeler, 2017), as well as dramatherapy more specifically (Constien & Junker, 2023; Frydman & Cook, 2025), may be limited by several barriers inhibiting dramatherapists who are interested in sharing their work via research and research publications. The EFD case study project was designed to address these barriers by (1) linking practicing dramatherapists with the research community, and (2) to guide them in sharing their practical insights via their very own published case study. However, the qualitative insights provided by the participating dramatherapists also showed that the project extended beyond these original intentions, in that their participation in the project, and the resulting exposure to the current research and literature of dramatherapy, permeated dramatherapists' clinical practice as well. Participants reported an increase in confidence in their role as dramatherapist within their workplace by being able to better understand the rationale and evidence behind their work, and by reaffirming their own professional identity. This mirrors previous qualitative findings from Snir et al. (2024), who showed that art therapists' participation in a clinical trial had an empowering effect on their own professional role via exposure to and experience with research in their field. Moreover, it seems to address one of the identified barriers towards career advancements of dramatherapists, namely a perceived lack of recognition from one's employing institution, by empowering dramatherapists in their work and their work rationale (Frydman et al., 2018). Overall, these findings indicate that the EFD Case Study Project did not only serve as an academic inquiry but rather had knock-on effects that impacted participants' professional role and work, suggesting the notion of a research-informed practice.

Despite the overall positive perception of the Case Study Project and its effectiveness for participants, it also needs to be acknowledged that, at the time of this writing (twelve months following the final workshop),

only two case studies, inspired and produced as part of this project, had been submitted to an academic journal. While not the primary focus of this evaluation study, the small number of finalised case studies for publication contrasts with the original goals of this project and exposes further barriers participants faced when attempting to engage in research practices. As indicated via the monthly evaluation surveys, most participants gained a lot from the workshop series as well as their individual mentoring meetings. Yet they were unsatisfied with their own progress in their writing throughout most of the evaluation period. This discrepancy may be indicative of a receptive, and motivated audience, that, at the same time, may lack the necessary confidence and skills in research to work on an independent research project. As the intended audience for this project were dramatherapists who had been practicing for a while, but had not published before, this discrepancy was to be expected yet could not be fully overcome in the case study project. Potentially, additional support or workshops, that focused on independent writing, would have been needed to bridge the gap in between what was expected and what could be reasonably achieved.

Generally, these findings are reflective of the similar mentoring project hosted by the NADTA research committee (Frydman & Cook, 2023), which was challenged by participants' lack of foundational research knowledge, which made it difficult to achieve the project's intended goal, i.e., a finalised research product. It also mirrors findings from across the creative arts therapies that consistently demonstrate that a lack of training poses consistent barriers for practicing therapists to engage with research (Betts & Laloge, 2000; Frydman & Cook, 2025; Waldon, 2015). Within the current project, the series of workshops effectively aimed to improve participants' research knowledge and competence, specifically in regard to writing an academic case study. Indeed, as indicated by the quantitative findings, participants' own perceived research competence significantly increased from before to after the project and was maintained up to four months after the conclusion of the workshop series. Additionally, participants reported in the interviews that they had made gains in their knowledge and understanding of research and research practices. Nonetheless, additional support, specifically in regard to academic writing, may have been needed.

Moreover, other barriers, aside from educational and research competencies, may have also limited participants' progress in writing. Indeed, participants also faced more practical constraints, such as difficulties accessing academic literature, but more importantly, a lack of time that could be devoted to working on their own case study. All participants were, during their participation in the project, also working as dramatherapists, some even in multiple settings. Consequently, workshops were hosted in the evenings, yet family or other commitments often prevented participants from attending. While the time spent working on their case study steadily increased throughout their participation, it may simply not have been enough to delve into the academic literature, get accustomed to the style of academic reading and writing, and, importantly, formulate one's own ideas for writing up their case study. As it was the participants' first experience of preparing a case study for publication, it may have been difficult to ascertain the necessary time commitment. As such, the initial expectation to have a finalised case study ready for submission to a journal, may not have been feasible within the duration of this project's evaluation period (i.e., 10 months). Again, these barriers have been reported previously in a similar project (i.e., Frydman & Cook, 2023) and may point to the need of establishing "research time" into clinical, educational, or private practices that allow dramatherapists time to engage in research and, potentially, also pursue their own research projects. Within nursing, for example, journal clubs offered within the workplace have been shown to effectively promote evidence-based practices, but also to develop research competencies and reduce a perceived research-to-practice gap (Valizadeh et al., 2022). Similar initiatives, with a specific focus on dramatherapy, may be useful for the further development of the field.

Moreover, these noted, and previously reported barriers may point to

the value of, establishing active collaborations between researchers and practitioners of dramatherapy that go beyond merely mentoring independent research projects. Commonly faced barriers, such as access to academic literature or other infrastructure (e.g., ethical review boards, funding sources), as well as time constraints may be effectively overcome by dividing up responsibility and making use of individuals' expertise, strengths, and institutional resources. In the current project for instance limited access to literature by participants could be overcome via the (academically-affiliated) mentors. Moreover, research collaborations may effectively address common barriers within the field by including a more diverse set of voices within the research community and adding insights from practice to the research agenda. Co-led research projects between academics and students of dramatherapy have been previously utilised within university settings and led to several peer-reviewed publications (e.g., Cook et al., 2022; Doria et al., 2023; Elowe et al., 2022; McFann et al., 2024). Similar collaborations could also be established between academics and practitioners of dramatherapy and may be a natural next step for the EFD Case Study Project.

Strengths and limitations

Several strengths but also limitations to the design of this evaluation study should be acknowledged. First, the study developed and trialled two questionnaires (i.e., Perceived Research Competencies, Perceived Characteristics of Intervention) that may be useful for similar projects in the future. The PR-Comp, for example, showed good internal consistency across time points and was sensitive to gains made by participants. It may, thus, be a useful tool for the evaluation of continued education programs or courses in dramatherapy degree programs. Moreover, this evaluation study was based on a previously established theory-guided evaluation framework (i.e., RE-AIM, Glasgow et al., 2019) and followed a pre-registered protocol that guided its data collection and analysis. While this greatly strengthens the validity and credibility of the presented findings, it may have missed peripheral outcomes that were not focus of the pre-identified research domains. For example, the social connections made via the EFD Case Study Project between participants and mentors greatly enhanced the learning experience, as indicated via the qualitative reports, however, they were not exhaustively evaluated within this study. Similarly, other sources of data that could have broadened the scope of the evaluation of the project, such as the project team's reflections from their mentorship experience, were not within the pre-registered protocol and thus not formally evaluated. Moreover, the method of data collection via self-reported questionnaires may have introduced bias into the collected data. For example, the fact that participants worked closely with the project team and their individual mentors may have coloured their reporting via a social-desirability bias. Similarly, qualitative analysis by the project team may have been influenced by their relationship to the interviewed participants. To address this limitation, quantitative reports were kept anonymous and objective measures, like participants' attendance of the workshops and mentor meetings, were added to the evaluation. Moreover, interviews with participants were assigned to a member of the project team who was not the mentor of the interviewee, and transcripts were anonymised prior to analysis. Nonetheless, it would have also been beneficial to have the evaluation conducted by a separate team of researchers that was not directly associated with the project itself.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current evaluation study of the EFD Case Study project, shows that dramatherapists, even those who are established in practice, are eager to contribute to the growing evidence-base of the field. This reflects previous research findings from across the creative arts therapies (Frydman & Cook, 2025; Snir et al., 2024; Waldon, 2015; Waldon & Wheeler, 2017). The EFD Case Study project was intended to

support ten experienced dramatherapists, who had not published previously, to write a case study of their clinical work. A series of workshops focused on academic writing and case study research and additional individual mentoring were provided to participants. The results from the accompanying evaluation study showed that the dramatherapists valued their participation and gained lasting research competencies that spilled over from their academic pursuits into their clinical dramatherapy work. Nonetheless, several barriers were also encountered that delayed or prevented some of the dramatherapists in submitting their finalised case study for peer-review. Recommendations for future iterations of similar projects include to (1) extend the project timeline to acknowledge time constraints on behalf of the (working) participating dramatherapists, (2) offer writing workshops alongside content-focused workshops to provide participants with time and guidance for independent writing, and (3) establish long-term research partnerships that connect researchers and practitioners of dramatherapy to further bridge the research and practice of dramatherapy. Future work might capitalise on these findings and recommendations, as well as its openly shared materials, to develop additional continued education programs for dramatherapists that target research competencies to foster a collaborative and engaged research culture within the field.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Susana Pendzik: Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Jane Bourne:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Eleanor Keiller:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Tobias Constien:** Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Simone Klees:** Writing – review & editing. **Ellen Foyn Bruun:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization. **Marc Willemsen:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at [doi:10.1016/j.aip.2026.102524](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2026.102524).

Data availability

Research materials and data are publicly accessible on this study's OSF project page (osf.io/p4tzc).

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