

UNATC PRESS

Theatre Education Series



Andreea-Diana Jicman

THEATRE
AS A SOCIAL INCLUSION MECHANISM

UNATC PRESS
UNIVERSITARIA CRAIOVA PRESS
2025

Theatre as a social inclusion mechanism
Andreea-Diana Jicman

Published as part of

Fair and Inclusive Education through Theatre and Film
Project, CNFIS-FDI-IEI-2025-F-0543,

funded by the Ministry of Education and Research
through the Institutional Development Fund (FDI) 2025.

Project Director: Lecturer PhD Andreea Jicman

Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a României
JICMAN, ANDREEA

Theatre as a social inclusion mechanism / Andreea
Jicman ; translated from Romanian by Cosmin Bădulețeanu,
Diana Ștefan-Dinescu, Mihaela Zamfirescu. - București :
U.N.A.T.C. Press ; Craiova : Universitaria, 2025

Conține bibliografie

ISBN 978-606-082-075-8

ISBN 978-606-14-2184-8

I. Bădulețeanu, Cosmin (trad.)

II. Ștefan-Dinescu, Diana (trad.)

III. Zamfirescu, Mihaela (trad.)

316.4

792

ISBN UNATC PRESS: 978-606-082-075-8

ISBN Universitaria Craiova Press: 978-606-14-2184-8

UNATC PRESS 2025

Theatre Education Series

www.unatcpres.ro

Editors: **Prof. Bogdana Darie, PhD; Assoc. Prof. Mihaela Bețiu, PhD.**

Translated by **Cosmin Bădulețeanu, Diana Ștefan-Dinescu, Mihaela Zamfirescu**

Proofreading & layout: Andreea Jicman, Mihaela Bețiu

DTP & cover: Corina Rezai

smartprint.ro

© UNATC PRESS for this edition

In collaboration with UNIVERSITARIA CRAIOVA PRESS

INTRODUCTION

Uncertainty and anxiety have currently a strong social impact. They have been felt ever more in the recent years and become part of a lifestyle characterised by cultural diversity. Differences between people are increasingly obvious and often lead to conflict or may cause the exclusion or marginalisation of some individuals. As a result, the legitimate desire of the human being to feel as an integral part of the community to which they belong is no longer achieved. Thus, a feeling of unfulfillment and dissatisfaction takes hold, affecting the biological, psychological and social wellbeing and productivity in the long run. Social exclusion manifests itself especially in relation with poverty, as those living in economically scarce conditions are also exposed to social marginalisation caused by material scarcity. At the same time, social exclusion appears when a collectivity's member is denied the right to contribute to the common good. There may be many causes for such behaviour; however, they all boil down to a common denominator, i.e. being different, hence, not understood and not accepted. This book is dealing with this latter dimension of the social exclusion phenomenon. Doing away with the exclusion caused by poverty requires joint effort, it also necessitates the involvement of the government, but this part of the problem exceeds the scope of the present work.

David Lewis-Williams writes that art is a social act, not a personal activity. Art serves social purposes despite it being used by individuals in social contexts to achieve certain targets¹. Therefore, art is inextricably linked to social circumstances. Theatre facilitates relational learning experiences, the starting point for an analysis of the methods pertaining to the art of theatre. These may be tailored to become working instruments facilitating a mutual understanding and acceptance environment. Such transformative type of effort springs from the foundation acquired through the interaction of socio-cultural factors.

Along his educational path, the child comes across various barriers that they overcome or not, depending on how the pedagogue works with them and the other members of their group. The difficulties they may face are generically

¹ David Lewis-Williams, *The mind in the cave*, Thames & Hudson, Londra, 2002, p. 44.

called special educational requirements. They refer to various, more or less visible, manifestations: 1. disabilities (physical or intellectual impairments); 2. behavioural disorders or learning difficulties, and 3. social, economic and cultural disadvantages for the child's development². From the standpoint of this theory, every participant in the educational process taking place in public or private institutions may come across hindrances along their educational experience. Consequently, vulnerability does not affect only those carrying visibly the sign of difference (persons with major disabilities or cognitive deficiencies), but also those espousing a difficult behaviour (aggressive youngsters), gifted children or those characterised by any other condition that may trigger adaptation difficulties in the school environment and the education process (for instance, children whose parents left abroad for work, immigrants, refugees, etc.)³. To feel excluded, marginalized from the collectivity to which they belong leads to negative outcomes hampering their individual development. It is in this very context that the student-student as well as the student-teacher relationships are equally important, since the teacher is the adult responsible for coordinating and modelling the education process. Before being a provider of knowledge and special skills and competences, the teacher is a human model to his or her students.

Inclusion is being lived as smooth integration into a work group and by creating an environment where everyone is appreciated and respected for what they are. From this perspective, the creative and socio-emotional development of the future adults bears great relevance. Thus are created the conditions for shaping an individual capable to perceive the difference not as a negative trait, triggering lack of understanding, but as a naturally defining component of the human being. Establishing a relation of complementarity between people requires collaboration. This becomes easier if the principle underpinning creativity is understood, that is, every individual is different; this is how people learn to value themselves and those around them. This is the reason why we can conclude that dialogue, and not aggressiveness, violence or marginalisation, is the balanced approach to settle conflicts. The art of theatre, as a form of education and support for the development of the human being, provides a specific approach, characterized by inclusivity, in which every member of the community is accepted and integrated, regardless of their personal development and learning peculiarities⁴.

² Traian Vrăsmaş, *Cerințe speciale și dizabilitatea în educație: o perspectivă internațională* [Special Requirements and Disability in Education], EDP, București, 2015.

³ Alois Gherguț, *Educația incluzivă și pedagogia diversității* [Inclusive Education and Diversity Pedagogy], Polirom, Iași, 2016, p. 31.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

The art of theatre is eminently collective, not individual. Ever since Antiquity, Aristotle presented the social character of the human being, dependent on cohabitation with their peers in organised communities. For the man to be fulfilled, he needs to be understood and accepted by those around him. The lack thereof leads to frustration and crops up in a low performance of the affected individual. This social need is ever more stringent in the social context that has been changing since the COVID-19 era, which imposed physical distancing requirements and other limitations to direct human contact. The direct, live human interaction has been replaced by that mediated by technology and applications of intelligent devices, which slightly became the second nature of young people and not only. Now the physical interaction of people comes with increased anxiety, even if cohabitation is not a threat for health protection anymore. Many aspects fundamental to the specifically human development process are affected by the new context. The normal unfolding of key psychological operations for social interaction, such as empathy, that often starts with observing the facial reaction of the other person, have become hindered.

Furthermore, given the current circumstances, dominated by competition and the desire for affirmation at any cost, there is a need for working instruments that require organising and favouring contexts that stimulate the collaboration skills of the young individual, even since the school age. Research “suggests that marginalisation in education has negative long-term consequences for young people in terms of social engagement in the wider world, academic attainment, emotional development, and future employment”⁵. Drama may offer a working direction in this respect as it promotes the principle of *Wê*, never of *I*⁶. The circle is the shape used in many theatre-related activities that follows this principle; in this way each participant is encouraged to act and assume individual responsibility for the success of the entire group: achieving the common goal⁷. Thus one discovers that through positive collaboration with the others, devoid of rivalry, achieves more than working alone. Process is much more important than result. Notions that define the attitude of acceptance and cooperation in interhuman relations, such as respect, concession and collaboration are thus better understood and become part of the future adult behaviour.

Theatre education is useful for the balanced shaping of the human being, irrespective of the field of activity that they later choose for themselves, as each has an inborn dramatic nature. The analysis of daily communication situations

⁵ A. Tawell, I. Thompson, H. Daniels, V. Elliott, N. Dingwall, cu O. Rubtsova și K. Munk, *Being Other: The Effectiveness of Arts Based Approaches in Engaging with Dwaaffected Young People*, Univ. Oxford, Oxford, 2015, p. 4.

⁶ Viola Spolin, *Improvizație pentru teatru* [Theatrical Improvisation], UNATC Press, București, 2008.

⁷ Joe Winston; Miles Tandy, *Beginning Drama 4-11*, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2009, p. 19.

shows the way in which the participants' behaviour can be interpreted through a dramatic metaphor. In practice, each is a co-creator, and the communication act resembles an actor's performance. Human interaction becomes an act of ritual with a spectacular character. People transmit messages both via the words they use and the way they utter them, as well as the position of their body, mimics, gestures, etc., employed when speaking. Consequently, human communication is taking place simultaneously on three levels (verbally, paraverbally and non-verbally), and their coherence is attained by thought. The harmonious interlinking of these three levels is the key of authentic and efficient communication that can be obtained with a lot of exercise. For instance, by means of theatrical games and specific exercises, a participant learns to formulate correctly a message matching his/her vocal and body expression, developing intrapersonal and interpersonal skills⁸.

This type of education can be integrated as such within the curricula or even be carried out extracurricularly in the form of workshops. It can also be borrowed and adapted by teachers in teaching their subjects to catalyze the creative and socio-emotional development. The start of the 2020-2021 academic year came with good news for the entire Romanian educational environment, i.e. the Ministry of Education approved new curricula for theatre-related disciplines that were to be included in what is called School Decision Curriculum for each pre-university education cycle: *The stage and I* (3rd and 4th grades, approved through Education Minister Order no. 5530/September 08, 2020); *Theatre and us* (6th and 7th grades, approved through Education Minister Order no. 5662/September 30, 2020); *The theatre lab* (10th and 11th grades, approved through Education Minister Order no. 5663/September 30, 2020). The proposal for these classes was put forth by the National University of Theatre and Film (UNATC), more precisely by an interdisciplinary team led by professor Bogdana Darie. The abovementioned electives can be a first step in acknowledging the positive role of theatre education in shaping the young individual of today.

The introduction of theatre techniques and methods in school curricula is a first step in the process of change of the educational process. This school activity, structured as an "experimenting workshop"⁹, is adapted for each age group, being aimed at developing specific skills for a harmonious development of the human being. Theatre art games and exercises stimulate the participant to question aspects from the surrounding reality and grow aware of how he reacts to them through thought, emotions, and actions. Truly winning individuals are those who know well themselves and understand what is going on with and

⁸ A.M. Moldovan, *Teatrul ca joc și metodă de formare* [Theatre as Play and Training Method], Tritonic, Buc., 2016, p. 100.

⁹ Ion Cojar, *O poetică a artei actorului* [A Poetics of the Art of the Actor], Paideia, București, 1998, p. 11.

around them. Everyone can practice theatre if willing to get involved actively, because theatre means *to play*. It contributes to relieving pressure from authority, because theatre means learning “from experience and by experimenting, and no one teaches anyone anything”¹⁰. Playing proposes various situations that require solving a problem and gives the participant freedom to act, according to his/her own individuality. The future adult is provoked to find new ways of solving and different methods of valorizing the function of an object. This fosters more courage to act, to be himself/herself, original and aware that every person is different. This is how young people will be able to accept more easily to work with various colleagues without judging or marginalizing them.

The book’s structure follows the idea of modelling the human behaviour on the basis of the influence coming from the theatre phenomenon. It provides a theoretical as well as practical approach of the theme. It proposes a working perspective founded on the theatre art principles in order to shape the creative and socio-emotional skills necessary to an active citizen, whose thinking is oriented towards unity and involvement, not dissension and division.

The first part of the book, entitled “Theatre employed to combat the social exclusion phenomenon”, discusses the social exclusion issue and the possible psycho-social mechanisms that constitute the origin of this phenomenon in the human community. At the same time, to underline the outcomes of exclusion, the social nature of the human being is looked at, together with the challenges society faces nowadays. Theatre practice has come up with management models or, better put, models to combat social exclusion. Some of them are showcased as arguments of the fact that theatre can offer tools for inclusive education.

The second part, “Theatre as a tool for inclusive education”, treats the concrete application in education of theatre-specific methods. It discusses the dynamics of the concept of education and its implications for the human development process. To achieve the ideal objective, that is forming an adaptable and emotionally intelligent individual, education needs to be focused on the growth of creativity and socio-emotional traits, all these being needed in shaping an inclusive behaviour. The ideas that are being developed are practical suggestions that may direct the activity of theatre education programmes with pre-university students. They may be useful to the teacher that organizes such activities as well as to the artist who wishes to hold theatre workshops. These proposals are justified by the author’s activity carried out over three years of research, especially within the UNATC Junior project series, financed by the Ministry of Education and Research through the Institutional Development Fund. To these we add

¹⁰ Viola Spolin, *Improvizație pentru teatru* [Theatrical Improvisation], UNATC Press, București, 2014, p. 14.

the experience acquired in carrying out various activities in collaboration with UNATC partner institutions, aimed at implementing theatre education activities based on the pedagogical model promoted through the University's project.

This book is an argument for employing theatre education to shape an individual prepared to live in a diverse society, driven by a quest for solutions, not guilt, and who can live in harmony and balance with his peers. It is intended both for the students and alumni of the "I.L. Caragiale" UNATC Theatre Pedagogy master's programme, and for those from the University of Bucharest Alternative Pedagogies and Theatre Art in Education (PED-ArtE) master's programme. Some of the topics pertaining to the teaching and training delivered in these programmes are to be found in this book. This volume is equally intended for theatre, psychology and pedagogy professionals wishing to apply theatre models for educational purposes. It can also be a useful tool for kindergarten, primary and secondary school teachers as well as other professionals working with young generations in the public and private pre-university education system, given that it provides a bird's eye view on the way in which theatre can be approached as a working method fostering an inclusive climate. Last but not least, this book can be read by anyone interested in understanding the way in which theatre as a mechanism facilitating social inclusion, in short accepting and valuing diversity, works.

—

CHAPTER I

**THEATRE EMPLOYED TO COMBAT
THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION
PHENOMENON**

Contemporary society is defined by cultural and social diversity, which generates changes in interhuman relationships and creates an ever growing pressure to identify and implement strategies and policies at the educational, economic, political level to manage such changes. Diversity has been a constant trait of human settlements from the earliest times, if we are just to think that a community is made up of a population in which each individual constitutes a separate personality. From ancient times, the growth of the great empires and the desire of their leaders to conquer new spaces led to an intensified interaction between people belonging to different cultures. In certain cases, when communication worked well, people managed to find common ground, which allowed collaboration and development. In other cases, on the contrary, an inadequate communication resulted in divergence and conflict, some of which got carried to our time, being fuelled by speeches based on disregard shown to the other parties involved. The Crusades are one such example, which were based on a lack of understanding between the Western and Eastern cultures.

There have been various means to harmonise interhuman relations. In this respect, theatre has provided specific methods as instruments emphasizing diversity and fighting social exclusion phenomena, created by inequities and the unbalanced distribution of power socially, economically, and politically.

To understand how social exclusion affects the good functioning of society, it needs to be understood that it erodes and even cancels active participation in community for some groups of people. Consequently, they are violated some rights, such as equality, liberty and fraternity, or the right to free participation in cultural life. These rights are stipulated in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*¹¹, adopted in 1948, and derive from an intrinsic necessity of the human being: social contact.

¹¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was promulgated on 10 December 1948 and contains the idea that all human beings are born free and equal in rights and dignity. The two said rights are included in articles 1 and 27 of the convention. Source: *Declarația Universală a Drepturilor Omului*, https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf, accessed on 20.08.2020.

Human Interaction. Psychological and Social Aspects

The Social Nature of the Human Being

Aristotle postulated the notion that human beings are social beings, whose characteristic is the need to live in organized communities, where they can develop connections with their peers, thus proving their usefulness. Unlike the animal kingdom, this particular quality helps them distinguish between good and evil, moral and immoral, which favors the creation and maintenance of social relationships. The Aristotelian assertion has been reiterated over time by researchers who have been concerned with understanding the innate social nature of the human condition.

In this respect, Abraham Maslow published a work in which he gives a hierarchical classification of the needs experienced by the human being. According to the order presented by the researcher, the systematization refers to five categories of needs. These are: physiological (basic needs: hunger, thirst, rest, etc.); safety (related to physical and psychological stability and comfort); belonging (referring to the necessity of social relationships); esteem (which refers to self-respect and the recognition desired from others), and self-actualization (which concerns the desire for self-improvement and fulfillment). The classification was represented in the form of a pyramid for clearer visualization, with the needs identified by Maslow arranged according to the hierarchy he created, from the base to the top (Figure 1).

The researcher's theory assumes that a person needs to gradually satisfy, either partially or fully, each type of need in order to progress to the next level. The reality of this theory is reflected in examples from everyday life, where individuals belonging to disadvantaged groups, whether materially, emotionally, etc., cannot focus on meeting higher-level needs, such as forming relationships or continuous self-improvement, because they lack financial stability. For this reason, the first four categories of needs are characterized as deficient; their fulfillment does not produce a significant difference in the well-being experienced by an individual. However, the lack of fulfillment in any of these levels creates discomfort. The needs situated at the highest level are considered *growth, self-realization*, as they induce a state of satisfaction and completeness for the human being. The classification was represented in the form of a pyramid for clearer visualization, with Maslow's identified needs arranged according to the hierarchy created, from base to top (Figure 1).

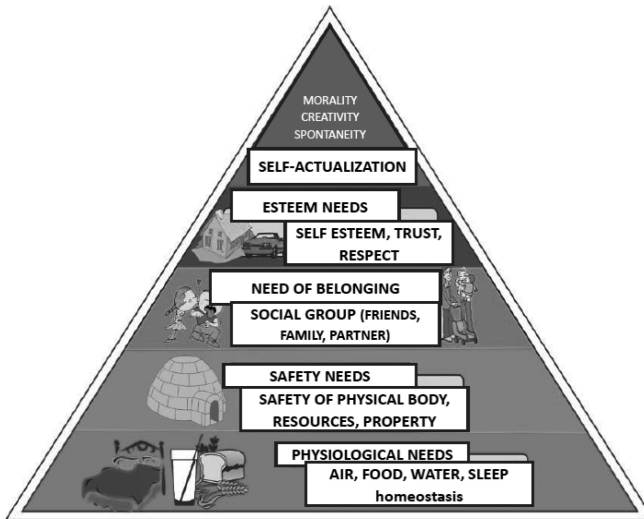


Figure 1. Maslow's pyramid

Source: <http://workshop-revival.ro/piramida-nevoilor-trebuintelor-a-maslow/>

Maslow's pyramid offers a perspective on the desire for belonging with which every individual is born, a fact further explored and confirmed by other researchers as well. Belonging represents “a profound emotional need of human beings”¹² and refers to “the fundamental drive to seek, establish, maintain, and protect strong social relationships”¹³. Sigmund Freud and John Bowlby associated this need with the primary reference relationship in human life, namely that formed between child and mother in the early years of life. Consequently, Bowlby, the creator of attachment theory, considered that the desire for belonging stems from the necessity of rediscovering in contact with others the intimacy and security that each person experiences in the early years of life in the relationship with their mother.

In contrast, Roy Baumeister considers that human beings are in fact born with the desire to form relationships, a desire not necessarily correlated with the mother-child bond, but rather with each person's need for recognition and intimacy. In a study, the American psychologist highlights that people are programmed to create strong social bonds, regardless of circumstances, and

¹² Nira Yuval-Davis, “Borders, boundaries and the politics of belonging”, in S. May; T. Modood; J. Squires (coord.), *Ethnicity, nationalism and minority rights*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 214-230, p. 215.

¹³ Kory Floyd, *Comunicarea interpersonală* [Interpersonal communication], Polirom, Iași, p. 303.