

You are kindly invited to the public defense to obtain the degree of

DOCTOR OF ADULT EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

of Ms. Silke Marynissen

which will take place on 23 October 2025, 16:00 CET
Promotiezaal (Building D, room D.2.01) – [VUB Main Campus Brussels](#)
Pleinlaan 2 – 1050 Brussel

Or if you wish to attend online, click [here](#) to join the meeting

**WHEN WORDS FAIL, MUSIC SPEAKS:
UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES OF
PARTICIPATORY MUSIC PROGRAMS IN PRISON**

JURY

INTERNAL:

Prof. Dr. Free De Backer (Chair) (VUB, Fac. PE)
Prof. Dr. Lars Breuls (VUB, Fac. RC)
Prof. Dr. Maurice De Greef (VUB, Fac. PE)
Prof. Dr. Valérie Thomas (VUB, Fac. PE)

EXTERNAL:

Prof. Dr. Laura Caulfield (University of Wolverhampton)
Prof. Dr. An De bisschop (Ghent University)

PROMOTOR(S)

Prof. Dr. Dorien Brosens (VUB, Fac. PE)
Prof. Dr. Geert Vandermeersche (VUB, Fac. PE)

Coming by car? Please [register](#) your licence plate in advance to have access to the campus.

You are also invited to the reception afterwards.

Please confirm your attendance **before 20th of October** by filling out this [form](#).

SUMMARY

Music-making is widely recognized as beneficial to people in prison. But what exactly makes participatory music programs work? This dissertation explores how, why and under which circumstances such programs can foster positive outcomes for incarcerated persons. Drawing on a qualitative multi-method study and a critical realist science perspective this study identifies four key outcomes of participatory music programs for incarcerated individuals: it helps people managing and expressing emotions, stimulates self-development, provides respite, and facilitates connections.

At the same time, the study emphasizes the critical role of context. Using a socio-ecological model, it shows how factors at five interconnected levels (i.e., intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, public policy level) can either stimulate or hinder change. Five key mechanisms of change were identified as central to these programs: the approach of the music practitioners, creating a contrasting environment, being a collaborative process, providing a goal, and connecting participants to the world outside the prison walls.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Silke Marynissen obtained her Master's degree in Adult Educational Sciences at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in 2021. Her master thesis on digital learning opportunities in prison sparked Silke's interest in prison research. Building on this interest, and her personal passion in music, she got the chance to start her PhD in November 2021 on music programs in prisons, which was funded by the Research Foundation of Flanders (FWO). Throughout her PhD trajectory, Silke contributed actively to both academic and public debates on arts and imprisonment. She authored a book chapter in the book *Arts in criminal justice and corrections: International perspectives on methods and journeys, and challenges* (Routledge), published articles in the Dutch journals *Fatik* and *Panopticon*, and co-authored five national and international contributions. In addition, Silke Marynissen got the chance to present her research at different national and international conferences and symposia (e.g., Conference of the European Prison Education Association (EPEA), the International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA), and symposium of the network on the Social Impact of Music Making (SIMM)) and translated her results to the broader public (e.g., EOS, Doctoral Derby).