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An **inclusive theatre programme** by **Inad Theatre** and its **role in education** Analysis of a training programme

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Abstract

This article aims to shed light on Inad Theatre's use of inclusive theatre techniques as an educational and pedagogical tool aimed to promote social inclusion and cultural empowerment for people with disabilities. The work conducted with the Pontifical Institute Effetà Paul VI will be analysed to present this experience, in order to highlight the training programme developed and assess its impact on students. The article will also explore how children interacted with the programme and experienced their journey. Inad Theatre believes in the role of theatre in enhancing the educational process, which aims to strengthen Palestinian cultural identity, instil social and ethical values, raise awareness, modify behaviour, develop various skills and promote a culture of love, forgiveness, acceptance of others and openness to other cultures.

Keywords: *Inclusive theatre, school theatre, hearing impairment*

Introduction

Khalid Massou, the author of this article, co-founded Inad Theatre during the First Intifada in 1988, providing himself, a passionate theatre enthusiast, with a space for self-expression and resistance against the Israeli occupation. He later majored in Theatre at the University for the Arts, Sciences and Communication in Chile. These studies enabled him to transform Inad Theatre from an amateur theatre company to a professional one. He then decided to study Education at the Al-Quds Open University in Palestine to improve his skills as a drama trainer. Finally, he studied Management of Cultural Institutions at the Dar Al-Kalima University. His drama training prompted him to undertake the study of people living with disabilities at the Effetà school in his capacity as a trainer for the programme.

Palestinian students face significant challenges, the most notable of which is the ongoing Israeli occupation that continues to deny children of their right to an education. Their freedom to move between Palestinian cities is restricted due to the Israeli regime's policy of segregation, which involves an apartheid-style wall and military checkpoints. This effectively turns Palestinian cities into prisons, preventing students from reaching their schools. Systematic Israeli restrictions, such as the demolition of schools and attacks on them, the intimidation of students and the arrest of both students and teachers, create an abnormal educational environment in Palestinian schools. These factors deny students of their right to an education and negatively affect their academic performance.

The right to education, which is guaranteed by international treaties, is systematically and openly violated by the Israeli regime, without any deterrent. Evidence of this can be seen in the experiences endured by Palestinian students in Gaza during wars of extermination. These wars have involved unimaginable crimes against children, families, schools, places of worship and hospitals, depriving people of their basic human rights.

This programme is designed for students of all ages who live in areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority. These areas include cities, villages, refugee camps and remote locations such as the Jordan Valley. Unfortunately, we cannot implement the programme in schools in Jerusalem as the Israeli occupation authorities prevent drama/theatre trainers from the West Bank from entering the city, due to military checkpoints and the requirement to obtain permits from the Israeli military authorities in order to teach there.

The drama and theatre education programme aims to enhance students' abilities in self-expression

through physical, vocal and emotional means. It also seeks to provide a safe space for students to talk about the various issues they face, which can affect their lives in different ways, whether socially, academically or politically.

A school theatre programme by Inad Theatre

Inad Theatre is one of the cultural institutions that has introduced drama and theatre education programmes into Palestinian schools, including government schools, schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which has supported people living in camps since the Nakba of 1948, private schools affiliated with charitable organisations and churches, and project-based schools.

At Inad Theatre, we believe in changing the traditional approach to teaching, which focuses on academic achievement. We advocate a liberating education that evaluates students' achievements in terms of their personal development and provide learning opportunities to help students face the future with sustainable knowledge and develop a fully integrated personality.

From this perspective, Inad Theatre considers school theatre to be an effective tool for building our children's resilience. This is achieved by making the educational environment more enjoyable for students and helping them to overcome the difficulties caused by military checkpoints. Furthermore, school theatre can encourage students to continue attending classes and avoid dropping out due to the systematic challenges imposed on them by the Israeli occupation. Many students at the Effetà school live outside the Bethlehem Governorate and must travel long distances every day. They must undergo inspections of their school bags and present their birth certificates proving their age, and their disability cards proving their hearing impairment before reaching school. This causes students to suffer on a daily basis. Therefore, theatrical activities have become an emotional release outlet, enabling students to express the fear and anxiety caused by these violations.

This programme comprises two components: educational theatre and child-to-child theatre. Educational theatre aims to theatricalise the curriculum through a teaching and learning process carried out during school hours, either as part of the set curriculum or as an extracurricular activity. In this context, the Inad Theatre drama trainer works with students to deliver educational theatre. A specific lesson from the set curriculum is selected, enabling the trainer and their students to transform the educational material into a theatrical script. This

highlights the educational and pedagogical goal, intended to be conveyed to students in an engaging way that leaves an emotional impact. This can be achieved through monologues and dialogues performed by the chosen characters discussing the educational and pedagogical topic, or through puppetry or other performance arts.

Child-to-child theatre produces performances for children and young people under the age of 18. Students lead the performances themselves, under the supervision and guidance of a drama and theatre trainer from Inad Theatre. This activity is usually carried out during school hours, often as part of an extracurricular programme. The theatrical work is produced collaboratively by the trainer and the students. This involves writing or dramatising the script, as well as developing the performance in all its technical and artistic details. The students play central roles, with a focus on them as the core of the teaching and learning process. The content of this work does not have to follow the curriculum.

Inad Theatre classifies both components as school theatre and delivers them in educational settings. This classification distinguishes between school theatre and professional children's theatre. The two are fundamentally different: those involved in professional children's theatre at Inad Theatre are professional actors who perform plays for children in theatres and schools. They have a specialised, professional team consisting of writers, directors, actors, technicians and administrators to produce these performances. In contrast, school theatre is primarily executed by drama and theatre trainers and students.

The philosophy of Boal and Freire within the Inad Theatre experience

Augusto Boal's vision led to the creation of the Theatre of the Oppressed. In his book (Boal, 1980), he explains that the Theatre of the Oppressed provides an opportunity for marginalised and disabled people to express their concerns and advocate for their rights. Inad Theatre views inclusive theatre as an extension of Boal's philosophy and vision.

In addition, Inad Theatre shares Paulo Freire's vision of education for the oppressed and liberation-oriented education. Freire (1970) emphasises the pivotal role of students in the educational process, as partners and co-creators of decisions. Students should have space for expression and creativity. From this perspective, Inad Theatre places students with disabilities at the heart of the creative process, working alongside teachers to develop the theatrical production and contribute to all of aspects of its creation.

Inclusive theatre and Inad Theatre

The school community in Palestine is diverse, encompassing students from various social, religious and political backgrounds, and with different physical and mental capabilities. Palestinian schools recognise the importance of social inclusion, particularly with regard to people with disabilities. Many specialised schools cater for this group, such as the Effetà school in Bethlehem.

Working with civil society institutions and schools for people with disabilities has led to the definition of inclusive theatre as "theatre that includes people with disabilities – whether motor, visual, or hearing impaired – and people without disabilities in the same theatre production, in order to highlight their rights in the cultural arena, address their societal issues and showcase their talents".

Inad Theatre seeks to build partnerships with schools in order to implement a collaborative drama and theatre programme. Effetà and Inad Theatre agreed to run a theatre/drama course incorporating inclusive theatre methods, and both parties worked hard to ensure the success of this initiative for the benefit of the students. Support from the school administration helped the students to successfully complete the theatre project.

The objectives of this initiative were as follows:

- Develop their personal and social skills, create a space for self-expression and confidence, and improve communication. This objective was achieved by carrying out a series of improvisation exercises with the students. For example, theatre games helped students to develop their communication skills and become more confident when expressing themselves in public.
- Create a cultured environment that treats people with disabilities with respect rather than sympathy, breaks down stereotypes and establishes policies that protect their rights. This objective was achieved by creating a safe space in which students could develop positive attitudes towards their disability and talk about it without shame. For example, Effetà students' participation in the school theatre competition alongside non-disabled students demonstrated how the latter expressed admiration for the Effetà students' performance, thereby highlighting their right to participate in cultural activities alongside their peers.
- Utilise inclusive theatre as an educational method to enable students to engage with the curriculum in a liberated, non-didactic manner, through drama/theatre activities that stimulate interactive and collaborative

learning. This objective was achieved by involving students in the writing process.

- Use inclusive theatre as an awareness-raising tool to highlight students' needs and challenges. This objective was achieved through their participation in the staging of "The Piper" during the school's Open Day, where they demonstrated their ability to address an audience and tackle educational issues.

Building and designing the training programme at Effetà

The goal was to create a theatre performance using inclusive methods. This involved conducting a series of training sessions with students at the Effetà school, adopting a general-to-specific approach. This educational approach in the learning process was applied to the field of drama, exposing students to general educational experiences before guiding them towards the specific objective of the performance. For example, theatre games and improvisation exercises were designed for Effetà students, beginning with general principles and culminating in the final outcome (the performance).

The programme targeted tenth-grade students and one ninth-grade student with hearing impairments. Twenty-five training sessions were held, each lasting an hour and a half and taking place once a week. Nine students of both genders participated.

Massou, the programme's trainer from Inad Theatre, was informed by the school's principal, Albert Hani, about the nature of the students' disabilities. Speech and hearing specialist Issa Zeitoun then explained that the students at Effetà school either have temporary or permanent hearing loss. Sometimes, this requires them to undergo cochlear implant surgery instead of wearing hearing aids, in order to avoid complete deafness. Zeitoun clarified that communication with students is achieved through sign language or lip-reading. However, Massou was afraid that he would have to communicate with the students through sign language, which he did not know. Before the training began, he was instructed to speak slowly and clearly so that the students could read his lips. Working with students who had pronunciation difficulties meant that the trainer had to focus on vocal exercises related to theatrical lines. These exercises were kept short, and specific words were selected to ensure clarity of understanding.

Practical and theoretical aspects

The practical aspect included theatre games. These were adapted from the original games by Augusto Boal (2022) to suit the nature of hearing impairments

of the Effetà students. The theoretical aspect, on the other hand, involved introducing the concepts of school theatre and inclusive theatre, as well as familiarising the students with theatrical elements such as the tools of the actor's trade and the components of a play.

From Inad Theatre's perspective, writing is a valuable form of expression. To facilitate creative writing, the trainer must be able to collect these improvisations, process them dramatically and shape them into a theatrical script, all the while preserving the original improvisations and respecting the students' work. Once the students have written the script, they do not need to memorise it – they can deliver their lines in their own way.

Inad Theatre believes in giving students sufficient space when they are involved in creating a theatrical production. This frees them from the constant stream of information and strict directorial notes, enabling them to think outside the box. This helps them to develop their own directorial vision, rather than becoming mere instruments manipulated by the director on stage. Regarding the assignment of roles, each student chooses the role they wish to play. In our opinion, this is particularly important when dealing with people disabilities. If students do not feel connected to the characters they are portraying, they will become like puppets in the trainer's hands, performing roles without feeling them.

During the process of composing the scenes, emphasis was placed on the emotional aspect. We believe in respecting students' expression of feelings, as this boosts their self-confidence. At the beginning of the training, the students were reluctant to express themselves, but after the trainer implemented a series of ice-breaker exercises, they became more confident in sharing their feelings. Sadseen, for example, was the only female student in the training group and was initially shy about acting in front of her classmates, but grew in confidence after the workshops.

During the preparation stage, the group helped to choose the music for the performance. The trainer asked the students to suggest pieces of music. During one of the training sessions, the students proposed various musical compositions, listened to them carefully and then made their selection. The Effetà group also visited the Inad Theatre, where they had the opportunity to select costumes to match the characters in the play from the costume storage room. Each student chose a costume to suit their character and discussed their choice with their classmates. Finally, the students began designing the set by looking at the available props in the

school. Based on their vision, they selected suitable props and used these to stage the scenes.

It was important for the trainer to perform with his students in the performance, as this fostered a friendly relationship with the team and made the students feel more secure on stage. Furthermore, his participation was an expression of appreciation and respect towards the students, emphasising the idea of inclusive theatre.

The students agreed that the story of the Piper would serve as a model. The objective was to instil the concept of justice in them by adapting the tale for the theatre. The trainer introduced them to the Brothers Grimm's tale, in which they expressed an interest. Once they had confirmed that they were happy for the story to be staged, they began to discuss and analyse it.

Training for the performance started with improvisation exercises to help the students to express the story's events in their own words and encourage them to engage in the creative writing process. First, they decided on the characters, established the order of events and identified the conflict. Then, the students improvised the events of the play sequentially.

The confrontation between the Piper and the Mayor was an example of the improvisation process. The Piper demanded his rightful monetary reward, but the Mayor refused, highlighting the conflict between the two characters regarding the importance of keeping promises. The trainer explained the event to Ahmed, who was playing the Piper, and asked him to express his claim in his own way, while the trainer played the Mayor. Both sides improvised the situation, with Ahmed expressing his stance with the

trainer's help. The latter reinforced the conflict between them by refusing to give Ahmed the reward. This contributed to the students' creative writing sessions, in which the trainer prompted them with details of each improvised scene, and they wrote down the dialogue themselves until the script was complete. Here is an example from the script:

(The Piper returns after freeing the town from rats.)

Piper: I came back and freed you from the rats as you saw.

Mayor: Thank you, God bless you.

Piper: Where's the reward? Where's your promise?

Mayor: What promise? That I would reward you?

Piper: A thousand dinars. You promised me a thousand dinars.

Mayor: Nobody promised you anything.

Everyone: Looks like you're a fraud.

Piper: I'm not a fraud, you promised me.

Abu Hamdan: Get out!

Abu Sultan: Get out!

Everyone: Get out!

Mayor: Do you want to take our money, a thousand dinars for a few rats?

Piper: I saved you from disaster, this is my right, and you promised me, and a promise from an honourable man is sacred.

Everyone: Get out!

(Music plays and the villagers gather to drive the Piper away. He leaves sadly.)



Before the performance, Massou made sure that the students arrived early to review the script. The trainer also led them in warm-up exercises to prepare their bodies and voices. Each student put on their costume and had their make-up applied by the trainer. The group remained backstage, focused, until the performance began.

The performance took part in a competition organised by the Palestinian Ministry of Education. It was also performed during the school's Open Day, which was attended by parents and students. Seeing students with disabilities step onto the stage and perform had an impact on both the students and the audience. The students felt confident and enjoyed performing in front of their families and peers. Parents felt proud watching their children celebrate their achievements on stage.

Opinions and evaluations

Albert Hani, the principal of Effetà school, commented on the experience: "It was an innovative and very beneficial pioneering experience, which boosted students' confidence and developed their performance skills. This improved their academic performance and their ability to communicate effectively".

Teachers Wafa Ghattas and Mira Bannoura said: "Our students had a unique experience. They found that acting was an effective way to communicate their feelings and thoughts. They used body language and facial expressions in a spontaneous and touching way, and theatre provided a safe space in which they could express themselves freely, without restrictions or judgements. This allowed them to unleash their innermost feelings and confront challenges. Moreover, this experience helped the teachers to understand the students' abilities and hidden potential".

Sadeen Saad, the student who played the role of the Mayor's daughter, stated: "At first, I was reluctant to perform in front of an audience due to my fear of judgement. However, after taking part in the training, I was able to develop my skills, feel more relaxed and gain self-confidence. It also helped me to discover and develop my talent for acting".

Ahmad Salah, the student who played the Piper, said, "I was shy at first, but I managed to get over my shyness by taking part in the play". He added: "I used to believe that people with hearing impairments were incapable of integrating into society. However, after participating in





this performance, I was able to challenge this perception and show that we can be creative".

Elissa Metwasi, a hearing and speech therapist at Effetà school, commented: "I strongly encourage the idea of inclusive theatre for its benefits in developing students' speech, language and auditory skills. We saw this improvement in their receptive language skills, as inclusive theatre helped them to understand speech and expand their vocabulary. We were surprised by the progress students made after going through this theatrical experience and by how much clearer they were able to pronounce words and sentences".

Working with Effetà school on this inclusive theatre initiative has helped Inad Theatre to develop mechanisms for working with students with hearing impairments. This has encouraged Inad Theatre to expand their work with Effetà and apply it in other schools. This will also help Inad Theatre staff members to develop their inclusive theatre skills, giving them a better understanding of the needs of people with disabilities and the most effective ways to interact with them to achieve better educational, teaching and theatrical outcomes.

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Khalid Massou is the artistic director and co-founder of Inad Theatre. He is also an actor, writer, director and drama trainer. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Acting and Education, as well as a Master's degree in Cultural Institution Management. He has worked as an actor, writer and director since 1987, participating in all of Inad Theatre's productions. He teaches drama and theatre at Dar Al-Kalima University and works as a drama trainer at Al-Quds University. Since 1994, he has performed in numerous productions for both children and adults with Al-Kasaba Theatre. He has participated in many Arab and international theatre festivals, and has received multiple awards and certificates of appreciation. He has presented children's programmes on the radio and television and has appeared in various Palestinian TV series and films. He specialises in community theatre and inclusive theatre.

