



TEAM *of* ART

THEATRICAL PERFORMANCES WHICH INCLUDE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

General Objective

The purpose of this practical sheet is to discover the environment of theatrical art and how to adapt and design theatrical performances to include people living with disabilities.

In this fact sheet, you will:

- ✓ Learn more about the theatrical environment in general,
- ✓ Learn more about the effects that theatre practice can have on people with disabilities,
- ✓ Learn more about the different activities that can be put in place to make theatrical performances more inclusive.

What you'll need:

- A room with a stage, chairs and cushions.
- A computer with internet access, a timer, soft music.

Challenges and settings

Background





The Greek origin of the word "theatron" means "place where one watches". Theatre represents "performances in which actors, placed in the circumstances and situations created by a text and the vision of a director, embody characters for an external gaze (the audience), in a limited time and space. Written dialogues are called plays, but there can also be written or even wordless plays. There are also musical theater works. The theater belongs to the family of scenic art.

Theatre is also about representation, interpretation and staging. It's a literal genre and the building in which the theatrical performance takes place.

In addition, there are several theatrical genres such as:

- **Tragedy:** A theatrical piece that stages a story with a fatal outcome.
- **The drama:** staging of a passionate hero and its tragic events
- **Comedy:** Seeks to make people laugh, to divestiture with a lighter plot
- **The farce:** Represents a short comedy putting forward stage games.
- **The boulevard theater:** puts in scene the world of the bourgeoisie

The five (5) pillars of theatre are: **listening; group strength; determination or self-confidence; expression of emotions and creativity.**

Note that theatrical art is a collective experience, it is generally practiced in group and is inscribed in the present time (no concrete traces as can be the painter and his painting).

A variety of questions come to mind when discussing the topics of inclusion, disability, art and aesthetics. Here are some of them: What is the place of disability in theatrical performances? How do we look at the person in a wheelchair performing in a play, highlighting the vulnerability of disability? Are we talking about accessibility or integration through art? Is the theater a means of sensitization, educational support, therapy?



Theatrical performances and people with disabilities in the 21st century

Disability is defined by the WHO (World Health Organization) as follows: "Disability is the interaction between subjects representing a medical condition (e.g. cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome or depression) and personal and environmental factors (e.g. negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings, and limited social support)."

It is estimated that more than 15% of the world's population lives with a disability (over one billion people). Theatrical art can be a good way to raise public awareness about different disabilities.

The challenges faced by the theatre community in making this art form more inclusive can be seen in different ways such as adapting venues, writing plays and approaching people with disabilities. There are a number of questions that one might ask themselves when thinking about theatre and disability for example:

1. How to include people with disabilities in a theatre company?
2. How to homogenize the rehearsal exercises?
3. How to allow people with disabilities to express themselves openly?
4. Are the performance spaces adapted to people in wheelchairs?
5. Can the visually impaired person include his guide dog in the scene for example?
6. How does the public view a mixed theatre piece (people with disabilities vs. non-disabled people)?

To meet the needs of disabled people and to be more inclusive in line with the 21 SDG's. Changes in social policy and the nation's narrative about disability culture through the availability of fully accessible, world-class theatres and storytelling is needed. The National Disability Theatre is one organization which

focuses on this goal and provides a guiding model in accessibility for the arts and cultural sector.

Actors, writers and directors reflect on how far theatres have come in boosting accessibility for audiences and creatives. More can be read in Isabel Flynn's article via this link:

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/jan/27/theatre-access-actors-writers-directors-theatres-accessibility>

Adaptation

- Theatre: Collaborative and collective experience.



Collaborative experience is defined as “work done in common by several people who pool their knowledge and skills, organize and coordinate their actions to obtain a result for which they are collectively responsible.” Theatre

allows for a collective experience. It also helps to break the isolation of people living with a disability and contributes to a better social recognition. Everyone is free to express themselves regardless of their difficulty or disability.

- Theatre: A playful experience

The notion of "play" refers to pleasure, to self-development. Theatre can be an excellent field of play, freedom, verbal and physical expression, communication and interaction for people living with a disability. It allows people to create a character and to play an active role in it.

Role-playing allows people with disabilities to express themselves, and it also allows the externalization of what is inside of us.



- The theater : Place of creation and personal development

Theatrical art is the meeting of several ingredients such as the actor, the audience and the role play. Investing in a creative project such as theater can allow people living with a disability to have another meaning to their lives. Creation can be a liberating experience and thus value the difference.

The use of the theatrical medium has multiple benefits such as, the improvement of self-esteem, the surpassing of oneself, the liberation of the expression of the emotions and the body language. It also contributes to the improvement of stress management, participates in the development of social skills, develops the imagination and has emancipating effects. Theatre allows one to exist within a group and to express oneself freely.



Practical examples and inspiration

Below are some examples of theatrical activities that can be used with people with disabilities (Down syndrome, learning disabilities, hearing and speech impaired, physical disabilities)

Activity 1 - Use of Space

The aim of this exercise is to appropriate the space. Learners are instructed to walk around a well-defined space (representing the stage). When the facilitator claps his hands, all the learners must freeze and so on. The movement is free (e.g., a student can stand with his hands in the air when the facilitator claps his hands).

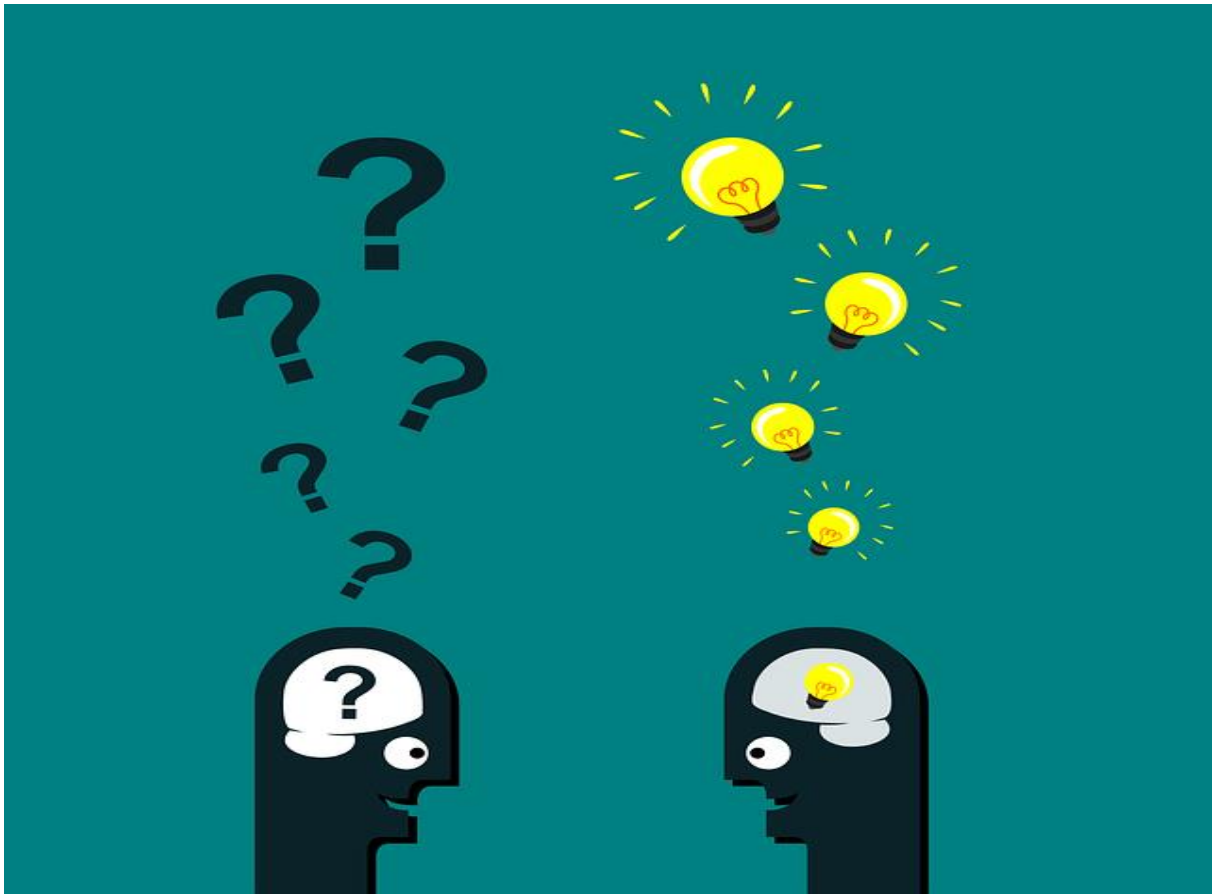
This activity allows you to develop your sensory perceptions, your curiosity, do a physical activity and learn to listen to instructions.



Activity 2 - Memorization Exercise

In a circle. In turn, each person gives his or her first name and the next person must memorize the other's name and say it out loud. The aim of this exercise is to work on memorization.

This activity allows us to work on memorization despite the handicap, to feel valued and to learn to participate in a group.



Activity 3 - Mime exercise

In small groups. The aim of this exercise is to mime a situation, a job, etc. and to make the groupmates guess it.

This exercise allows to work on the imagination, the coordination of movements, to develop another mode of communication. It also allows to solicit various senses such as touch and visual.



Activity 4 - Body expression exercise

The participants are free to move around the stage. The instructions for this exercise are that the facilitator should designate the first person to start. Each person in turn proposes a movement, which the others repeat. This exercise allows the participants to learn to trust each other, to know each other, and to listen to the instructions.



Activity 5 - Relaxation exercise

In a circle. Each person gives a shoulder massage to the person in front of them. The change of direction can be done after one to two minutes. Through this exercise, the learner learns to manage his emotions, to trust the other person and to reinforce his self-confidence. This exercise also allows you to learn to relax, channel your emotions and work on your breathing.



Additional resources

- Disability and health.

This resource will allow you to learn more about disability in general and the United Nations strategy for the inclusion of disability.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>

- Inclusion, Don' Forget About Us : Disabilities in Performing Arts.

This resource will help you learn more about the representation of people with disabilities in the arts.

<https://harvardpolitics.com/disabilities-in-performing-arts/>

In keeping with the inclusive nature of the Team of art project, here is an additional resource in French

- Video to illustrate silent theatre

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZVUs9_GVA4

