

## Education & Theatre

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### Editorial

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Dear reader,

A scientific journal that publishes one issue per year aims to monitor developments in research, theory and practice in the field as far as possible, but cannot always keep up with current events. Today, however, it is impossible to remain indifferent to an ongoing humanitarian catastrophe such as the genocide unfolding in Palestine, which can be witnessed in real time. Systematic violations of fundamental human rights, coupled with an absence of effective international accountability, raise critical questions about the functioning of institutions and international law. They also call into question the sustainability of the values that constituted the post-war democratic ideal. Eighty years after the United Nations was created, the ideas on which the international community is based are being strongly questioned. The simultaneous rise of far-right and authoritarian political rhetoric around the world is creating an atmosphere of insecurity that jeopardises our collective capacity for democratic dialogue, empathy and participatory action.

In this context, the theatre and drama education community cannot ignore the political and pedagogical nature of theatre as an art form. As Freire and Boal remind us, theatre and education are fields of dialogue, awareness and resistance to degradation. The current situation highlights an acute contradiction: while many governments remain silent or are complicit in the face of injustice, citizens, artists and educators around the world are developing discourses and practices of solidarity. They are claiming the self-evident right to human life and dignity in solidarity with a people who are being persecuted so unjustly, and who are being fought over and disappearing. Despite the weakening of legal and diplomatic institutions, the moral and political responsibility of communities remains active. In the streets, classrooms and theatre stages, new forms of public dialogue and critical consciousness are emerging. Perhaps more than anywhere else, there is a renewed belief that art and pedagogy can function as acts of freedom, memory and resistance.

Since its foundation, the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (TENet-Gr) has been working to build relationships of communication and cooperation with artists, academics, researchers, educators and activists from Palestine. This has created a network for the exchange of experiences and knowledge, formed through meetings at international conferences, joint campaigns and international programmes. For almost three decades, we have witnessed the global development of theatre and drama education, recognising how theatre and the performing arts serve as forms of artistic expression, social empowerment, psychosocial resilience, resistance and healing. In Palestine, from Gaza and Hebron to Bethlehem and Jerusalem, theatre takes the form of experiential testimony and collective empowerment, providing children, young people and communities with the means to survive and find meaning in perpetually challenging circumstances. In this issue, we

have decided to focus on the Eastern Mediterranean. As well as presenting local research, we have given a voice to Palestinian theatre practitioners, drama educators and artists who have made remarkable and consistent contributions to the international debate on theatre's power as a pedagogical and social practice. We hope these narratives will foster understanding, dialogue and solidarity within the international education and performing arts communities.

Therefore, readers will notice that this issue devotes just a few pages to local activities, work and events in order to make room for our special insert on Palestine. In the Research articles section, **Maria Filippopoulou-Iosifidou** and **Konstantinos Mastrothanasis** explore how theatre and drama pedagogy can foster resilience in children and adolescents during times of crisis. Through an extensive review of international literature, the authors demonstrate how drama processes – ranging from improvisation and dramatisation to puppetry – can serve as spaces for healing, emotional regulation and collective empowerment.

A Viewpoint article by **Antigoni Parousi** offers insights into the career of the iconic 20th-century puppeteer, Michael Meske. She explores how his work evolved and changed over the years, with a focus on the Swedish artist's creative presence in Greece from the early 1970s onwards.

In the Reports section, **Georgia Antoniou**, **Anastasia Lazaraki** and **Eugenia Zagoura** revisit the International Conference "Theatre/Drama and Inclusive Education", held in Athens in March 2025. This three-day event, organised by TENet-Gr, celebrated the tenth anniversary of the "it could be me – it could be you" programme and the completion of the "Theatre Makes Politics" initiative. The conference aimed to open a meaningful dialogue on inclusion in education. Through their eyes, we gain insight into the keynote speeches, workshops, presentations, events and artistic performances.

In the section dedicated to doctoral dissertation presentations, **Maria Tzovenaki** presents her research into school theatre productions and their pedagogical value, conducted in Cypriot high schools. Considering the context, process and outcomes of student performances, she explores whether creative and productive theatrical work constitutes a pedagogical act that goes beyond creating a theatrical end product.

Next is the special insert entitled "**Palestine: Performing arts as resistance, resilience and *sumud***". The articles clearly demonstrate that theatre practitioners, drama educators and the wider arts community in Palestine exist, survive and resist, utilising the performing arts as a means of survival and active social action. The applications of theatre are not confined to formal education; inevitably, they acquire characteristics of resistance and community theatre, extending to education, therapy and resilience.



This special feature begins with an introductory note from the Editorial Board, which provides a detailed overview of the contents. To summarise, the research section comprises three articles based on various research projects. The first article, by **Khitam Edelbi** and **Shams Almanal Timraz**, uses autoethnography to explore the Palestinian experience. It examines experiential art forms and emphasises the importance of storytelling in transmitting historical memory, preserving collective identity and envisioning the future. **Hala Al-Yamani**, **Abdelfattah Abusrour** and **Fadel Alsawayfa** used interpretive analysis and poetry in a mixed-methods design to examine aspects of the lives of young Palestinians. In qualitative research conducted with postgraduate students at Bethlehem University, they based their study on Ghassan Kanafani's novella *Men in the Sun*. Their analysis and the resulting found poems highlight dominant concepts such as homeland, emigration and a strong sense of belonging. In her case study, **Rand Barakat** explores the use of the arts in education as a means of promoting personal, pedagogical and community development within the context of Palestinian higher education. Her research is based on the accounts of three current and former students of Bethlehem University's MA programme in Creative Pedagogies and Community Practices.

In the Innovative Programmes section, a number of artists, activists and theatre/drama educators present and discuss their community-based work at the heart of recent developments. **Abdelfattah Abusrour** talks about his work and his belief that the arts can encourage peaceful and creative self-expression. He refers to this approach as Beautiful Resistance, a concept that emerged primarily through his work in the Aida refugee camp and with the cultural organisation Alrowwad. **Marina Johnson** re-examines *The Gaza Monologues*, an ASHTAR Theatre project that transformed the testimonies of young people in Gaza into an ongoing global act of remembrance and resistance. Fifteen years later, the project has been given new life through *Letters to Gaza*, an initiative inviting people worldwide to share messages of solidarity. **Marina Barham** and **George Matar** introduce us to the work and philosophy of Al Harah Theatre. For over 20 years, the theatre has worked with disabled and non-disabled children in schools, refugee camps and community centres. Theatre and drama are used as catalysts for emotional healing, self-expression and hope, helping to transform the experiences of children, women and people with disabilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. **Khalid Massou** presents an inclusive school theatre programme developed by Inad Theatre in partnership with the Effetà special school for deaf children and young people in Bethlehem. The partnership views theatre as an act of social justice, aiming to expand access, cultivate empathy and affirm the right to education for all. Finally, **Jenny Karaviti** outlines a number of actions organised by TENet-Gr's "4 Colours" working group to raise awareness and demonstrate solidarity with the Palestinian people. These focus, among others, on *The Gaza Monologues* by ASHTAR Theatre and The Freedom Theatre, based in the Jenin refugee camp.

In the Interviews section, **Marina Johnson** talks to Iman Aoun, the co-founder of ASHTAR Theatre, about using art as a means of survival, maintaining continuity and resisting oppression. They discuss the revival of *The Gaza Monologues*, the creation of *The New Gaza Monologues* and the most recent initiative: *Letters to Gaza*. Through her words, Iman connects artistic practice with political responsibility, shedding light on how theatre can serve as both a witness to history and a source of life amidst the siege. Finally, **Jenny Karaviti** introduces the recently formed Palestinian artist group “We”, whose members have been displaced in southern Gaza. During a live online discussion organised as part of the 2024 World Theatre/Drama & Education Day events, digital graphic designer **Alaa Al Jabari**, puppeteer and director **Mahdi Karira** and writer **Fidaa Ziad** talked about how their group came together, their experiences as artists during the war and the writing, visual arts and puppetry workshops they are currently running for children and women in Gaza. The discussion emphasised the ability of theatre to bridge distances, facilitate the processing of grief and foster hope in the face of disaster. Mary Kaldi edited the discussion transcript and organised the written presentation.

In the face of concepts and realities characterised by profound human suffering, such as apartheid, ethnic cleansing, forced displacement, violations of fundamental rights and the loss of land and memory, the contributors to this issue celebrate the power of creation. Here, art, education, theatre and the performing arts are not just aesthetic expressions, but also potent cultural and pedagogical gestures that affirm identity and dignity. Embracing the spirit of sumud – unwavering perseverance in the face of oppression – this issue is a collective testament to our belief in people's ability to create, communicate and maintain hope. We hope that reading this issue will encourage reflection, evoke emotion and inspire action.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Board

