

## Education & Theatre

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Education & Theatre



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# education & theatre

A journal for the promotion of research on and practice  
of drama/theatre and other performing arts  
in formal and non-formal education

insert:  
tribute to  
**JOHN SOMERS**



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**Education & Theatre**

A journal for the promotion of research on and practice of drama/theatre and other performing arts in formal and non-formal education

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#### **Journal aims and scope:**

- To create a channel of communication between teachers, academics, artists and students with a particular interest in combining theatre, educational drama and performing arts with the educational process, wherever it takes place, inside or outside the school context.
- To advance knowledge and promote research in the field of theatre and performing arts at all levels of education, both nationally and internationally
- To promote dialogue and communication among its readers on theoretical and practical issues related to theatre and performing arts in education.

#### **The Journal's fields of interest:**

The journal covers all fields in which learning and theatre/drama co-exist such as:

- Theatre/Drama and Performing Arts teaching
- Theatre/drama as an educational means and teaching tool
- Community Theatre
- Theatre as social intervention
- Theatre in Education projects
- Playing-through-Theatre
- Drama Therapy, Psychodrama, Playback Theatre
- Other issues pertaining to the theory, practice and research in the field of theatre and performing arts in education.

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Dear friends,

2024 has been a year of productive work in theatre/drama in education at the practical, theoretical and research levels. But it has also been a year of significant losses for the international theatre/drama in education community. In February we said goodbye to Hans-Wolfgang Nickel, an iconic figure in the field of theatre pedagogy in Germany. A month later we were saddened by the loss of our own John Somers, an influential figure in drama education and applied theatre in the UK. At the end of August, Lakis Kouretzis, the man who introduced drama games to Greece, passed away. All three put students at the centre of their practice and spoke of inclusive processes that empower, inspire and give voice. Their approaches, albeit from different starting points and approaches, had strong social and political perspectives. They have been an inspiration to us as teachers and will be a compass for the rest of our journey. Their visions and voices remind us that in every age, the sounds of art and education echo the need to face humanity's challenges with strength, respect and solidarity.

For many years, such a perspective has helped to prioritise our choices and organise the way we read and interpret reality. And in these circumstances, we can only turn our thoughts to the people of Palestine and acknowledge their inhuman, unjust, long and exhausting ordeal. We are deeply moved by the following words of the poet Rafeef Ziadah:

*If my words could stop this  
I would create a rhythm  
Louder than the speed to too familiar  
I would learn the lyrics to every freedom song  
And write it on every building still standing in Razda  
If my words could stop this  
If they could stand in the way  
Of a bomb, a drone or a single bullet  
I would lay them at the feet of every child in Razda  
I would offer them like prayer  
Recite them over, and over, and over*



*Like the Holy Names of God*  
*I would write them endlessly*  
*Until all language breaks*  
*But words can't stop this*  
*So I offer you this silence and a poem*  
*And tell you are not to worry*  
*We are holding our ground*  
*We are holding our ground*  
*We are holding our ground*  
*We are holding our ground.\**

Convinced that humanity, justice and solidarity are not only moral values but also the basis for building a just and peaceful society, we are challenged to reflect on our responsibility as artists and educators to inspire understanding and hope, in whatever field of formal, non-formal or informal education we are active.

The research and projects presented in this issue of *Education & Theatre* demonstrate such wider social reflection and focus.

The research articles section begins with **Maria Koltsida**, who presents the historically shaped dimensions of art involving people with disabilities and the Greek cultural context. The relationship and engagement of disabled people with the arts is a constantly changing and evolving field, reflected in both practical artistic applications and theoretical framing. In the first part of this study, the author explores the different artistic practices involving disabled people and artists through specific, historically shaped dimensions. The second part discusses the relevant research in the field and the artistic practice and education of disabled people in the Greek cultural field. Through the theoretical analysis of the above data, the study attempts to discuss the ways in which the historically shaped dimensions in art involving disabled people and artists are intertwined with the artistic practice and education of disabled people in Greece.

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\* "If My Words", a poem by Rafeef Ziadah. Available at: [http://www.rafeefziadah.net/js\\_videos/if-my-words/](http://www.rafeefziadah.net/js_videos/if-my-words/)



**Roumpini Dafni** presents her research with adult students at the School of 18 Ano, a school unit within the Addiction Rehabilitation Unit of the Psychiatric Hospital of Attica. She applied and studied the impact of educational drama techniques in the form of documentary theatre on the cultivation of citizenship. The results of the quantitative research showed an improvement in the citizenship of the experimental group, but no statistically significant differences were found. On the contrary, analysis of the qualitative data indicated an improvement in civic skills and attitudes towards diversity, as well as an increased interest in social and political issues, accompanied by personal involvement.

The use of new technologies and digital media in the development and delivery of drama activities in an educational context has become an increasingly important area of research, study and experimentation in recent years. **Emilia Karantzouli** shows how digital drama can be used to enhance the role of today's students in an educational context, facilitating communication and collaboration. In this way, young people who, more than ever, need intense experience, play, action and interaction, while living, speaking and growing up in a world dominated by technology, will have opportunities for a more meaningful understanding of the complex concept of self in the modern technological world.

In the section on innovative programmes, **Georgina Kakoudaki** highlights the importance of theatre in education and the efforts to bridge the gap between artistic and pedagogical skills through innovative initiatives. The article presents "Creating Space In-Between Cultures", a programme that promotes experiential education by fostering intercultural exchange between Greece and the UK and offering participants the opportunity to engage with social and political issues through theatre. Supported by the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (TENet-Gr), this 10-year initiative aims to pave the way for the integration of drama and applied theatre into society, ensuring that the actor of the future will be able to respond to the needs of the community on stage, and that theatre educators will be equipped with high quality artistic tools when offering their services to the community.

Throughout 2024 there have been a number of very important international meetings. In the conference report section, **Miao Bin** outlines the work and themes of the 10th IDEA World Congress, held in Beijing in July. **Betty Giannouli** and **Nassia Choleva** present the scope and key ideas of the World Alliance for Arts in Education Summit, held in Athens in October and attended by a UNESCO representative for education, arts and culture. This important international conference was followed by the annual meeting of IDEA Europe representatives, also covered in this issue.

In the dissertation synopsis section, **Konstantinos Mastrothanasis** explains how he attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of theatre pedagogical methodologies for the language education and literacy of bilingual student populations, aged 10–12, in times of socio-health restrictions. The impact of urgent distance and in-person language immersion interventions based on applied theatre and drama for teaching reading in Modern Greek as a second language was investigated.

This issue concludes with a special tribute to our beloved teacher and mentor John Somers. It includes an introductory note by the editors, a viewpoint text by **Yi-Man Au**, conversations between several of his colleagues and students and Eirini Marna, and a republished version of his seminal article on the “compound stimulus”. Senior members of TENet-Gr remember John with memories and photos, and **Nikos Govas** prepares a list of all the writings (research, viewpoints, autobiographical, workshop descriptions and presentations) that John has generously offered over the years to support the association’s publishing work.

We wish you an enjoyable read!

Sincerely,  
The Editorial Board



# From **therapeutic** to **artistic-political** examples The **historically shaped dimensions of art** involving **people with disabilities** and the **Greek cultural context**

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**Maria Koltsida**

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece



*THEAMA: The Trojan Women (Summer Tour 2022). Photo: Antigoni Kourakou*

## **Abstract**

Art involving disabled people and artists is a field that is gradually attracting the interest of academics, researchers, artists and cultural organisations in Greece. However, the relatively limited theoretical and research scope of the field requires an exploration of different trends in relation to the arts, and in particular theatre and people with disabilities. The first part of this study explores the different artistic practices related to disabled people and artists through specific, historically shaped dimensions. The second part focuses on the relevant research and the structure of artistic practice and education of disabled people in the Greek cultural context. Through a theoretical analysis of the above data, the study attempts to discuss how the historically shaped dimensions of art involving people and artists with disabilities are intertwined with the artistic practice and education of disabled people in the Greek cultural space.

**Keywords:** *disability, theatre, art, arts education*



## Introduction

The relationship and engagement of disabled people with the arts is a constantly changing and evolving field, reflected in both practical artistic applications and theoretical framing. A significant part of the existing literature is devoted to cultural representations of disabled people in the arts, “where disabled people are symbolically present” (Karagianni, 2023, p. 145). Traditional and dominant representations of disabled people, as historically established in the media and the arts, portray disabled people as either “villains” or “victims”, associating the experience of impairment with tragedy, loss and healing (Kempe & Shah, 2016; Lewis, 2006; O'Reilly, 2009). Even today, disabled people as impostors, disabled people in need of charity and disabled people as subjects of inspiration make up the vast majority of available representations of disabled identities in the media and the arts (Hadley & McDonald, 2019). In the context of these negative representations, non-disabled artists continue to take the available theatrical roles of disabled characters, thus reproducing and fuelling the professional exclusion of disabled artists from the arts.

With regard to the issue of the participation of disabled people in the arts as producers and participants in the arts, specific dimensions have emerged and developed in the international literature. The historical exclusion of disabled people from the arts, among other things, and the consequent demand for disabled people's access to the arts has led to the development of different dimensions. Therefore, references to the different directions of art in relation to disability create a distinct field from the outset. Through an in-depth exploration of the relevant foreign and Greek literature, this study aims, on the one hand, to open a dialogue on the aforementioned dimensions that reflect the artistic practices in the field under discussion and, on the other hand, to outline the research trends and artistic practices and education in the Greek cultural space.

## Theoretical background

Studies on art and disabled people and artists are grouped into different categories, offering different dimensions and approaches to the field. According to Newsinger and Green (2016), these studies can be grouped into two categories and, by extension, form two dimensions: on the one hand, art therapy, i.e. art as a therapeutic tool, articulated within the spaces of health and social work professionals, and on the other hand, disability arts, which have been linked to empowerment, political and artistic imperatives. Disabled activist Michael Oliver (2009) aptly points out that the disability arts movement is

called upon to “fight to free itself from the domination of able-bodied professionals who define art as therapy” (p. 149) rather than as a cultural product. In other studies (Solvang, 2012, 2017), four dimensions are most widely recognised as framing art related to disabled people and artists: art therapy, outsider art, disability aesthetics<sup>1</sup> and disability arts. Through a spectrum map, Lee et al. (2019) attempt to schematise the two different dimensions, placing arts and disability, which encompasses art therapy and art by non-disabled artists that includes disabled people or art with relevant content, on one side, and disability arts, the art produced by disabled artists with or without relevant content, on the other. Similarly, in Hadley and McDonald's (2019) study, there is a variation in the terminology used in the relevant field, as arts and disability and disability arts are present, but there is also mention of the term “inclusive arts”.

According to Ineland (2004), theatre involving disabled people and artists can be divided into two categories: on the one hand, theatre is seen as art in which the meaning and value of the artistic work is emphasised and on the other hand, theatre is viewed as a method, as therapy, in the context of which its ameliorative effects on disabled people are discussed, reproducing the individual-medical model of disability. In the field of applied theatre, Hargrave (2015) distinguishes between the therapeutic dimension of theatre and social/participatory theatre, which reflect the individual-medical and social models of disability, respectively.<sup>2</sup> According to Hargrave, a third dimension is encapsulated in the term “arts and disability” and refers to the production of professional theatre performances with disabled artists, which has emerged in the first two decades of the 21st century. This distinction is made because similarities are often seen between the therapeutic and social/participatory approaches mentioned above, so that the particular benefits of disabled people's participation in the arts overlap with the resulting aesthetic product.

The first part of this study presents the different dimensions that art involving disabled people and artists has historically taken. The study refers to individuals, artists and creators as it is considered that the dimensions to be discussed do not concern or refer to artists as a whole. These dimensions include outsider art, art therapy, arts and disability, inclusive arts and disability arts. The second part of the study provides an overview of the Greek cultural landscape, with reference to research trends in the field, artistic practices, arts education and broader issues related to the arts involving disabled people and artists. The review of the historically shaped dimensions of art

related to disabled people aims to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which research and artistic practices and education of disabled people have developed in the Greek context.

## The historically shaped dimensions of disabled art

### *Outsider art*

In the 1940s, the French artist Jean Dubuffet described the art created by people with disabilities and people with mental health problems in institutions as *art brut*. A historical starting point for art brut was the collection of the psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn, who compiled a collection of artworks by people who had been institutionalised (Solvang, 2017). The term was reformulated in 1972 by the British art historian Roger Cardinal, who called it outsider art. According to Cardinal (2009), it is a personal and unusual art produced by individuals on the margins of society, who deviate from or are unaware of existing artistic norms and have not incorporated prevailing cultural influences, while the artistic creation is characterised by its unconventional nature. Central to the definition of outsider art is that it departs radically from mainstream cultural expectations of what art should look like and how it should be made (Cardinal, 2009). Historically, the best-known creators, collectors and curators of outsider art have had close relationships with institutions, but this relationship changed in the late 20th century with the emergence of independent collectors and gallery owners specialising in and working with this kind of art (Rhodes, 2000).

Criticism of outsider art has been multi-faceted. It has been argued that it largely reflected the treatment of disabled people in institutions based on ableism where disabled people were not considered capable of caring for themselves, expressing themselves, asserting themselves and making decisions (Chandler et al., 2023). Outsider art was dominated by non-disabled curators who collected the work of people in institutions. Creators were not paid for the works they sold, as the curators reaped the profits (Prinz, 2017), and were excluded from exhibitions and related speeches, a practice that continues into the 21st century (Kuppers, 2016). Although the creators of outsider art have not all been disabled, this kind of art is essentially tied to medicalised discourses and logics that are based on ableism (Wexler & Derby, 2015). At the same time, Davies (2009) raises questions about whether outsider art qualifies as art, arguing that the creative process is not understood. The boundaries of the nature of this art and the creators who engage with it are blurred, while reducing it to outsider art isolates the creators

and creates divisions. In this context, social marginality is causally linked to the aesthetic appreciation of the work of these creators, as their value lies in their non-relationship to both the society and the dominant artistic establishment (Hargrave, 2015). This dimension cuts off the creator from their work, exoticises disabled people and artists, fetishises their artworks and functions in a patronising way, as disabled people and artists themselves have no control or voice in the different stages of the artistic process.

### *Art therapy*

Art therapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses artistic means to achieve positive change and personal development in individuals (Hackett et al., 2017). Historically, art as a therapeutic tool has been used in institutional and hospital settings, special schools, day and rehabilitation centres and psychotherapy centres. It aims to use its practical applications as tools for the treatment of medical conditions or the psychoanalytical expression of repressed emotions, as well as for developing useful social skills related to communication, self-esteem, personal development of disabled people, etc. (Hadley & McDonald, 2019; Hall, 2010; Solvang, 2017; Wu et al., 2020). More specifically, drama therapy involves the use of theatrical elements and techniques (improvisation, role play, puppetry, mime, etc.) as therapeutic tools and is the point of convergence between therapy and theatre. The origins of drama therapy can be traced back to the 18th century, when theatre appeared in psychiatric hospitals in Europe to improve mental health through art (Bailey, 2006; Crimmens, 2006). It is argued that drama therapy builds self-confidence, increases self-awareness and responsibility, and improves communication and social skills (Crimmens, 2006). As reported by various drama therapy organisations (e.g., the British Association of Dramatherapists), the therapeutic aspects of drama and theatre are used in the drama therapy process to promote creativity, imagination, learning and the overall development of the individual.

Although the various forms of art therapy concern artistic practices with disabled people as well as with other social groups, they tend to be discussed separately from professional, experimental and politicised artistic practices for, with and by disabled people (Hadley & McDonald, 2019). At the same time, the therapeutic dimension of art has received little attention from disability studies scholars, theatre practitioners and applied theatre practitioners, in contrast to their interest in the performing arts and their aesthetic and social implications (Hadley & McDonald, 2019; Hargrave, 2015; Sandahl & Auslander,



*Disabled Artists Movement: The first universally accessible musical performance "Diptych" by Alkinoos Ioannidis on Euripides' Bacchae, Megaron Athens, March 2018. Photo: Nikos Karanikolas*

2005). The approach of art as therapy for people with disabilities is based on paternalism (Barnes & Mercer, 2001) and adopts medicalised discourses that aim to improve or heal individuals and overlook the socio-political, economic and structural aspects of their disablement (Miller et al., 2020). Similarly, related research tends to limit itself to advising practitioners in the field on how to improve people's mental health and personal development, obscuring issues of social and political agency and power that are central to other studies on arts, culture and disabled people (Hadley & McDonald, 2019). While the value of art to the development and growth of the individual is not generally denied or questioned, the association of disabled people with the arts exclusively through the lens of therapy and the use of the arts to normalise disabled people is particularly problematic.

### *Arts and disability*

In the term "arts and disability", we identify a dimension that could be a precursor to inclusive arts, as they share a number of common assumptions. According to Perring (2005), arts and disability refer to artistic practices that are usually organised by non-disabled artists or organisations run by non-disabled artists and that involve disabled people, especially people with intellectual impairments. It is a practice that usually reflects the values and

interests of non-disabled artists (Perring, 2005). It is also known as a facilitative arts practice, where non-disabled artists work with disabled people (Hadley & McDonald, 2019). The aim of arts and disability was to ensure the integration (and later inclusion) of disabled people in art and creative expression. Although it shares common elements, it is a separate category from art therapy (Perring, 2005). As mentioned in the introduction, in his distinction between the therapeutic dimension of theatre and social/participatory theatre, Hargrave (2015) locates a third dimension of arts and disability, namely the production of professional theatre performances by mixed theatre groups. These groups seek to produce theatrical products that are not treated as a form of social charity, but are instead funded, judged and critiqued by audiences for the substance and quality of their artistic material. Within this dimension, the artistic process and its various aspects are largely controlled by non-disabled participants; the artistic work itself is not exclusively focused on issues of concern to disabled people and is often mediated by non-disabled participants.

### *Inclusive arts*

The notion of inclusion has only entered the field of art in the last decade, which shows why it has not been sufficiently clarified and theoretically framed as a dimension. What the relevant studies have in



THEAMA: "Antigone: Act I" (ISON Theatre 2022). Photo: Gkikas Melachrinou

common in terms of defining inclusive art is that it refers to artistic partnerships between disabled and non-disabled artists to produce artworks that, according to Hadley and McDonald (2019), contain a strong inclusive agenda. Using an outdated term, Kramer and Freedman Fask (2017) refer to creative collaborations between people with "different abilities" in theatre, music, visual arts and elsewhere. In their work, Fox and Macpherson (2015) use the term "inclusive arts" to describe creative collaborations between people with intellectual impairments and non-disabled artists. Inclusive arts seek to develop the abilities, knowledge and skills of those involved, so that these creative collaborations produce works of art or creative experiences of high aesthetic quality. In this context, the main objective is to produce high quality artistic outputs with socio-political objectives being of secondary importance, unlike other related social/participatory practices where disabled participants are perceived as those in need of support or representation. At the same time, non-disabled artists are removed from the traditional role of the helper and are treated as collaborators (Fox & Macpherson, 2015).

For Nijkamp and Cardol (2020), inclusive theatre refers to the artistic partnership between people with intellectual impairments and non-disabled artists, where the aim is to create an open inclusive and egalitarian context for collaboration and to

develop the creativity of the participants through artistic expression. Using the example of Odyssey Theatre, an inclusive theatre organisation in the UK, Wooster (2009) identifies inclusive theatre as theatre that is not devoid of aesthetic quality. It is a creative process that involves people from different backgrounds, addresses the issue of inclusion and aims to involve disabled people in the arts from which they have historically been excluded (Barton-Farcas, 2022). As discussed above, inclusive theatre – disabled and non-disabled artists creating together – breaks the traditional pattern of non-disabled artists supporting the disabled artists (McRae, 2018).

The main common premise of inclusive arts and arts and disability is the partnership of disabled and non-disabled people, with a focus on people with intellectual impairments. At the same time, although aesthetic value appears as a primary goal, the inclusive agenda is common to both dimensions. The role of non-disabled participants appears to be critical, and although they are theoretically in the position of equal partners, it is not clear whether changes in the traditional and established power relations between disabled and non-disabled people are taking place.

### *Disability arts*

The disability arts movement emerged in the mid-1980s as a cultural manifestation of the disability movement and resulting disability politics that





*Disabled Artists Movement: The first universally accessible screening of the film Little England at the Greek Film Archive, September 2015. Photo: Nikos Karanikolas*

developed in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom (Darke, 2003; Hargrave, 2015; Solvang, 2017). The disability arts movement was based on the social model of disability (Cameron, 2007), which shifted the focus from the individual's impairment to the physical and social environment that disabled them. In this context, the focus was on disability, through arts and culture, as a collective and personal experience arising from the socio-economic exclusion experienced by disabled people (Darke, 2003). The negotiation of disability issues in socio-political terms therefore changed the way disabled people engaged with arts and cultural processes (Barnes, 2003). The disability arts movement argued strongly that the only acceptable art was that which was demonstrably owned, controlled and performed by disabled artists (Hargrave, 2015). The cultural expression of the disability arts movement is encapsulated in the term "disability arts", which refers to artworks created by people with disabilities that are inspired by the experience of disability (Solvang, 2017) either in content or form (Sandahl, 2006). Disability arts are directly related to the disability movement, as its rise was the substrate for the development of disability arts (Sutherland, 1997). It is a vibrant and rich field in which disabled artists create work that expresses their identity as disabled people (Jacobson & McMurphy, 2010;

Sutherland, 1997). Historically, a key focus of disability arts has been the issue of inclusion, the ability of disabled people to make art and actively participate in the art-making process, and by extension, the expression of their individual and collective experiences and the recognition and assertion of their rights (Barnes & Mercer, 2001; Hadley & McDonald, 2019; Hargrave, 2015). During the development of disability arts in the 1990s, there was a growing interest in the career prospects of disabled artists and their professional identities as artists, moving the discussion away from seeing art as a means of transcending the self or proving the worth of disabled people (Cameron, 2007). In this regard, Hargrave (2015) notes that disability arts negotiate the oppression of disabled people, aim to empower them and constitute a tool of resistance against the dual oppression of both dominant culture and art therapy. The art produced by disabled people themselves further aims to undermine traditional aesthetic and social values by causing or attempting to remove ableism (Darke, 2004), i.e. "a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human" (Campbell, 2009, p. 5). Disability arts challenged the bourgeois and dominant assumptions that defined what was and was not art.

As a direction, in attempting to create and develop a disability culture in opposition to the dominant hegemony of normality, it not only broke with but also undermined core values and exposed the production processes of the dominant culture (Darke, 2003). In contrast to mainstream artistic trends that promote what the disability community and scholars in the field call inspiration porn<sup>3</sup> (Sandahl, 2018), disability arts do not aim to be didactic and evoke empathy, nor do they seek to train audiences to embrace “diversity”. In this regard, Abbas et al. (2004) state:

Disability Arts and Culture marks the growing political power of disabled people over their narratives, as disabled artists use it to counter cultural misrepresentation, establish disability as a valued human condition, shift control to disabled people so they may shape their narratives and bring this disability controlled narrative to wider audiences. (p. 1)

An important starting point for disability arts was the establishment of the London Disability Arts Forum in 1986, an organisation controlled by and employing disabled people (Sutherland, 2008). The Forum’s goal was to create an organisation to provide financial support to arts organisations in London (Sutherland, 2008; Vasey, 2004), to develop a disability culture informed by the collective experience of disabled people, to create opportunities for the production of artistic work by disabled people and to establish a framework for expression through different art forms (Vasey, 1989). As disabled activist Vic Finkelstein (1987) notes, “We must be clear that it is essential for us to create our own public image, based upon free acceptance of our distinctive group identity” (p. 4). As a branch of disability arts, disability theatre is created by disabled artists and seeks to abolish stereotypes, challenge the notion of stigma, renegotiate disability as a human condition with value and has both a political and an artistic orientation (Johnston, 2012, 2016).

In this context, the disability arts movement has referred to the practice of *cripping up*, i.e. non-disabled actors taking on theatrical roles of disabled characters (Kociemba, 2010; Ryan, 2018). The process of non-disabled actors auditioning for and playing the roles of disabled characters refers to the anachronistic and offensive practice of *blackening up*, i.e., the portrayal of African American characters by white Hollywood actors, when there was clearly an abundance of African American professional actors. As Ryan (2018) notes, while the practice of *blackening up* is now seen as highly problematic and condemnable, the practice of *cripping up* is still rewarded with accolades and rave reviews. This practice is often viewed as an indication of the artistic merit

and acting ability of non-disabled actors portraying the relevant roles (Kuppers, 2001). Performances in which non-disabled artists play theatrical roles of disabled characters are inherently inauthentic, activate and reproduce the prejudices and fantasies of the dominant culture, and perpetuate the discrimination and exclusion of disabled people from employment in the arts (Kociemba, 2010). The way the entertainment industry works by selecting famous and established actors to play disabled roles in order to achieve financial success and profit and the argument by producers, directors or casting directors that there are no disabled actors suitable for the role in question, are some of the reasons that lead to this practice.

## The Greek cultural context

### *Research review*

As has already been shown, the field of arts involving people with disabilities remains unexplored in Greek literature, both in terms of research and theoretical studies (Koltsida, 2022; Koltsida & Lenakakis, 2019). The theoretical and research work found in this area concerns the review of disability theatre groups and mixed groups (Economou & Perifanou, 2019; Koltsida, 2022; Koltsida & Lenakakis, 2017), the study of drama production and the representation of disabled people on stage (Koltsida, 2023; Koltsida & Lenakakis, 2019), research on other arts such as dance and visual arts involving disabled people and artists (Alexias et al., 2019; Kanari & Souliotou, 2021; Karagianni, 2023), the mobilisation of disabled artists (Rellas, 2022) and the study of public exhibitions or performances of heteromorphic bodies (*freak shows*) (Karagianni & Koutsoklenis, 2023). At the same time, there are studies that are influenced by the individual-medical model of disability in terms of discourse, practices and approaches and that focus on the therapeutic effects of art and theatre on disabled people (Christodoulou, 2016; Kladaki et al., 2016; Kyriakou, 2016; Michailidou & Petra, 2016; Mpella et al., 2019; Stratou & Tsiaras, 2019; Tego-poulou, 2020; Tsibidaki & Kladaki, 2016). The artistic and theatre pedagogical programmes of the above studies are characterised by a single-subject approach, as they address specific categories of impairment based on medical diagnostic criteria (e.g., research on children with autistic spectrum disorders or children with moderate mental retardation, etc.). Finally, research conducted by the author (Lenakakis & Koltsida, 2017), although not based on an individual-medical model of disability, focuses on research findings related to the positive impact of the rehearsal and performance process on disabled subjects, without including non-disabled subjects.



## Artistic practice and education

The involvement of people with disabilities in theatre began in the 1980s and intensified in the late 2000s and early 2010s, with the establishment of amateur and professional artistic and theatrical groups and collectives. The historical Greek Deaf Theatre, founded in 1983, ARTimeleia, En Dynamei, THEAMA, the Disabled Artists Movement and Crazy Colours, among others, have been active on Greek theatrical stages (Koltsida, 2022), but without sharing an understanding of disability and the art of theatre. As an example, the Disabled Artists Movement clearly uses the social model of disability in the art field both theoretically and practically (Karaigianni, 2023), while the THEAMA group incorporates the philosophy of the social model in the context of their performances (Fanouraki, 2019). Despite the long-standing artistic presence and activity of these groups and collectives, disabled people themselves have little or no access to institutionalised professional theatre training (Alexias et al., 2019). As reflected in a survey of disabled participants in European arts organisations, including those in Greece, a common problem reported by the majority of disabled artists was their exclusion from higher education or opportunities for professional development as artists (Leahy & Ferri, 2023).

In Greece, the admission of disabled candidates to drama schools, and thus the prospect of professional training in theatre and acting was impossible because disabled people were institutionally excluded from artistic education until 2017 (Alexias et al., 2019; Koltsida & Lenakakis, 2017; Rellas, 2022). As Alexias et al. (2019) note, “[d]isability was – and still is – institutionally incompatible with professional training in dance and theatre by Greek standards” (p. 176). According to the Regulation on the organisation and operation of Higher Schools of Dramatic Art (Department of Acting), “candidates must also be able-bodied, as certified by the examination board” (P.D. 370/1983, art. 8, par. 1c), while the same passage is included in the Presidential Decree on the organisation of the operation of the Higher Schools of Dramatic Art of the National Theatre and the National Theatre of Northern Greece (P.D. 336/1989, art. 6, par. 3). A similar criterion for admission can also be found in dance education where, according to the Regulation on the organisation and operation of Higher Schools of Dance, in order to be considered suitable for admission, candidates are subjected to a health examination to determine whether they are “healthy, fit and of suitable physique”, while “[the] examinee is not considered fit if he or she has a serious physical defect or



THEAMA: Nekrassov (Apo Michanis Theatre 2018). Photo: Penny Delta



disease" (P.D. 372/1983, art. 8, par. c). Although the criterion of "able-bodiedness" has been abolished following protests and mobilisation by associations and groups of disabled people active in the arts (Disabled Artists Movement, THEAMA, etc.) (Rellas, 2022), barriers to participation in arts education and employment for people with disabilities remain, as the corresponding criterion for admission to dance schools is still in force (Alexias et al., 2019). At the same time, the alternative for disabled people to attend private drama schools is expensive and therefore excludes a particularly large proportion of disabled candidates.

While access to arts education for disabled people can be achieved through national exams and admission to higher education institutions (HEI), this possibility is also linked with a number of issues that lead to the educational exclusion of disabled people in the field of the arts. The enrolment rates of students with disabilities in higher education without national exams, which for extended periods appear to be lower taking into account the places reserved for them (5%) (Vlachou & Papananou, 2018), raise questions about their access to higher education, as well as the broader educational policy pursued with the existence of segregated educational structures (special and general education). Despite the theoretical possibility of access for disabled people to university departments, research shows that attending higher education is particularly difficult for disabled people due to both architectural/structural barriers and inaccessible teaching methods and resources (Koutsoklenis et al., 2009; Vlachou & Papananou, 2018). Despite fragmented and isolated initiatives by university departments to establish support centres for students with disabilities, a broader institutional and integrated system of accessibility support mechanisms and tools is lacking in HEIs (Vlachou & Papananou, 2018). As far as higher education in theatre is concerned, it is provided by three departments of Theatre Studies (Department of Theatre Studies of the University of the Peloponnese, Department of Theatre Studies of the University of Patras and Department of Theatre Studies of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) and the School of Drama of the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Koltsida, 2022). However, of the four departments mentioned, only two (the School of Drama of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the Department of Theatre Studies of the University of the Peloponnese) offer arts diplomas (Puchner, 2014).

At the theoretical level, people with disabilities are allowed to take part in the entrance exams for drama schools and are given the possibility to



take the national exams for admission to higher education institutions, but no substantial changes and modifications have been made in the educational procedures, accessibility, content and teaching methods of the courses in the relevant educational institutions. The lack of professional training in theatre leads theatre groups to create their own programmes and workshops for the training of their disabled members and artists, which is observed both internationally (Calvert, 2009) and in Greece (Economou & Perifanou, 2019).

The problem of the exclusion of people with disabilities from arts education is deeply intertwined with the aforementioned practice of crippling up, which can also be observed in the Greek cultural landscape, where the very few artistic projects with disabled characters usually feature non-disabled actors in these roles. For example, during the 2021–2022 theatre season, *“The Intouchables”* by Olivier Nakache and Éric Toledano, directed by N. Haniotakis, was presented at the NEOS Akademos Theatre, where a non-disabled actor played a disabled character. Similarly, during the 2018–2019 theatre season, *“The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time”* by Mark Haddon was presented at the Tzeni Karezi Theatre in a theatrical adaptation by Simon Stephens and directed by V. Theodoropoulos, in which a non-disabled actor plays a disabled teenager. A cycle of exclusion is thus clearly reflected, as chronic social oppression, the institutional obstruction of disabled people in professional training in the arts, the devaluation of disabled artists and the pervasive disablist notions of what theatre should be like lead to the practice of crippling up, which in turn leads to the re-exclusion of disabled people professionally, economically and more broadly.

## Discussion

The above analysis has explored the individual dimensions that have shaped the arts, with a focus on theatre, that involve, engage with and are produced by people and artists with disabilities. It is clear, however, that this is an evolving field of research in constant dialogue with the cultural expressions and practices of art involving disabled people and artists. A key distinction between these dimensions is the degree of control that disabled artists have over the work produced and the various aspects of the artistic process. The issue of control and the promotion of disabled artists to key roles where they make decisions and have a voice has been a goal of disability arts for the past 30 years (Hadley, 2020). A second differentiation of these dimensions can be found in their purposes, which undoubtedly relate to ideological and political assumptions around art

and disability. In this context, practices that have therapeutic, artistic or political purposes, or a combination of these, are reflected through the above dimensions.

As discussed, there is a strong tendency both at the theoretical level and at the level of arts education – through its presence or absence – to view art as a means and tool for the improvement and development of disabled participants. This orientation cannot be studied and explained in isolation from the broader national disability policies. A typical example is the educational policy for disabled students and young people, which is articulated through segregated education, takes place in segregated structures (special schools) and reproduces discourses that refer to the individual-medical model of disability (Karagianni & Koutsoklenis, 2023). The projects that use art as a tool exclusively for people with disabilities, and even more so for people with specific impairments, and that aim to have a therapeutic effect on individuals reflect the corresponding corrective and normalising character of special education. As has already been shown, the way in which each dimension is framed varies depending on its purpose and content, the theoretical and ideological basis of said dimension and the power relations of those involved. In this context, disability arts scholars have pointed to the phenomenon of pseudo-alliance, i.e. support from non-disabled people at the level of theoretical proclamation, but a failure to engage in practical and meaningful participation in the elimination of disability oppression and social change (Hadley, 2020; Hargrave, 2009; Schmidt, 2017). As disability activist and artist Paul Anthony Darke (2003) notes:

The problem is that you will almost never see any actual Disability Art in a theatre, museum, gallery or even at a Disability Arts festival. [...] Mostly, though, what you will see is pseudo-therapy workshop products or impairment-orientated works. Usually it will be from a craft basis or developed in an empowerment course, superficially structured within the social model of disability but actually impairment-specific. (p. 133)

The historically shaped dimensions related to art that involves, engages with and is produced by people and artists with disabilities are part of a dynamic and constantly evolving field and their analysis aims to initiate a dialogue in the Greek academic and cultural space. It is imperative that in Greece, too, the proclamations of inclusion of people with disabilities should not be limited to theoretical slogans that ignore the barriers in education and art, the lack of accessibility to the theatre stage and the dominance of non-disabled people in the art field.

To conclude, the mapping of the barriers to the artistic development of people with disabilities, the identification of the “options” available for professional engagement with the arts in Greece and the existing research suggest the need for both further investigation in the field and changes at the institutional level. In terms of research, it is necessary to focus and delve into artistic practices that actively relate to the demands and rights of disabled people and that promote the elimination of oppression and universal accessibility to art, without downgrading their artistic value.

## Notes

1. For Siebers (2010), disability aesthetics seeks to emphasise its presence in cultural representations and to challenge the dominant aesthetic criteria of art based on ableism. Drawing primarily on examples from the visual arts, disability aesthetics opposes the representation of the human condition without impairment as the only defining aesthetic.
2. For an extensive analysis of the social and individual-medical model of disability, see Karagianni and Koutsoklenis (2023).
3. Inspiration porn, according to Grue (2016), refers to the portrayal of disabled people in ways that objectify them, individualise their disability and devalue their lives. It is the process of objectifying disabled people for the purpose of inspiring non-disabled people by reproducing and promoting ableism.

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# Documentary theatre as a means of cultivating and strengthening citizenship among adult students in the School of 18 Ano addiction rehabilitation unit

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## Abstract

This article refers to an action research project investigating the impact of documentary theatre as a means of cultivating citizenship among the adult students of the School of 18 Ano, the Addiction Rehabilitation Unit of the Psychiatric Hospital of Attica. To this end, twelve interventions based on documentary theatre and educational drama techniques were designed and delivered to 11 students during the 2022–2023 school year. A mixed research approach was adopted to ensure a more comprehensive investigation of the research questions. The analysis of the quantitative data showed an improvement in the citizenship of the experimental group but no statistically significant differences before and after the interventions. On the contrary, the analysis of the qualitative data suggested an improvement in civic skills (collaboration and critical analysis), attitudes (participation and diversity) and interest and personal involvement. This improvement is indeed linked to the techniques of documentary theatre.

**Keywords:** *documentary theatre, drama in education, active citizenship, adult education, social reintegration, rehabilitation*

## Introduction

The cultivation of citizenship has always been a central objective of educational systems and applied curricula. However, both the content attributed to it and the educational practices chosen vary considerably. Given that citizenship is defined in different ways and that the emphasis placed on citizenship depends on the type of society and political community we seek (Mouffe, 1992, p. 225), the choice of educational practice is ultimately a political choice.

For this reason, the present research examines the possibilities offered by drama in education, and more specifically documentary theatre, for cultivating skills and attitudes of active citizenship in the context of a transformative education aimed at personal, social and educational change in an educational unit (School) that is part of an addiction treatment programme (18 Ano) whose goal is, by definition, change. To this end, twelve interventions based on documentary theatre were designed and implemented to the students of the School of 18 Ano, and their results were compared with those of a control group (students of the school who attended classes based on traditional teaching methods) in an action research context.

## Theoretical background

### *Citizenship education*

The dominant concept of citizenship does not focus on participation but is limited to the allocation of rights and duties within the framework of a nation state (Keating, 2014, p. 43). However, linking citizenship to a homogeneous community, such as that of a nation state, is not possible in modern multicultural societies (Turner, 1997, p. 13). The problems faced by modern citizens (wars, violence, racism, poverty, environmental degradation) are not amenable to “political regulations” but are determined by public attitudes, popular movements and everyday actions (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz & Zalewska, 2017, p. 142).

The emphasis on action and citizen participation also marks a shift towards active citizenship (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009, p. 461). Active citizenship is defined as the participation in civil society, community and/or politics, characterised by mutual respect, non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy. Based on this definition, it encompasses a wide range of participatory activities ranging from participatory democracy (protest and social change) to representative democracy (including actions such as voting) as well as participation in the everyday life of communities (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009, p. 462).

However, according to Pigkou-Repousi (2012, pp. 12–13), there is an “educational paradox” in the

Greek educational system, a contradiction between, on the one hand, the educational objective of fostering active citizenship and, on the other hand, the content and pedagogy that offer students very limited opportunities for active participation in real contexts, turning them into passive receivers, able to adapt to the world but not to change it, into spectators rather than recreators of reality (Freire, 1974, pp. 82–83).

If citizenship education is indeed aimed at mobilising students and transforming them into active citizens, as stated in the European Commission’s report on citizenship education in Europe’s schools (European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2017, pp. 84–88), to be effective it must be active (learning by doing), interactive (discussion and dialogue), relevant (real-life issues), critical (autonomous reflection), collaborative (teamwork and co-operation) and participatory (students have a say in their learning). Citizenship education encompasses a wide range of teaching practices, such as the climate and relationships within the school (the informal/hidden programme), the experiences through different school activities, the behaviour of teachers (who act as role models) and partnerships with the community, which aim to cultivate not only knowledge but also attitudes and behaviours (Howe & Covell, 2005, p. 84; Keating, 2016, p. 5).

In order not to remain abstract and procedural, political and civic engagement requires not only dialogue and critical awareness, but also the moral and emotional engagement of students (Pigkou-Repousi, 2016, pp. 96–99). This kind of engagement results from “care” and “hope” and forms an alternative concept of citizenship that promotes political participation by integrating the personal as a means to achieve the political (Pigkou-Repousi, 2016, p. 71). Thus, students and teachers, in relationships of companionship and solidarity, can become active subjects in the educational process in order to fight for their emancipation (Freire, 1974, p. 96) and to transform themselves and their society.

### *Cultivating citizenship through the art of (documentary) theatre*

Applied theatre, which includes dramatic forms outside of mainstream theatre institutions with the aim of benefiting individuals, communities and societies, for example through education on active citizenship, emphasises activity and involvement in theatre making and rejects passivity and uncritical consumerism (Nicholson, 2005, pp. 2, 10). Participation in theatrical processes in itself provides a second-order experience of full and equal participation in the processes of democratic freedom (Choleva et al., 2021, p. 67; Neelands, 2007, p. 315).

Furthermore, in drama in education, by simultaneously participating in the real and the imaginary worlds of drama (Pigkou-Repousi, 2019, p. 188) in a state of "metaxis" according to Boal (2006, p. 74), students transform "the scene in a rehearsal space for real life" (Boal, 1995, p. 44). The hybridity of the processes of drama in education between the real and the imaginary, between spectator and actor, between observation and performance, between experience and reflection promotes and develops the dichotomy of thought and action (Pigkou-Repousi, 2019, p. 189) towards the transformation of reality through critical reflection (Freire, 1974, p. 108).

The close relationship between theatre and citizenship becomes even closer in the case of documentary theatre, whose function, according to Ververopoulou (2018), coincides with the goals of citizenship education (p. 175). The performance of documentary theatre presupposes an active audience not only in relation to the performance and its subject, but also in general – active spectators and, ultimately, active citizens (Stamati, 2019, p. 30).

Apart from their political nature, all forms of documentary theatre have in common their relationship to the real. Documentary theatre is not based on fiction but on the use of documents, such as narratives, eyewitness testimonies, letters, diaries, files, reports, interviews, videos, films, photographs, objects, maps, scientific studies, laws, proceedings, etc. in order to combine archival material, research and technology with embodied memory, oral history, oral theatre culture and body language (Morris, 2014, p. 10; Zoniou, 2017, p. 43). Its relationship to the real is not underpinned by the conventions of naturalistic theatre, but rather the techniques of "epic theatre" are employed, often abolishing the classical convention of the "fourth wall" (Jeffers, 2006, p. 3; Morris, 2014, p. 134) along with the aesthetics of realism.

Documentary theatre "disrupts the illusion" (Cosgrove, 1982, p. 193) by assuming the pedagogical role of the "teacher" and turning the audience into "students" or "jurors" who are called upon to think and judge (Morris, 2014, p. 134). Furthermore, documents in theatre succeed in becoming, if not a trigger for action, then certainly a driving force for concern, thus incubating an active audience and informed, aware and responsible citizens (Ververopoulou, 2018, p. 175). This is precisely why documentary theatre is increasingly being used in schools, communities and other educational settings as a means for the underrepresented (Jacobson, 2017), the excluded, minorities and ordinary citizens in general to gain a voice by expressing their views on controversial issues, even if they contradict official sources (Ververopoulou, 2018, p. 175).

It is therefore particularly important to apply the techniques of documentary theatre in a drama in education workshop in a school for adults who belong to the vulnerable social group of people with a substance use disorder. Such a workshop aims to contribute to the cultivation of skills and attitudes of civic participation and action, but also to transform the classroom into a forum for civic engagement in the present, where participants "test" future selves and rehearse becoming the active citizens they want to be (Gallagher et al., 2017, p. 12; Gallagher, 2018, p. 135).

### *The particularity of the School of 18 Ano and the cultivation of citizenship*

The present study concerns the students of the School of 18 Ano, which has been operating since 2001 in cooperation with the Ministry of Education (Papadi, 2012b, p. 33). In 2016, within the framework of compensatory education (Law 4368/2016, art. 26), the operation of secondary education classes in the premises of the 18 Ano Addiction Rehabilitation Unit of the Psychiatric Hospital of Attica was approved (Joint Ministerial Decision 166082/D2/2016). These classes included students who were either in the social reintegration phase of the rehabilitation programme 18 Ano, or who had completed other approved addiction treatment programmes.

The School of 18 Ano offers a second chance, both educational and mental (Papadi, 2012a, p. 69), as part of the therapeutic process, since it contributes to the prevention of relapse and to social reintegration (M. Katsarou, 2018, p. 25; Matsa, 2008b, p. 145). In this particular school, which is essentially part of a rehabilitation treatment programme, a transitional process aimed at reconnecting patients with social reality (Papadi, 2012b, p. 32), the cultivation of citizenship plays a central role. The empowerment of the students-patients as active social subjects contributes fundamentally to the change that addiction treatment itself seeks: the transition from marginality, stigmatisation, manipulation, individualisation and renunciation of drug addiction to the development of critical thinking and independent speech, integration into collectives, real participation in social life and, finally, integration into social life with a new role (Matsa, 2006, pp. 71–74).

According to Matsa (2008b), the treatment of addiction as a process of transforming the drug addict into a social subject is in a dialectical relationship with art, which, through its political and social role, fulfils an emancipatory function by stimulating the imagination, expanding thinking, influencing emotions and providing the means to imagine and find the lost utopian horizon in human life (Matsa, 2017, p. 185). Art





and theatre in the drug rehabilitation programme 18 Ano contribute to the socialisation and transformation of the treated patients' relationship with themselves and the world (Lenakakis, 2008, p. 465).

The rehabilitation programme places special emphasis on the art of theatre, since drama therapy is one of the pillars of the programme's "art therapy" (Mpania, 2023), which supports and frames addiction treatment in all its phases (the closed phase of mental addiction and the social reintegration phase) (Matsa, 2008a). Drama therapy seems to be able to contribute to the continuation of the therapeutic trajectory through the release from preconstructed social roles, the deepening of communication with others and with oneself and the expansion of expressive skills (Giotis et al., 2018), complementing and not replacing other psychotherapeutic procedures in the programme (Apostolaki, 2018). The theatrical act itself has been a central socialising element of the programme ever since the first performance of the Reintegration Team in 1989 in the small theatre of the Attica Psychiatric Hospital, where *Dying as a Country* by Dimitris Dimitriadis was staged (Zagianaris et al., 2019).

Since theatre is closely related to drama therapy for the students at the School of 18 Ano, the present research, aiming to highlight the difference between drama in education and drama therapy, chose the form of documentary theatre because its

focus on the real ensures the necessary critical distance, while its political orientation excludes highly experiential, personal discussions or any recollection of traumatic experiences.

### Research methodology

The research strategy adopted was action research, aiming at the dialectical relationship between research and action, theory and practice (E. Katsarou, 2010, p. 556), in order to achieve change or improvement (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 385) in the context of the School of 18 Ano.

Specifically, the research sought to answer the following key research questions:

1. Can the use of drama techniques in the form of documentary theatre in the educational process of the School of 18 Ano strengthen citizenship?
2. What are the possible ways in which the use of documentary theatre techniques in the educational process of the School of 18 Ano can strengthen citizenship?

The mixed research approach was adopted so that the qualitative approach could focus on the themes of the research and the quantitative approach could focus on the statistical confirmation of the conclusions. More specifically, the qualitative approach examines the cultivation of citizenship in students as a process and the quantitative approach examines it as an outcome (Kosti, 2016, p. 170).



A quasi-experimental design, i.e. a pretest/posttest control group design in which the control group is not exposed to the treatment condition, was chosen to collect the quantitative data for this study (Mertler, 2016, p. 105).

The experimental group consisted of students from different classes of the School of 18 Ano who were interested in participating in the Educational Documentary Theatre course, while the control group consisted of the remaining students of the school who attended classes with conventional frontal teaching methods. Prior to the research interventions, both groups completed the Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ) for Evaluation of Service-Learning Outcomes (Moely et al., 2002).

In order to achieve the greatest possible diversity of data, the present study used a variety of tools to collect qualitative data: participatory observation, researcher's diary with observations and reflections of the practices followed, participant's diary, in which participants' thoughts, ideas and feedback were recorded at the end of each session (Mertler, 2016, p. 137), participants' interviews and their work kept in the personal student portfolio (Vitsilaki-Soroniati et al., 2007).

The present study, which follows an action research strategy, is mainly qualitative, i.e. it does not seek to formulate laws and generalisations but is rather a case study with a reflective mood and the aim of drawing up a proposal that could be used by other interested parties in other contexts as an opportunity for their own reflection (E. Katsarou, 2010, p. 565).

In relation to the quantitative study, precisely because it aims to confirm the conclusions of the qualitative study, the design is not purely "experimental", as the sample is not random but comes from a particular school and is therefore small. For that reason, the resulting quantitative data will not be generalisable, but it is important that it confirms or refutes the qualitative data. It is also worth noting the limited duration of the interventions, which makes it impossible to study the duration of the effect of the independent variable on the dependent one.

### *Teaching framework*

Twelve interventions of two school periods (80 minutes) were implemented in the experimental group once a week from December 2022 to March 2023 according to the school timetable. The design of the teaching interventions took into account the teaching units of the relevant curriculum subjects. Specifically, the units chosen were war, social problems, media, immigration, discrimination, hate speech and civil society.

The starting point of the teaching units of the relevant curriculum subjects related to citizenship (Social and Civil Education – Political Education) formed the common basis of the experimental and control groups, as the control group was taught the same units but with a teacher-centred approach and directed dialogue.

The planning of the interventions was gradual, with an emphasis on exploratory learning. Through teacher-student interaction and feedback from the

group, there was flexibility in the planning, but also in the direction of the content, so that the teacher and students could eventually explore and co-create together (Avdi & Hadjigeorgiou, 2007, p. 54).

The interventions were designed in two research cycles with interim feedback from the team contributing to the re-design of the subsequent interventions. In the first cycle, which included the themes “Christmas truce of 1914”, “social problems – ideal society” and “the media”, the element of reality was drawn first from History, then from the social experience of the participants and finally from current social and political events. In the second cycle, where bonds of trust had already been established and the educational nature of the course was distinct from the psychotherapy groups of the programme, the researcher aimed for a more experiential involvement of the participants through exploration of their personal stories. In this way, the element of the real came first from the others, the “foreigners” (themes of immigration and discrimination), then from the personal stories of the participants (stories of names, personal belongings and stories of change), so that finally the political and the personal could be linked through their moral and emotional involvement. The reflection at the end of the interventions, beyond the needs of this research, also led to the collective creation of a theatrical event with the intention of serving as a social intervention.

### *Description of interventions*

As the pre-research process had involved six sessions of the experimental group, during which various exercises had been carried out to get to know each other, to bond the group members and to familiarise them with the techniques and tools of drama in education, the first intervention directly introduced one of the themes of the project, namely “war”. The objectives of the first and second interventions were defined as a reflection on the phenomenon of war and the critical treatment of historical and current events. Creating a Christmas atmosphere (music, tree decoration) was combined with news of Christmases past, while documents from the First World War (photos, letters, diary pages) engaged the students in an experiential, emotional and logical exploration of the theme through techniques such as role on the wall, writing in role, role cards and creative writing.

The third and fourth interventions on the theme of “ideal society” aimed to critically approach social problems, develop methods of argumentation and imagine social change. The third intervention used the rhythm machine technique (Boal, 2013, p. 173) and pantomime to perform the social problems and

solutions proposed by the group. The fourth intervention took the form of an educational visit to the archaeological park of Plato’s Academy. This particular park has become the subject of intense public debate in relation to the ways in which public spaces are used, renovated or exploited. This visit was also attended by students from the 3rd class of the upper secondary school, who were studying Plato’s *Republic*. Combining the image of the park on Sunday with the ancient use of the same space and some information about the *Republic*, the reflections were presented through a debate (on the necessity or not of public spaces), role play (with the “classes” of the *Republic*: creators, guardians, philosopher-kings) and image theatre (with dynamic images of today’s society, the vision and the path of transition).

The fifth and sixth interventions focused on the media and aimed to develop critical media literacy and explore social issues of concern to the group. They created captions from pictures in newspaper articles, and frozen images from captions. The creation of a “wall newspaper” with collages from various news publications was not only a critical approach to the media, but also an exercise in collaboration and dialogue. Finally, the printed material was a source of inspiration for the creation of a story/narrative presented with dramatisation and a series of dynamic images. The sixth intervention focused on hate speech on social media with documents related to Roma people. Debate exercises, role play and dramatisation were used to deconstruct these practices. At the end of the sixth intervention, discussion and feedback exercises took place, which to some extent redefined the design of the second cycle of interventions.

Discrimination and the role of the media continued to concern the group in subsequent sessions. The seventh and eighth interventions were designed to explore the causes of xenophobic attitudes and immigration, to understand the “refugee crisis” and to develop empathy. In the seventh session, the topic was a fictional fake news story (Tudorache, 2021, pp. 168–174) that highlights the different (dominant and alternative) narratives about the same event. The dramatisation of the article was followed by interviews with the help of role cards, which greatly contributed to highlighting different viewpoints and different positions of power. The role of the “by-stander” was also explored with character creation questions, the “voices in the mind” technique and role playing. In the eighth session, an attempt was made to link the participants’ experiences with the stories of the “others” using the techniques of devised theatre, based on descriptions of their homes and the testimonies by refugees published in a news



article (Louka, 2022). The poems "Home" by Warsan Shire and "Things We Carry in the Sea" by Wang Ping ("Kavévaç", 2020) were also used in the image-sculpture performance of migration with the images of "before" and "after".

The ninth and tenth interventions introduced reflection on the connection between the "I" and the "we". The personal stories of the participants (names and personal objects) were used, as well as interviews that they conducted with each other on the theme of change (personal and social), which were presented with monologues, stage compositions and the technique of the composite character of verbatim theatre (The Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators, n.d.) in order to improve communication skills (active listening, empathy, sharing personal moments) and creative synthesis skills to link individual/private concerns and aspirations with social/political concerns and goals.

As part of the reflection on the techniques and actions implemented, in the last two sessions the participants were asked to evaluate the project, their own participation and how this process could develop into a social intervention. For the purpose of reflection on the project, random impressions and observations from a walk in the neighbourhood served as a means of creating stage actions using the techniques and new means of expression acquired from the project. The reflective discussion was also nourished by the exercise of the "Map of sessions" created by each participant individually and the Collective Map created with everyone's input and observations.

## Research results

The Civic Attitudes and Skills Questionnaire (CASQ) for Evaluation of Service-Learning Outcomes questionnaire (Moely et al., 2002) was used to collect the quantitative data. This questionnaire assesses five characteristics related to citizenship, the dependent variable of this research, namely: A. civic action, B. interpersonal and problem-solving skills, C. political awareness, D. leadership skills and E. attitudes towards diversity.

Analysis of the quantitative data showed that a statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group, when testing dependent samples, was observed in question 35 on attitudes towards diversity ("I enjoy meeting people from backgrounds very different from mine") and in question 22 on national issues ("I understand the problems facing this nation").

In the pretest of the independent samples, the two groups, experimental and control, were equivalent before the implementation of the interventions

in terms of their level of citizenship, whereas in the posttest the experimental group showed a statistically significant difference compared to the control group in questions 14 and 15 concerning the characteristic of "interpersonal and problem-solving skills" ("I can easily get along with people" and "I try to find effective ways to solve problems").

The results of the quantitative research gave some indication of a tendency towards the strengthening of citizenship through the effect of the independent variable "techniques of documentary theatre" on the students. The limited effect can be attributed to the small sample and the limited duration of the research. Therefore, this trend should be studied with a larger sample and in longer term research.

In addition, the limited results can be linked to the nature of the skills and attitudes taught and the way they are quantified through a questionnaire in which participants are asked to translate their subjective perception (qualitative relationship) of their citizenship into a subjective quantitative relationship (Pourkos, 2010, p. 150). In addition, achieving this change in perception is a difficult process that takes longer than the duration of our research interventions, as it is a process of developing a new identity, a process that is more difficult for adult students (Illeris, 2003, p. 16) and the results of which may be perceived at a later stage.

Based on Mills' (2011) separation of statistical and practical significance, where the former is determined statistically and the latter is subjective in nature, it is important to investigate the practical significance of interventions through the analysis of qualitative data.

During the qualitative content analysis of the data, the present research mainly followed a deductive process of analysis and coding. The literature review of the theoretical framework provided the analysis with a set of pre-selected conceptual schemes that acted as a guide in the field, but also as fields of reference and taxonomic forms in organising the data, and were applied as categories to the data (Patton, 2002, p. 456; Tsiolis, 2015, p. 10). However, this preliminary conceptual framework was extended and transformed during the data processing by new parameters that emerged from the analysis in an abductive process (Tsiolis, 2015, p. 13).

The categories that emerged from the data collection and analysis are: a) skills (collaboration and critical analysis), b) attitudes (diversity and participation) and c) political awareness – personal involvement.

With regard to the category of collaboration and critical analysis skills, in the first cycle of interventions,



from the beginning of the sessions, the participants showed respect for the rules of dialogue but had difficulty in physical communication and in exchanging arguments. The use of documents, group creative work and emotional involvement in activities helped them to think more analytically. In the second cycle of interventions, the results were more encouraging, as the established climate of cooperation and security facilitated communication between the participants in many ways, at many levels and not only verbally. Group work also helped them to deepen their analysis and deductions.

In the category of attitudes, the difficulty that participants had with exposure – theatrical and social – in the first sessions diminished as a climate of trust was created between the group members. In addition, respect for diversity and inclusion emerged as visions, but it seemed more difficult to link them to action. An inability to connect their own experiences of social injustice and discrimination with the stories of others was also observed. This observation was used in the planning of the interventions of the second cycle, where it was found that the real stories and documents allowed the experiential interweaving of the participants with the stories of the “others” and to some extent this changed their attitudes towards diversity based on what they claimed. In terms of participation, the difficulty of exposing oneself in front of others was significantly reduced, leading to interesting stage experiments. On the other hand, the frustration with political participation, as it is expressed institutionally and partisanly, was not overcome, but this emotion was countered by small personal changes, solidarity and participation in the community.

In terms of political awareness and personal involvement, they seemed to be quite informed, despite their own negative self-image. Also, during the interventions they linked the events of the historical or social reality to their own experiences and it seemed that the personal, empirical or experiential link to the events further mobilised their interest and active participation. In spite of the negative image of themselves in relation to information, there was a tendency to comment on current events before class or during the break and, of course, in the context of the lesson. While in the interventions of the first cycle current events were used based on the research design employing articles-documents, in the second cycle this was done spontaneously by the participants themselves. Moreover, linking discrimination to their own experiences contributed to a better understanding of the victim's position and caused an emotional charge, resulting in an increase in empathy and concern/caring.

In general, in the second cycle, active participation in group creative work and the active role of all members increased significantly. On the one hand, documentary theatre as theatre of the real was a suitable technique for developing social and political interest, and on the other hand, the techniques of drama in education facilitated active participation and the development of the students' imagination.



In order to evaluate the project as a whole, a semi-structured group interview was conducted with all participants after the end of the twelfth intervention to explore their opinions on the content, techniques and outcomes.

Most participants reported an improvement in their interpersonal and communication skills: “The fact that I was with a group of people every Wednesday” (P9), “The game helps me a lot, it frees me up and I communicate [...] it helps me a lot to communicate” (P5), “I liked working in a group and every person who was here helped me to see things differently” (P11). Many participants also pointed out the project's contribution to shaping their own point of view and freedom of expression: “I wake up and I can take a stand in the society” (P8), “It has also given me wings [...] it has helped me to express myself better” (P7). Finally, it is worth noting that the

change in their attitudes towards those who are different was also expressed: "I look at them with a different eye. After an exercise we did, I see them differently" (P1), "I accept what is different and also find things in common and have fun with and love the different" (P9), "It helped me a lot in terms of empathy, that is, putting myself in the other person's shoes a little" (P7).

Their observations on the nature of the course focused on the bonds between them and the team spirit: "It became my priority during the week" (P9), "A little society here that interacts" (P3). In addition, most participants pointed out the difference between this course and the rest: "We have a great time, we come in here with joy. It doesn't compare to other courses" (P5), "At first, I complained that we were standing and walking all the time, but that's what's different and it's a nice thing" (P4).

The participants' observations support the researcher's finding that the project significantly strengthened certain aspects of citizenship, namely cooperation skills, attitudes towards diversity and interest in political awareness. At the same time, the development of critical thinking and active political participation are goals that require a greater variety, quantity and duration of interventions to be effective. As one participant pointed out, such changes are not immediately visible: "I will see the changes a bit later. I've had more help than I think. In other words, I will see it along the way, but..." (P9).

Although this research at the School of 18 Ano and the recording of its results concluded with the implementation of the twelve interventions, the impact and changes the project brought about in participants and the school structure were also observed afterwards. In particular, the Educational Documentary Theatre course continued until the end of the 2022–2023 school year, and inspired by the research activities and presentations, a theatre performance was prepared as a social intervention against racism and discrimination. The result was that this new teaching process, which began with the present research and project, "opened up" to the entire school and therapeutic community, so that the educational and therapeutic staff understood the dynamics of applying theatrical and political approaches in the school of a treatment programme. Most importantly, the participants had the opportunity to complete the process socio-theatrically and gain a sense of accomplishment and success. These results are in line with the goal of active citizenship, as the participants were given the opportunity to participate publicly and develop the identity of an active citizen (Pigkou-Repousi, 2012, p. 210). In addition, this experience empowered them and gave

them the courage, according to Arendt (1998), to proceed as a group in a more dynamic political participation: some of the students of the group presented part of this performance in a public event on 18 July 2023 entitled "Justice for the Crime of Pylos" organised by the Collective Actions of Social Solidarity for 18 Ano in the garden of the Association of Greek Archaeologists.

## Conclusions – Suggestions

The purpose of this research was to investigate the impact of drama in education techniques in the form of documentary theatre in the educational context of the School of 18 Ano in terms of the cultivation of citizenship. The limitations of the research, as already mentioned, understandably affected the nature and scope of the results. Due to the small number of participants and the non-random sampling, the results of the present research cannot be generalised. Certainly, the limited duration of the interventions also contributed to this.

In relation to the first research question, whether the use of drama in education techniques in the form of documentary theatre in the educational context of the School of 18 Ano can strengthen citizenship, the analysis of the quantitative data, collected through a questionnaire, does not refute the initial hypothesis. Although there were no statistically significant differences in all the categories studied, there was a tendency for the experimental group to improve in the category of attitudes towards diversity and to differentiate itself from the control group in the category of interpersonal and problem-solving skills. The two groups were equivalent before the intervention.

With regard to both research questions, the impact of documentary theatre but also the specific processes that contribute to strengthening the citizenship of the students of the School of 18 Ano, the results of the qualitative analysis of the data are clearer and more encouraging.

Specifically, in relation to the skills of collaboration and critical analysis, the initial positive climate of respecting the rules of dialogue during the interventions developed into an ability to actively listen, exchange ideas and co-create, and as a result became a source of pleasure, satisfaction and self-image improvement for the participants. In terms of participation, the established supportive climate encouraged the members of the experimental group to experiment and, through their gradual familiarisation with new means of expression, to express themselves in a different way, while their disappointment with existing forms of political participation led them to seek alternative forms of social and political intervention. In terms of their attitudes

towards diversity, from the projection of personal feelings or situations onto others and the stereotypical approach to certain groups (Roma and foreigners) through role playing and dramatisations, but also through the power of truth given by the theatre of the real, they were led to a more substantial understanding of each other's position and their attitudes towards these groups changed, which is also confirmed by the analysis of the quantitative data. Finally, in terms of the experimental group's interest in political awareness, their interest in social and political issues increased during the interventions, so that they often spontaneously used current events in the project's creative activities. At the same time, by linking personal documents with the testimonies/stories of others, they were made aware of the common experience of discrimination and the political significance of their own personal stories.

The above conclusions were drawn immediately after the research interventions. However, it would be of particular interest to record the research results for the same group over time, as encouraging signs were observed for this group over the course of the school year. In addition, the limitations of the specific research (limited sample and duration) may give reason for future studies to confirm the research findings.

At the same time, this research sought to combine an educational objective (the development of citizenship) with therapeutic objectives (social reintegration) through drama. Such a line of research could go beyond the limits of the School of 18 Ano and be applied in the context of formal education, combining educational objectives with the prevention of addictions. Finally, research into the use of documentary theatre techniques to achieve other educational goals, such as historical empathy, self-confidence, etc., would be of great interest.

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# The utilisation of digital drama in the educational process Enhancing the role of the student

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*Using Google Arts & Culture to augment space with Vincent Van Gogh's The starry night.*

## Abstract

This paper is an extract from the author's doctoral thesis on digital drama and its utilisation in the educational process (Karantzouli, 2023). Through a review of international literature, the main objective is to establish that activities combining the techniques of theatre in education with new technologies and digital media can enhance the role that students can play in a student-centred educational process. The possibility of exploring the student's "identity" through the activities of the hybrid form of digital drama is analysed and finally, reference is made to the aesthetic cultivation that can be achieved for students through relevant activities. The paper aims to highlight the great potential as well as the benefits that can be achieved by raising questions and providing food for thought and discussion.

**Keywords:** *theatre in education, new technologies, digital media, digital drama, students, education, drama in education, identity*

## Introduction

In recent years, great efforts have been made to overcome the teacher-centred approach in the educational process. The “teacher-mentor” model is changing, making learning more collaborative and turning it into a process of collective interaction (Matsagouras, 2011, pp. 309–311). Any change and renewal of curricula clearly reflects the objective of placing the student at the centre of the learning process not only in terms of acquiring knowledge, but also in terms of engaging in a process of exploration (Tzamargias & Karantzouli, 2023).

In any case, the main objective is to increase the active involvement of students in the learning process, which can be achieved both through theatre in education techniques and through the channels offered by information and communication technologies (ICT). Therefore, digital drama – as a hybrid form that seeks to combine characteristics of these different areas – can have a positive impact on the educational process, developing opportunities for expression as well as cognitive and aesthetic activities related to:

- i. observation
- ii. attention
- iii. understanding
- iv. participation
- v. action
- vi. ability to influence.

## Digital drama

In the international literature, many terms have been formulated and used to describe the combination of theatre and digital technology (Masura, 2024). In particular, terms such as “computer theatre” (Pinhanez, 1996) and “screen-based performance” or “théâtre de l’image” (Hébert & Perelli-Contos, 2001) are used, where the emphasis is on the use of the screen. Giannachi (2004) also refers to “virtual theatres”, focusing on the complex function of theatrical communication and the possibility of meaningful and interactive audience participation. In addition, the term “digital performance” (Dixon, 2007) is identified, where computer technologies seem to play a primary role in performances both in terms of aesthetic and communicative functions. Broahurst (2007), on the other hand, refers to “digital practices” in an attempt to create a broader umbrella term that would “fit” all the digital practices that can be used in theatre performance (Chatzichristodoulou, 2014), including technologies of movement, interaction, robotics, AI, etc. In her research, Jamieson (2008) introduces the term “cyberformance”, which focuses on the performance that results from the use of digital media and technologies, but also on the

communication of actors located in geographically remote areas. Finally, in recent years, terms such as “cyborg theatre” (Parker-Starbuck, 2011) and “cyber theatre” (Causey, 2009) have been increasingly used, highlighting the concept of mediality through the use of computer systems not only for the creative process, but especially for the presentation and projection of theatrical performances.

Today, it would be extremely difficult to attempt a strict and fixed definition of the meaning of digital drama and theatre, since it is obvious that the potential of this hybrid form is directly dependent on the technological products, media and technologies that are developing and will continue to develop. However, in this paper the term is often used in the sense of a combination and creative synthesis of the possibilities of new technologies and digital media with the concepts of theatrical role, character, theatrical expression, action, convention, plot and conflict.

## Interactivity and interaction

In the field of education, one of the key issues is to create conditions that provide more opportunities for students to take initiatives. Through their active participation they are able to create and tell stories (Jensen & Peterson, 2022, pp. 538–540), but also to acquire knowledge compatible with their individualised personal abilities (Vosniadou, 2006, pp. 31–32). Collaborative activities are perhaps the first meeting point between theatre in education and ICT. However, at a next level, digital drama activities also enhance student participation through interactive technology (Fanouraki, 2016).

The concept of interactivity, while referring to the ability of a medium to receive two-way communication, can take different forms depending on the technology used (Dixon, 2007, p. 563). We can therefore speak of “interaction with the system” through:

- **Navigation.** In this form, users choose where they want and where they are able to navigate in the cyber environment. This feature gives a sense of freedom and leaves the user with a sense of independence. This is not the case as the available options are pre-programmed. Thus “choice” and “navigation” refer to specific variations of a story. In digital drama, interaction in the form of navigation takes place at all stages, both during preparation, implementation and feedback (McNaughton et al., 2018). Students navigate the internet as they research and search for material. They create digital stories in digital storytelling environments while familiarising themselves with different digital media. In this way, navigation becomes a key tool for creating and reproducing stories. In addition, they

make digital collages, create digital repositories and, through navigation, enable audiences to participate and explore the products of theatrical expression, etc. (Georgiou, 2021).

- **Participation.** In this type of interaction, users can play a specific role through participation and the possibility to act, but also to make choices, as this is typically the case in digital game environments (Fanouraki, 2017). This form of interaction is made possible during the preparation and familiarisation of students with digital environments and during the presentation of a “digital theatre performance” on platforms such as The Sims4. In particular, there is the opportunity to create unique theatrical experiences. At the same time, the “role” function in each of the individual activities can also have a positive effect in this direction. The configuration and use of avatars as digital representatives reinforces this direction and gives new dimensions to the concept and function of the role (Hatton & Nicholls, 2018).  
In addition, we can talk about “interaction with other users” through:
  - **Conversation.** This form of interaction allows users to engage and interact with each other (McNaughton et al., 2018). In digital environments they are able to exchange views, to be influenced by others, but also to be influenced themselves (Zakopoulos, 2023). Distance communication platforms, as well as chat features in social media and digital gaming environments, provide opportunities for quick and easy communication, similar to those used by individuals in their daily lives and contacts with their social environment. This fact was particularly highlighted during the era of compulsory distance education, which was adopted as a measure to contain the pandemic of the new SARS-Cov2 coronavirus (Gauvin et al., 2022; Ioakimidou et al., 2021). The use of these features is dominant in the activities of digital drama, as communication is one of the main pillars of its development and implementation. It is a collaborative process that shapes the final products through interaction and two-way communication.
  - **Collaboration.** Collaboration as a form of interaction refers to the possibility for a user to act together with others. The result is a change in the structure or activities of a digital application, a digital game, etc. Although this process is about changing the architecture and building a digital world or product, this form could also be approached from the perspective of digital drama. Through the appropriate digital applications, students participating in individual

activities have the opportunity to create their own characters (Hatton & Nicholls, 2018), but also their own environments in which theatrical activities can be developed. They agree and decide on specific choices, with specific goals, becoming active co-creators of the reality they experience in the school context (Raptis & Rapti, 2004, p. 251).

These two concepts, conversation and collaboration, as the cornerstones of theatre in the educational process (Fanouraki & Lakidou, 2023), seem to acquire a new dynamic through the possibilities of new technologies and the intended interaction. In the process of designing and preparing the digital action, the importance of these two functions is obvious. At the same time, the production of a final product and the possibility of sharing it are as important as they are in the process of producing a theatre performance in its traditional form (Grammatas, 2009, p. 442).

### *The digital representatives – Avatars*

The use of digital representatives/avatars seems to enhance the active role of students in the preparation and implementation of digital drama activities (Klevjer, 2006) that require this kind of “digital presence” (Fodor, 2021). After all, an avatar is “animated” by the person on whom it depends or who created it (Rahill & Sebrechts, 2021). This allows the learner to express their purpose, thoughts, intentions and desires, to interact and cooperate through the potential representative in the relevant potential environment in which the avatar mediates instead of them (Aranzaes, 2021). The relationship between an avatar and the person who animates it (Szolin et al., 2023) could be contrasted with the actor and the character to which they give substance. At the same time, it could be seen as a “digital continuation” of the puppet or marionette. More importantly, whether the avatar is seen as a “pawn” in the hands of the student or as a means of identification, it seems to attract interest and increase the willingness to participate and engage in the particular activities that make use of it. Apart from the elements of “gamification”, the design and manipulation of an avatar allows the student to express themselves freely and uninhibitedly, free from the stress of making mistakes, to express their needs and seek opportunities for testing and experimentation (Williams et al., 2011) that are not subject to harsh criticism.

In the process of creating and developing a potential representative (avatar), students express themselves theatrically and take on roles. They become “directors” by directing their movement and “costume designers” by choosing the costume





*A student using a digital face filter during an improvisation session.*

and appearance. They study the role they have to create and as “actors” or “puppeteers” they look for the best way to speak and express themselves. Through digital drama activities, they “build” a character by thinking empathetically, putting themselves in their shoes and acting under the magic “if” (Hatton & Nicholls, 2018).

In addition, they can challenge students within the potential worlds and their respective environments to:

- search for material and study
- make contact
- interact with the space around them
- react to posts or actions of others
- solve puzzles
- provide solutions to more general or specific problematic situations
- learn parts of a story and become part of it
- create their own story
- create “relationships”, etc.

All of the above are also means and ways of theatrical expression, which engage students creatively, utilise the unexpected and leave space for free expression and development of final products related

to digital drama. At the same time, there seems to be a great deal of flexibility in terms of possible themes and the context in which these possibilities can be developed. The intended learning and cognitive goals of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches are thus served and reinforced.

Finally, through theatrical activities and also through the technological manipulation of the potential representative (avatar), the students unconsciously become familiar with simultaneous/parallel action at different levels. They make use of both animation codes and technological possibilities through playful and entertaining processes. According to Linderöth (2005), the realistic world (external context), the rules of the game (system context) and the impersonation of fictional characters (fictional context) are the levels on which the students interact in parallel while distinguishing between “self”, “player” and “character”. This distinction is intended to encourage reflection in order to achieve a higher level of consciousness of one’s own actions. It also helps them to perceive themselves as co-creators of the social and dramatic context in which they act, co-exist and create.

In summary, digital drama can create a fertile ground for increasing student engagement and providing more opportunities for expression and initiative, not only during the activity preparation process, but also during the implementation and feedback phases. The importance of this can be further understood if we consider the digital world in which today’s generation of learners develop and shape their interests, characteristics and capabilities on a daily basis (Lavelle, 2019; Shaw Brown, 2020). It seems that through the imaginative and creative use of both drama techniques and the possibilities of new technologies it is possible to engage participants in a learning process with playful characteristics and enticing ways, creating appropriate conditions for collaboration and the development of social skills (Reznicek, 2021). At the same time, empathy is cultivated, through which an individual can understand their surroundings as well as themselves, with all their distinct and individualised needs and peculiarities.

### **Exploring student identity through digital drama activities**

The use of new technologies in theatre pedagogical activities paves the way for the exploration of the student’s “self” and “identity” as a member of an “online community”. This process takes place through playful theatrical activities that are part of digital drama and can be applied in an educational context (see Cameron & Anderson, 2022).



*Screenshot of Google Arts & Culture's Art Filter applied to a female student's face.*

Today, it is well understood that the internet provides many opportunities for the presentation and promotion of the "self". Whether someone decides to use photographs and real information (as is usually the case in social media) or to create a digital/material representative (avatar), they are required to make certain choices about which elements of their identity they wish to highlight, which they prefer to hide and which they prefer to fabricate or invent. Observing these choices can be very useful in extracting information about the image one has of oneself and, in this case, of the students, what they believe about themselves and what they would like to possess as characteristics.

Based on this process of identity exploration in the use of theatrical activities enhanced and enriched

by technological possibilities in an educational context, Cameron and Anderson (2022) proceed to formulate and distinguish four types of "self" that can be identified at different points in the development of digital drama or, more simply, the fusion of theatre/drama and new technologies:

#### **i. Quantified self**

The "measured self" is shaped by widespread and ever-increasing web browsing, but also by people's constant permission to record their preferences and search history (Wolf, 2009). Inevitably, this leads to a corresponding quantification of the characteristics of the individual user. The "wired world" (Kustow, 2007) marks the loss of "embodiment" or the "replacement of the body" and implies the existence of a space in which people "live connected" by exchanging information, making choices and having preferences. They make up a whole personality with distinct traits, which sometimes make it possible to predict future choices and "moves". It is understood that the archiving of the data that the user generously provides to the online world will be used by large companies, such as Google, for promotional/advertising activities, but also to respond to possible requests and future needs based on the user's history.

The "quantification" of the self is a feature of modern society that students come into contact with possibly even before they start school. However, searching for information or products on online search engines is not the only means of creating such personal and individualised measurements. Everyday wearable devices, such as smart watches (Koutromanos, 2018), which can be easily used in the context of digital drama, continuously record a significant number of biological characteristics, creating a "daily archive of experiences" that can be transformed into one or more personal narratives (Lupton, 2016). More specifically, in the context of digital drama, this data can be used to create and present analogue or digital stories. These changes in pulse rate, breathing, even the recording of sleep patterns (Koutromanos & Kazakou, 2020), can be the basic quantified data on which to base the development of an entire story enriched with fictional elements or combined with those of other users/students. This data can be shared with the consent of all parties involved. In this way, students can create a "possible story" of a classmate's day or night based on this data. The cultivation of empathy is thus encouraged and a climate of cooperation is fostered through a genuine acquaintance and engagement with both the "self" and the "other". In this way they become "writers" and "researchers", gathering evidence, making combinations, creating dramatic texts, which they can then explore further through



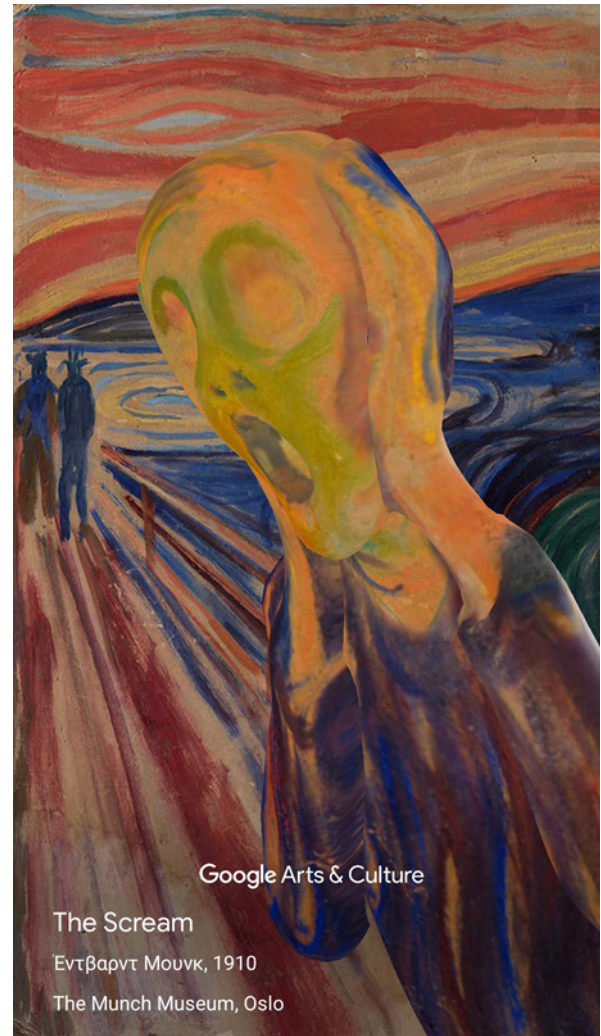
digital and analogue theatrical activities. They can even create an entire digital performance based on and following the specific data of the “quantified self”.

## ii. Mediated self

The concept of “mediation” refers to the ways in which young people learn about themselves and their personalities, but also about each other. This happens as they remain constantly connected, communicating, sharing thoughts, expressing preferences, “reacting” and commenting through a particular form of “digital socialisation”. Technology in this particular perspective, as already mentioned, is perceived as a “medium” through which, in the case of digital drama, the extraction of material, the creation, sharing and promotion of new content as well as the reflection and feedback on the whole process and the final result are achieved. Part of the user’s self is thus “communicated” to other users, enabling new social constructions and facilitating the exchange of new digital realities. In this way, parallel and multiple worlds are created (Kattenbelt, 2008). Beyond the context of the group practising or using digital drama techniques and tools, this function seems to involve collaboration between schools, the exchange of materials, the joint development of activities and the production and presentation of a collaborative digital performance that actively engages geographically distant students.

Cameron and Anderson (2022), citing the work of Duncan and Hayes (2012), highlight that teachers recognise their students’ “mediated selves” – they are happy to create and communicate content in the “mediated world” – but should not be directed in an endless effort to familiarise themselves with the constantly evolving technologies and their respective media. Instead, they should explore the new forms of learning and literacy that have emerged and use them to produce new knowledge in ways that meet the specific interests and needs of today’s student population.

At this point, in an attempt to focus on the development of theatrical activities with the use and contribution of new technologies, it is worth mentioning the use of distance communication platforms as “media” for the realisation of theatrical activities (Wolverton, 2021) during the distance education imposed by the measures to limit the spread of the new SARS-Cov2 coronavirus. More specifically, Siciliano (2021, p. 5) refers to the use of the Zoom platform as a “medium” for teaching theatre in a summer camp. It could be argued that the platform was the “space” for the development of “mediated selves”. In any case, the screen seemed to allow the students to move away from the usual concerns they had or



Screenshot of Google Arts & Culture's Art Filter applied to a female student's face.

expressed about how to handle their hands and feet. As a result, they were able to focus on other expressive actions, perhaps gaining greater familiarity than they would have had in a shared space. It seems that they ended up creating a new image of themselves. The same may be true in the school context, as activities such as those described in the previous chapter, using distance communication platforms, can “isolate” expressive tools and lead to the meaningful exploration and discovery of new possibilities for expression.

## iii. Augmented self

To explain the “augmented” self, researchers draw a parallel, or more precisely a correspondence, between the reality of the theatrical convention and the technologically augmented reality. Theatre uses both the analogue world and an imaginary representation of it, which is none other than this magical “as” or “if”. Thus, on the one hand, we have the biological humanity of actors who embody the roles with “real” features, movements, facial expressions



*Screenshot of Google Arts & Culture's Art Filter applied to a student's face.*

and reactions in a world that uses equally "real" objects as "signs" of certain "objects they are meant to signify" (Fischer-Lichte, 2019). Realistic and fictional elements are incorporated theatrically, made acceptable by the intended audience and attempt to tell stories and convey messages. Augmented reality, on the other hand, uses technology to add new elements and enrich the analogue world. Thus, we could formulate the view that augmented reality is able to "show" us what our analogue world would look like "if" it were enriched with some additional elements (Flavián et al., 2019). The use of real and digital elements creates a reality "like" the real one, offering both creators and users a unique hybrid experience (Garzón et al., 2019).

The use of this technology in theatrical activities in the educational process has considerable potential. However, in terms of the concept of "self", but also from the students' perspective, it is worth clarifying further that this technology can be an important aid in the effort to understand the "self" through theatrical activities, as students have the opportunity to move from "what they are" to "what they could be" (Cameron & Anderson, 2022, p. 521) by coming into contact with the augmented elements, but also by creating new ones. Thus, activities that use both

the concept of role and augmentative technologies, and that can be integrated in the context of digital drama can offer new experiences to students by increasing authenticity and strengthening their sense of "being" the role they are playing. In this way, they discover new reactions, new emotions and act in new circumstances, having all the elements of their analogue world, but also what augmented reality can offer. Another example that could be exploited in this particular case is the use of "filters" in various applications of smart mobile devices. The user can – by opening the front (selfie) camera and focusing on their face – retain many of its features, but enrich them with digital elements and then, seeing themselves, proceed to produce text exploring their new "character", even composing entire monologues.

#### **iv. Imaginative self**

The process of "inventing" the self has been a matter of theatre from the very beginning of its development and is independent of technological achievements and the corresponding developments. Undoubtedly, however, reality and contact with "others" play a primary role in this personal "invention". This means that when reality becomes "digital" and contact with "others" is mainly through technology, the "invented self" inevitably acquires a new dimension that cannot remain unaffected by the above elements. Some of the elements which, through the use of new technology, can provide details of the user's concept of "self" include: the searches that students make, the way they express themselves, the products they create, the means they choose to communicate, the interactions and the way they communicate, the reactions and comments, the aspects of identity revealed and concealed, the characteristics of the digital representatives chosen within the online platforms and the digital representations of the user. At the same time, it could be said that such a process seems to lead to a better understanding between the students and a strengthening of their positive relationships, which in turn can play an important role in improving the classroom climate (Mpampalis & Tsoli, 2020).

Technology should be seen as a medium that can intensify and "feed" the student's imagination, which is a key objective of any theatrical process. Theatre has always existed and can exist independently of technological developments. At the same time, however, it is an "expressor" and "designer" of reality, and it is precisely this reality that should not be sidelined, but "expressed" and "exploited" in the most appropriate and creative way. Theatre, therefore, if it is to be used either as a tool or as an autonomous area of study in contemporary education, should be triggered by and express the reality of the subject of



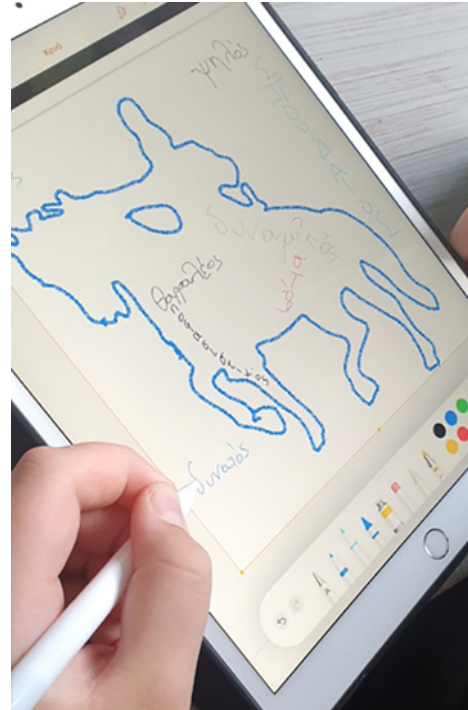
the learning process, i.e. the students themselves. In other words, it must come from their own reality and touch on their own interests, concerns and everyday experiences. Students do not come to the classroom as a "tabula rasa". Instead, they bring with them all the elements, experiences, thoughts and judgments that have shaped their personality up to that moment. Education must therefore start from these experiences and encourage students to analyse, process, judge and revise them in a genuine process of knowledge transformation (Freire, 1976, pp. 80-97). The fusion of theatrical techniques and new technologies can support and promote this objective as it enhances expressive means, intensifies exploration, promotes expression and offers new ways of participation and creation.

### Digital drama as a tool for the aesthetic cultivation of students

In addition to the pedagogical feasibility and the cognitive objectives, the aesthetic and artistic dimension of any form of theatrical expression is equally important. The "aesthetic emotion" (Grammatas, 2009, p. 448), as a fundamental concern of drama in a general context, must be of concern to those involved in the process of using digital drama in education and, in particular, it must be one of the dominant concerns that is in balance with the respective learning, pedagogical, cognitive and social purposes. Theatre is a "mediated" system of communication (Grammatas, 2015, p. 624), as the basic aesthetic lines of the dramatic text in question may still be evident and distinct, regardless of the final form that theatrical expression and its products may take. The same applies to the enhancement, enrichment and use of new technologies in the aesthetic effect of the "stage spectacle", as well as in its communicative dimension, elements that, although reshaped and transformed, remain intact in their deeper structures (Karantzouli, 2021, pp. 165-168).

At this point, it is worth making a separate reference to the concept of "mediation" as developed by Balme (2012, pp. 247-250). More specifically, he states that this concept can be understood as:

- "The transfer of the content of a narrative from one medium to another". From this perspective, we could speak of the concept of "adaptation" of a theatrical text, whose basic structures remain constant but are perceived in different ways. Digital drama supports this particular function, as digital media can make a significant contribution to both the production and presentation of a novel and/or play by modifying it while retaining its dominant structural and conceptual elements. The approach and transfer of a dra-



*Using ipad and ipencil to "sketch the hero".*

matic text in the hybrid form of digital drama can therefore function "transversally" in this particular light.

- "A special kind of intertextuality". This particular function further emphasises the relationship that exists between the different products produced by each digital medium in its creative use for the purpose of theatrical expression. Both in terms of aesthetic perception and content, the final products dealing with a particular dramatic text still maintain a relationship with each other in terms of their deeper meaning and structure. More specifically, the structure is not influenced by the technology and its media, but instead emerges and finds new ways of expression, as has been shown in the previous analysis.
- "The attempt to transfer aesthetic conventions and/or ways of expressing, observing and presenting the world from one medium to another". This formulation is perhaps the most complete definition of "mediumship". According to it, aesthetic conventions are realised through the observation, expression and presentation of the world in the different media used. Whether we are talking about an analogue theatre performance in its "traditional" form, or about the digital and/or cinematic rendering of the same dramatic text in the context of digital drama, the basic aesthetic structures and assumptions are still seeking space and expression through the different ways and means.

In terms of the aesthetic cultivation of students involved in the process of creating and using digital drama, this can be achieved in a number of ways. It is important to remember that new technologies and digital media cannot influence or change the basic structures and functions of drama and theatre. In this way, the aesthetic cultivation that takes place through this particular form of expression remains a fundamental pillar that changes in the way it is achieved and not in its essence and deeper structure. By participating in theatrical activities or by using exploratory dramatisation techniques enriched by the possibilities of new technologies and digital media, students can cultivate their aesthetics and become acquainted with different currents and their exponents.

More specifically:

- **When preparing a digital theatre event and/or performance**, it is possible to come into contact with a huge number of dramatic, literary texts and other works of art through online websites and search engines, to get to know the lives and worldviews of artists who lived and created in their own unique way in common or different eras, to study aesthetic genres and reflect on their different modes of expression, thus achieving a broader education and intellectual cultivation. They can also create categories and become “scholars”, “researchers”, “students”, “time travellers” or any other role that suits their own condition. Through the synthesis of analogue and digital reality, they will be able to create their own imaginative presentations to show their knowledge and their own aesthetic perspective on the subject they have studied. They will also have the opportunity to “put themselves in the shoes” of each artist, animating them and trying to approach their way of thinking and their particular needs of expression. At a more advanced level, with the appropriate guidance from the teacher, students can use their online communities to study, in person or at a distance, the different characteristics of dramatic genres (classical and romantic tragedy, pastoral and social drama, comedy and boulevard, satire and parody) in terms of their aesthetic and expressive dimensions. Through the above processes, they will also be able to understand and distinguish between trends such as classicism and neoclassicism or romanticism and arcadianism, etc., thus forming aesthetic criteria and gaining a deeper understanding of dramatic texts (Grammatas, 2009, pp. 449–451).
- **During the digital performance or the presentation of the digital drama activities**, students

will be able to benefit from the aesthetic culture offered by theatre as a *pammousia*, a composite of all the arts (Grammatas, 2014, pp. 13–20). In addition to pedagogical objectives, such presentations are cultural events that represent and serve additional artistic and aesthetic purposes. Again, the use of new technologies and digital media is not an exclusive purpose, nor should it be done for the sake of impression or under the pressure of a specific need. On the contrary, it can serve as a tool to strengthen theatrical codes and theatrical illusion, to contribute to the development of the particular communicative dimension of the theatrical phenomenon, but also to support the logistical infrastructure in a broader context. In any case, the reality, the interests and skills of today’s students are the factors that will lead to the use of the relevant media, always with a view to highlighting this complex cultural phenomenon. In other words: “In its different versions and expressions, depending on the social and cultural reality of each era, and on the psychology and expectations of the audience to which it is addressed each time, Theatre is a flexible means of understanding and interpreting the human journey through time” (Grammatas, 2015, p. 40).

- **During process of communication and feedback, additional aesthetic and artistic goals can be achieved.** The role context that must inevitably be maintained at every stage of the fusion of digital media and theatrical techniques can initially serve this purpose. The configuration of a digital museum/digital art exhibition through PowerPoint or digital storytelling environments or some other specialised digital environment can contribute dynamically in this direction. Students in the roles of scholars, “journalists”, “reporters”, “critics”, etc. can express their opinions, argue and justify their claims about the material and technical equipment and the organisation of the digital performance or the individual actions and can also acquire additional aesthetic criteria, make comparisons and formulate proposals.

In conclusion, the aesthetic cultivation of students is not a single teaching subject, but a broader goal that can be achieved in many ways through a variety of actions, dealing with different subjects and at different times. In this way, the process of implementing digital drama and using its techniques can develop students’ aesthetic and artistic criteria, just as it would if they were participating in an analogue theatre performance. New technologies are also emerging to support these complex functions,

providing a much easier access to a vast amount of data and information, but also the opportunity to creatively process and explore this material in an original and imaginative way.

## Conclusions

The use of new technologies and digital media in the development and delivery of theatrical activities in an educational context has become an area of increasing research, study and experimentation in recent years. However, the relationship between theatre and technology is long-standing, and what really changes is the type of technology and the tools that people use each time. From the *ekyklima*, the crane and the resonating vessels to interactive screens and AI, technology seems to seek out and facilitate the operation of theatrical codes, creating increasingly realistic experiences, without interfering with the core of the theatrical phenomenon (Baía Reis & Ashmore, 2022). At the same time, theatre and ICT are separate subjects in compulsory education, but they are also useful tools for teaching other subjects, so the combination of these two different fields is at the centre of the today's debate. The importance of this synthesis is underlined by the characteristics of the current generation of students. More than ever, they have a need for intense experiences, play, action and interaction, while living, speaking and growing up in a world dominated by technology and its products. This paper has attempted to document – through a study of the international literature from the end of the 20th century to the present day, most of which has been searched using the Google Scholar platform, subscriptions to reputable journals and university libraries – the ways in which the use of digital drama and its individual techniques can contribute to enhancing the role of contemporary students in the educational context by facilitating communication, encouraging collaboration, providing opportunities for participation and, most importantly, creating opportunities for a more meaningful understanding of the complex concept of “self” in today's technological world.

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## “Making Space In-Between Cultures”

The experience of working with others

**Georgina Kakoudaki**

Theatre theorist, director and theatre educator



Figure 1: “The Journey”, a theatrical event, Varkiza beach, Attica 2014

### Abstract

The aim of this educational exchange programme is to bring together applied theatre students and drama school students in order to establish ways in which theatre education and theatre as a performing art can be combined to create a new dialogue on form and content – both on a pedagogical and political level. Since theatre educators often lack performing skills and actors often lack pedagogical skills – the means needed to communicate the content of the play to others, the playing/interacting aspect (if necessary) with the audience – the programme focused on:

- How drama students can find new ways to invent content on crucial issues – a great contribution to creative thinking and dramaturgy, and
- How applied theatre students can focus on the performative, acting, expressive methodology that can develop certain skills on stage.

Held annually, this programme aspires to create a pathway for the integration of drama and applied theatre in society so that actors of the future will be more focused on the needs of the community when on stage and theatre educators will have more aesthetically sophisticated tools when working for the community.

**Keywords:** *theatre education programme, applied theatre, professional acting techniques, community*



## Introduction

Theatre as an educational process has been developed and defined in different ways in Greece in recent years, both in theory and in practice. Looking back over these years, there has always been a need for synergy and complementarity between two fields which, although close in their content, do not overlap.

In Greece, many theatre educators have a background in education and may have completed a postgraduate course combining education and theatre. There are no undergraduate degree courses combining education and theatre, only specialised postgraduate degrees in either education or theatre. Similarly, there is no specialisation in drama schools that focuses on theatre education. Few professional theatre educators come from drama schools, meaning they are trained for the stage and not for the classroom. Performances, stage events, dramatisations and staged ideas by amateur actors are usually limited to “sketching the stage event”, lacking professional theatre aesthetics and methexis. On the other hand, actors and directors who create performances for children or young people and talk to young people after the performance may not be aware of the educational approach to performances and the issues affecting young people. The challenge is how to work pedagogically to encourage young audiences to explore ideas and prompt them through appropriate questions to look for possible solutions. In both cases, the training of professionals does not include skills that will form a large part of their future work. Indeed, the educator often lacks theatre techniques and the actor lacks pedagogical skills. Fortunately, in a few cases, this deficit is compensated by using theatre educators to create educational material to accompany a performance.

The cultural youth exchange programme “Making Space In-Between Cultures: A Cultural Exchange Between Drama Students and Applied Theatre Students (2012–2016)” was launched with the aim of bringing together artistic groups from educational organisations of different focus. The programme was adopted by the Drama School of the Athens Conservatoire (<https://www.athensconservatoire.gr>), the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (<https://lipa.ac.uk/>) and the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (<https://theatroedu.gr/>). With no official funding, the Department of Applied Theatre and Community Drama at the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts (LIPA) partially funded the costs, while on the Greek side everyone’s participation was voluntary and self-funded.

The programme aims to improve the quality of theatre education activities on the one hand and artistic performances for children and young people on the other. At the same time, it explores contemporary material that concerns the communities of young people in the modern world on a social and political level, using the knowledge and skills of students of university departments of applied theatre – “a broad umbrella term, developed in the 1990s to describe ‘a wide range of participatory, socially engaged, often politically inspired, non-traditional theatre practices’ [...], usually conducted in spaces not designed for theatre, with and for populations that would not typically constitute mainstream audiences” (Jackson & Vine, 1993, p. 10) – and drama students.

## The structure of the programme: Aims and activities

The programme is focused on ways in which:

- Secondary school pupils can discover and express themselves on issues of concern through a theatre education process and a creative experience.
- Applied theatre students can focus on performance, acting, stage exposure and develop their stage potential.
- Young actors can derive content for the stage from contemporary social and political concerns, with or without the use of plays.
- All participants can discover new uses for theatre.

The various aims of the programme include:

- The actual experience of the stage, acting, dramaturgy and directing, and the experience of creating theatre through the creative imagination of those involved.
- The creative contact between young people from Europe (but also from other countries in special ad hoc meetings), the exchange of cultural, social and political experiences, the search for personal, social or local and wider political issues and problems that concern young people on a global level.

The exchange programme starts from the headquarters of each group and sets objectives for a specific topic on which each group will carry out joint research and preparation. The teams then will meet in one of the two countries. This large group also has the opportunity to meet amateur, school or special interest groups and offer them small workshops designed during the week of this joint meeting. The programme includes:

- Homework for all participants. Classics and other selected texts are distributed and participants

are asked to read, think, create the context, the original idea of the action. The selected texts are largely related to the secondary school curriculum and are intended to encourage participants to create teaching scripts and drama education projects for pupils and non-professionals.

- Theatre workshops led by programme leaders.
- Workshops and masterclasses (talks/lectures) by specialist scientists and artists.
- Lectures by scientific collaborators and academics, who are experts on the theme of the year.
- Joint visits to places of special interest related to the different themes. Attendance at performances and discussion with contributors.
- Creation of site-specific performances, i.e. performances that are designed and performed in specific spaces related to the content of the performances.
- Educational visits to schools and other educational institutions.
- Joint workshops with groups with similar interests (amateur groups, activist groups, school groups, etc.).
- Evening outings: social gatherings with the aim of exchanging cultural and social experiences and recognising the common European culture.

### Participants and implementation process

The programme is based on both the educational process and its artistic outcomes. The main participants of the programme are third year students of LIPA's Applied Drama and Community Theatre Department and second year students of the Drama School of the Athens Conservatoire. The main facilitators and designers of the programme are Brendon Burns, director, Georgina Kakoudaki, theatre theorist and director and Iro Potamoussi, theatre teacher and sociologist. The exchange programme is divided into the following phases:

- Mutual acquaintance and interaction between the two dynamic groups consisting of 40–45 people in a meeting of an average duration of seven days with joint workshops by the main facilitators.
- Meetings with students at all levels of education, but also with groups of young adults, focused on each year's central theme. A key feature that has been maintained throughout the years of the programme is that the workshop meeting of the team members is always tested in real conditions, within a school or relevant workplace.

The severe financial crisis that has hit Greece has led to an increased marginalisation of the arts in the educational system, a decline in humanitarian

values and heightened insecurity in the lives of citizens. However, there is space to reverse this situation through the power of theatre, which has the potential to empower young voices. Incorporating it into the school curriculum can provide significant support both in strengthening the educational process and in shaping a better future. For schools and young people, the strengthening of education is linked to specific cultural, social and political choices: on the one hand, the acceptance of values imposed by economic and political pressures, and on the other hand, the search for humanitarian values and freedom that are considered fundamental to the human existence (Giannouli, 2016).

The programme is supported by the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (TENet-Gr), in terms of providing theoretical support and developing partnerships with schools and other educational organisations involved in social intervention. The first invitation and meeting of the groups took place in the framework of the 7th International Conference "Theatre & Education: Bonds of Solidarity" organised by TENet-Gr. Their contribution was crucial at this point, as they have a large group of facilitators and designers of theatre education projects that have been applied in formal and non-formal education. It is worth referring here to one of the first materials of the TENet-Gr research group in relation to the meeting of theatre teachers and actors on stage (Giannouli & Potamoussi, 2011).

### *The programme's timeline*

Under the general title "Building Bonds of Solidarity" [November 2012, Athens], the group explored the limits of storytelling and the different manifestations of myth on stage. The workshops focused on stage communication, contact, the creation of original stories and different theatrical techniques, the invention of a movement language through non-verbal communication techniques and the management of gesture and human expression. The programme concluded with a presentation entitled "Building Bonds" at the 7th International Conference organised by TENet-GR through edited scenes of improvisation and text.

Inspired by Italo Calvino (2010), the programme was implemented under the title "Mushrooms in the City: Exploring the City I Live in and the One I Would Like to Live in" in 2013. The group explored the ways in which theatre education material can be produced from textbook texts, using dance movement and the narratives and experiences of the city we live in through documentary theatre techniques. The programme ended with a performance walk in the centre of Athens, as a conclusion to the joint workshop,



Figure 2: "Demosion Sema" (Public Cemetery), a street performance, Kerameikos, Athens 2015

entitled "A Walk in Athens – A True Myth in a Site-specific Performance". In the same exchange, the group collaborated with the Art School of Gerakas, and more specifically with the 1st grade of gymnasium (lower secondary school), in the framework of the experimental teaching of literature and held a joint experiential workshop with the contribution of the school's philologist Alexandra Vassilopoulos and the participation of 70 students.

In 2014, the programme, which again focused on the use of school textbooks and the creative assimilation of European literature as material for theatrical experience, continued with the theme "Floating Worlds – The Borders of European Identity: From the Aegean to the Atlantic, Myth and Reality". The workshops were based on three texts with a common theme: the journey, the concept of limits and borders and the search for individual identity. Excerpts from the fourth book of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1999), Rhapsody V of Homer's *Odyssey* (Samara & Topouzis, 2013) and Kafka's "Silence of the Sirens" (2009) were used. The programme concluded with an experiential street performance entitled "The Sea" based on the triptych "I – my destination – myself" on the Varkiza promenade (Figure 1). The theatre group of students and graduates of the General Lyceum (upper secondary school) of Vari par-

ticipated in the programme as part of the International Development for Reconciliation through the Arts (INDRA) project, coordinated by Betty Giannouli and Iro Potamouli.

Under the general title "Public Cemetery – Suppliant or Deceased: An Old Dilemma of the Modern World" (2015), the programme focused on the re-reading of works of ancient Greek literature. The workshops were based on the Funeral Oration by Pericles (Spyropoulos, 1981) [from *The History of the Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides], which is taught in the Greek school, and *The Trojan Women* by Euripides (415 B.C.E./1972) – works that stimulate public debate about the State, its institutions and the position of citizens within it. Participants practised public discourse and rhetoric and explored the responsibilities and rights of citizens in ancient and modern democracy. The team visited a number of schools with smaller groups of participants (5th Gymnasium of Agia Paraskevi, 12th Primary School of Kallithea), as part of "it could be me – it could be you", a project organised by TENet-Gr and the UNHCR. The programme concluded with a promenade performance at Demosion Sema (public cemetery), the place where Pericles is said to have delivered the funeral oration as a tribute to the fallen at the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War (Figure 2). From the





Figure 3: Guided tour of the ancient cemetery, Dipylon gate, Athens 2015

amphitheatre on the pedestrian street of Ermou (at the Dipylon, the ancient gate/entrance to Athens), a dramatised route was taken through the main streets where the cemeteries of the Peloponnesian War were located, now embedded in buildings, ruins, remains or fenced-off archaeological sites (Figure 3).

In 2016, with the aim of exploring how news informs and shapes, and sometimes misleads, public opinion, the programme, under the title “Headlines”, was based on reading everyday politics, the impact of overwhelming political events on our fast and confusing daily lives and linking today with the function of the messenger in ancient tragedy. The programme took place in Liverpool at a time of economic crisis and questioning of the European idea, just before the 2016 referendum on the UK’s membership of the European Union. The workshops were based on group activities, little theatre and community theatre techniques, and the archetypal relationship of the messenger (the external informer of one’s misfortunes) from ancient tragedy to today’s digital world. The programme concluded with a performance/presentation in the auditorium of the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts entitled “Yes or No/Remain or Leave, Grexit/Brexit” (Figure 4).

In 2017 and onwards, the programme evolved into more of a workshop project with the aim of bringing groups of students together with groups with special characteristics. Under the title “The Citizen Artist: Focusing on the Political Voice in Times of Uncertainty”, the groups met in alternative spaces in Athens (such as the Myrtillo café/expression space) and addressed issues of identity, social and interpersonal relationships, and youth culture in a time of change.

In 2019, for the 8th meeting of the programme, the student groups collaborated with accommodation facilities for unaccompanied refugee minors in Athens. Under the theme “Youth Solidarity”, they

organised workshops on applied theatre and visits to Home Project facilities hosting unaccompanied refugee minors aged 6–17, where they held workshops with the children and shared experiences through art. There were three meetings over three days in the facilities, which housed young children aged 6–12, girls aged 13–17 and underage mothers and boys aged 13–17. The groups of participants and students evolved with the experience of each visit. This opportunity for people from different countries and cultures to work together with these institutions opened up new horizons. Theatre can also have value and contribute off stage, and it is very important for a future actor to have many different experiences and stimuli.

After a pause in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic, the programme returned with a purely workshop character, focusing on “Democracy as a Public Good” (2022) and “Hamlet, today” (2023), with an emphasis on the iconic phrase “to be or not to be” and how it is analysed in our current modern experience. The programme ended in 2023 after a total of 10 co-organised projects over 11 years.

#### *Programme timeline*

- 2013 “Mushrooms in the City: Exploring the City I Live in and the One I Would Like to Live in”
- 2014 “Floating Worlds – The Borders of European Identity: From the Aegean to the Atlantic, Myth and Reality”
- 2015 “Public Cemetery – Suppliant or Deceased: An Old Dilemma of the Modern World”
- 2016 “Headlines”
- 2017–2018 “The Citizen Artist: Focusing on the Political Voice in Times of Uncertainty”
- 2019–2020 “Youth Solidarity”
- 2022 “Democracy as a Public Good”
- 2023 “Hamlet, Today”



Figure 4: "Headlines" performance, Little Theatre, Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts 2016

### By way of epilogue

The aim of this programme is to revitalise artistic theatre groups. For young actors, the aim is to cultivate the political dimension of theatre as a means of direct social intervention and a way of emancipating citizens. On the other hand, to remind theatre educators of the great power of stage experience, of the way in which a story becomes real and multiplies its effect on its audience when its facilitators have stage experience and can be internally consistent on stage. In both cases, however, the motivation to see the reality and the truth is strengthened. This happens when, as Pammenter (2013) puts it, one is concerned "with devising theatre in education (TIE) as an art form that examines, questions and represents the realities of our current human condition and makes new meanings in pursuit of progressive change and positive human development" (p. 83).

Different social conditions require new forms of interaction and innovative action. Creating theatre with substance is a dialectical process that adapts to specific contexts. Theatre in education, as an artistic means of exploring the human experience and as a tool for social change, always has human values at its core. Its aim is to deepen participants' understanding in order to challenge and change the conditions that limit human existence. The theatrical act with an educational and social dimension provokes, empowers the voices of the artists-teachers and brings

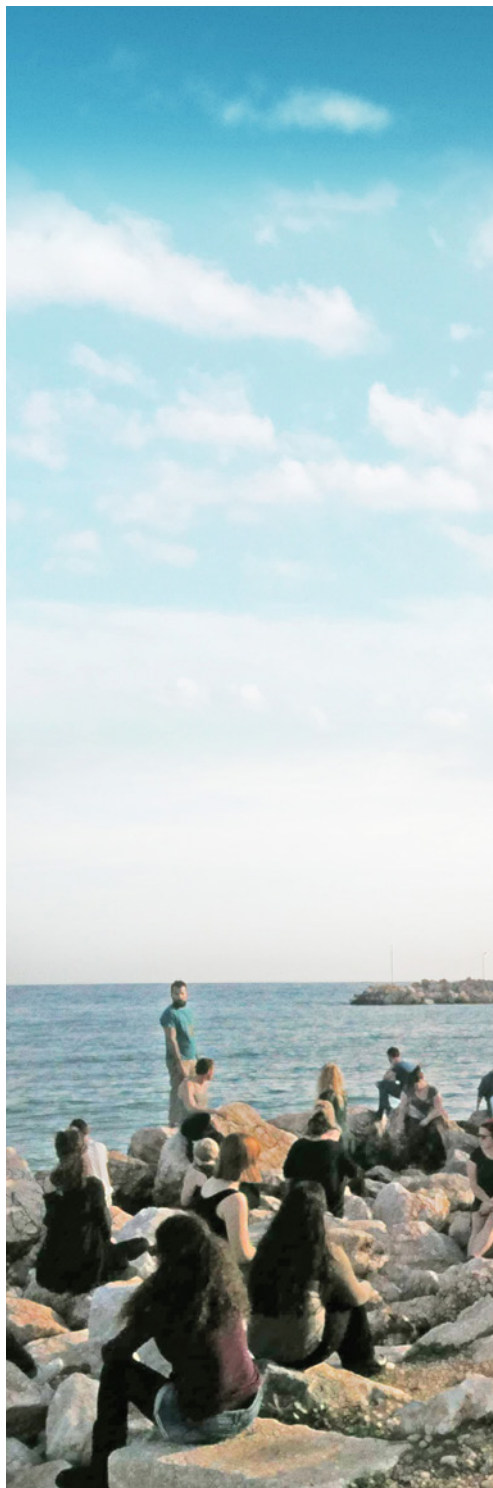
to light experiences that lead to a rethinking of perceptions and attitudes. This process is therefore itself a form of cultural action (Pammenter, 2013).

The workshops created a space that allowed the participants to see the intentions of others beyond themselves, to operate in a multi-prismatic way. The presence of strangers, the socialising dimension of the programme with the opening up of the closed university group to a larger one, created bonds of solidarity through the theatre itself, a simulated experience of the work that all participants, for their part, will be called upon to do in their professional futures.

The key to this shared experience, this openness, lies in the themes raised in the workshops, whether political, literary and inspired by contemporary reality or the timelessness of archetypal questions, which are already part of the students' lived experience. Recognising the differences between them, due to the culture, social and political realities and different backgrounds, but above all being aware of their similarities in terms of how they perceive what is happening and how they feel about what is happening around us, gives one a very high level of motivation about how to make sense of the world we live in.

With this basic philosophy, very close to Freire's pedagogy (1977) and the techniques of a theatre of self-observation such as Brecht's theatre (see





Brecht, 1974), they shaped content and created theatrical practices with aesthetics, elements that quickly united the members of the group and the sub-groups with which they were asked to work. The group as a whole, each time creating a language of theatre but also a language of political and social positioning, found a common voice through the workshops, which was expressed in the open to the public performances on the last day of the meetings; performances with common goals and a

common position on what needs to be shared with society through theatre today in a Europe that is undergoing radical restructuring.

By spending time together and getting to know each other, searching for common cultural material in the intensive time of a week and with many activities outside the strict framework of work, the groups create a small society, a kind of *communitas* as defined by Victor Turner (1969), an intermediate state of transition, in which the participants are isolated from the rest of society and temporarily placed outside the existing social structure. During this phase an ambiguous and playful recombination of all familiar cultural forms takes place and relations of equality and camaraderie develop between the initiates. In the case of the programme, this “defamiliarisation”, where the contents and gestures of the bodies have to be interpreted by another culture, creates a new language. A language of cultural perception in which a group acquires a common code for interpreting the world through similarities and established relationships (Bruner, 1964), through mutual understanding and non-verbal communication, where theatre always proves to be the best channel.

This cultural exchange is an active application of all the theories of experiential co-education, cooperative teaching, the assimilative capacity of education through the arts. But at the same time, it makes use of the techniques of the stage, of the ability to persuade through the stage, to offer meanings to the judgement of the public, to be a *hypokrites* (an actor) in a deep and archetypal sense, where the theatre for the sake of artistic acceptance is annihilated and the stage becomes an arsenal for social dialogue.

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## Tribute to JOHN SOMERS

His legacy, memories and stories  
from people who knew him

Someone handed the box to Tony as he sat in a Welsh pub. Sharon and Tony opened the box slowly, almost ritualistically, and began to take out objects one by one in front of our eyes. A pen was passed over a long rope, a pair of glasses with a string attached. Those of us who knew him understood that John was above all a practical man, and that he kept his basic tools with him at all times. His notebook: "Talk to graduate students about choosing research instead of internships..." "Write the grant application for the foreign student..." A piece of carved beech wood. We recognise the objects. We mentally travel to John's office for a moment and imagine him writing an article, proofreading a paper, organising the dance in the barn at Payhembury. The emotion and sadness are momentarily replaced by smiles and memories.

This compound stimulus completes a cycle of decades of exploration and storytelling through objects collected in a container. "Start small: take a shoebox", he advised us when we were trying to collect objects to use as prompts for a drama workshop. And what could be more fitting than for Sharon Muiruri Coyne, director and artistic director of the Vita Nova group, and Tony Gee, puppeteer, trainer and writer, old students of his, to unfold his life through one last "compound stimulus" of his so familiar personal belongings in front of a small crowd gathered in person or online for a final farewell.

The year 2024 has left the drama education community poorer with the passing of John Somers. For many of us he was an inspiration, an advocate, a mentor, a teacher, a fellow traveller in difficult times and a tireless champion of the notion that ideas, theories, practices and research should be shared, exchanged, multiplied and strengthened. Members of the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (TENet-Gr) had the honour of meeting him in the early days of the association, in the 1990s, and received all the love, support and encouragement every step of the way. John supported the nomination of TENet-Gr to IDEA and spoke highly of the potential of the association at the 2004 General Council Meeting in Ottawa, Canada; as a result, TENet-Gr has since become a full member of IDEA for Greece. He participated in all the first conferences with presentations, workshops and pre-conference seminars in different cities in Greece. He networked many of us, brought us together to join forces and was always there to share thoughts and ideas. And something that those of us who had even the slightest written contact with him will remember: he replied to all messages within minutes! For an academic who divided his professional time between the university, teaching, research, editing his own journal, organising his international conferences, his community theatre and meetings around the world, this is something truly unique.

Over the years, John generously shared his knowledge, experience and ideas with TENet-Gr, of which he was an honorary member. He insisted on the creation of a journal focusing on theatre/drama in education, something that was lacking in Greece in the distant year 2000. He was an active member of the Academic-Advisory Committee of this journal for almost 20 years, offering advice, guidance and all kinds of help. He provided expertise and content, and saw the journal grow, get organised and stand on its own two feet.

*Education & Theatre* is what it is today in part because of his perseverance. As a modest tribute, this year's issue includes a supplement dedicated to John Somers. Senior members of TENet-Gr who had the pleasure of meeting him in person and attending one of his workshops share brief, spontaneous recollections as well as photographs documenting moments spent with him. Nikos Govas compiles a list of the writings that John so generously contributed to our association's research and publications.

In the Viewpoint column, Yi-Man Au, a facilitator, drama educator and researcher, brings together memories and incidents, events and activities from John's life and work in a text that, although subjective, reflects the shared experience of many students on the MA Applied Drama course at the University of Exeter, UK. This personal narrative reflects his work as an academic, facilitator, director, collaborator, teacher and mentor.

One of the great qualities of John Somers was his power to multiply ideas, to inspire and empower those in the field who knew him, individually and collectively, to experiment and advance their work in breadth and depth. This is the common denominator that all the people we contacted to write about him returned to. In a kind of group interview, Eirini Marna, a teacher and student of John's, asked the question: "How do you feel your work has been influenced by meeting John?" She received answers from Helen Nickolson and Joe Winston of Royal Holloway, University of London, and Warwick University, respectively, the people who took over the management and coordination of *Research in Drama Education*, the first academic journal in drama education (and still the most influential in the field), after his retirement in 2005. In addition, academics from different parts of the world respond to how their work and teaching are still influenced today, multiplying John's ideas and approach through their strategic positions: Hala Rashed Al-Yamani (Bethlehem University, Palestine), Shu-hwa Jung (Taipei National University of the Arts, Taiwan), Ha Young Hwang (Korea National University of Arts, South Korea) and Marios Koukounaras-Liagkis (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens). Finally, Nikos Govas (Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network, Greece), Maria Depta, Alicja Jaskulska and Aldona Żejmo-Kudelska (Drama Way Foundation, Poland), Zeki Özen (Contemporary Drama Association, Turkey) refer to the support they have received for the creation and sustainability of active theatre/drama in education networks in different parts of the world.

The tribute concludes with the reproduction of his iconic article entitled "Narrative, Drama and the Compound Stimulus", first published in TENet-Gr's tenth anniversary special issue (Issue 9, 2008). In this article, John presented in a clear and concise way the logic and methodology of the well-known "compound stimulus", a tool for the initial stages of drama workshops.

The *Education & Theatre* journal bids farewell to our dear friend.

The Editorial Board





## Members remember

**I**t was like he was dancing; everything. When I watched him, the word I would use is "rhythm." He was present in everything he did, he believed in it so much. Generosity, childishness, enthusiasm, love, commitment, dance.

Jenny Karaviti

**T**he first image that comes to mind when I think of John Somers is him walking into a workshop with a mysterious smile on his face, holding a... shoebox from which he is slowly taking out various seemingly unrelated small objects that will soon be magically transformed in his hands into tools for a creative drama lesson.

Nikos Govas

**I**remember the directness, the sincerity and the depth in his eyes; his body moving gracefully as he introduced you to a world to be explored. Inspiration, elevation, soul and method all at once. A man full of life, with all the virtues that go with it. A teacher. Unforgettable.

George Mardas

**T**eacher, I have seen in you the magnificence of kindness, of simplicity and of availability.

Dina Tsolaki

### EDUCATION & THEATRE JOURNAL



Issue 1 (2001) *Drama in Education: What teachers and students do*

Issue 2 (2002) *Theory & practice in drama education* (in Greek)

Issue 3 (2003) *"Community theatre" in rural Devon: An alternative model* (in Greek)

Issue 3 (2003) *Discovering seminal stories: Community theatre as cultural memory - The Exwick project*

Issue 4 (2004) *The effectiveness of one in-service education of teachers course for influencing teachers' practice* (with Eva Sikorova)

Issue 9 (2008) *Narrative, drama and the compound stimulus* (special edition - 10 years Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network)

Issue 19 (2018) *The affect and effect of drama on my life* (special edition - 20 years Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network)



He was the one who showed me where to find the words to speak about my world; he opened up my horizons and lit the spark; direct, human, he combined knowledge with solidarity and humility; he was my mentor.

Nassia Choleva

A very specific image... his face, his smile! Very communicative, giving, warm! He loved what he did!

Maria Rebouskou

I don't think I'll ever forget the faces, bodies and looks of the people who attended John's workshop at the 5th International Theatre/Drama & Education Conference in 2006. We stood in the large sports hall, silent and misty-eyed, having felt on our skin all the magic of the ritual that he unfolded step by step from the first hour of the workshop in his unique way, with the passion and energy of a teenager! Just as I will never forget the belly dance we did in Mouria! An unforgettable experience!

Hara Tsoukala

There was a youthful energy in the movement of his hands and face. His generosity – the first week of classes he invited us to his house and we shared food and folk tales. You always felt that what you were doing had value.

Eirini Marna

John Somers, thank you so much! You have made my 35 years working in the school system brighter, happier, more satisfying, more creative and more effective!

Paschalia Michalopoulou

#### PROCEEDINGS OF CONFERENCES ON THEATRE/DRAMA IN EDUCATION HELD IN ATHENS

1st International Conference, *Searching for the place of theatre in secondary education* (2000, published in Greek)

- Drama in Education: What teachers and students do (keynote speech – short version published in Issue 1 of the *Education & Theatre* journal)

- Entering fictional worlds (workshop description)

2nd International Conference, *Theatre in Education: Art form and learning tool* (2001)

- Theatre meets education: Attitude and behaviour change through dramatic experience (paper)
- Entering fictional worlds (workshop description)
- Developing deeper narratives in drama (workshop description)

3rd International Conference: *Theatre in education: Building bridges* (2003)

- The therapy of drama (keynote speech)
- Entering fictional worlds: The use of drama in schools (workshop description)
- Developing performance from Drama in Education work (workshop description)

5th International Conference, *Creating new roles for the 21st century* (2006)

- Drama and ritual (workshop description)
- Combining the arts: How music, visual art, dance and drama can work together as equals (workshop description)

6th International Conference, *Theatre and education at centre stage* (2009)

- Theatre as communal work: Intervention in rural communities (paper)
- The relationship between DiE (Drama in Education) and performance (paper)

7th International Conference, *Theatre and Education: bonds of solidarity* (2012, bilingual edition)

- Drama in schools: Making the educational and artistic argument for its inclusion, retention and development (paper)

## In loving memory of my dearest teacher **John Somers**

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**Yi-Man Au**

Applied theatre practitioner, trainer and researcher

When you spend your lifetime remembering a person, how that person lived becomes the most important imprint on your heart. Professor John Somers was the first mentor to introduce me to the world of drama education. In the more than twenty years I knew him, he not only shared his passion for imparting knowledge and his scholarly demeanour, but more importantly, he personally showed me what a complete, whole person looks like.

In 2000, I boldly wrote to him, a complete stranger, in the hope of enrolling on the Applied Theatre Master's course he was supervising. He strongly recommended that the department admit me, a student with an underwhelming undergraduate record, and from then on, we formed a lifelong teacher-student bond.

As I write this tribute to him, my mind is flooded with vivid and profound snippets of our multifaceted interactions.

John was a gentle person who was quick to see the needs of others and offer comfort. As a young girl from overseas, I felt an immense sense of warmth from him. I remember when I first arrived in Exeter, there was one time after class when I was homesick and tearful. He approached me quietly, took me for a walk in his big soft hand and listened intently. He invited our entire class to this house for dinner and introduced us to his family, making us feel at home. Each week in class, he would have fresh eggs from his home on the desk, which gave me a sense of delight and coziness – I had never had a teacher who would give such a gift to their students.

John was a natural connector and always supportive of his students. Even before I enrolled, and throughout my studies, he introduced me to seniors and peers from various cohorts and regions, many of whom have since become my closest friends and family. After graduation, he connected me with applied theatre practitioners around the world, placing me in this big community to continue my development. Every year, he would send me a handmade Christmas card with a self-portrait photo from his

teaching journey, which became an annual touch point for our connection.

John was a rare and wonderful friend. He brought a delightful sense of humour to the theatre games, always making each game more fun and engaging for everyone. His gentle, deep singing voice would linger and resonate long after he had sung or harmonised with us.

John was a citizen deeply committed to his community. As we walked together, he would often bend down to pick up litter from the ground, as naturally as he would clean his own home.

John would write important reminders on the back of his hand. Since I met him in 2001, I have unconsciously taken up this little habit of his that has continued for over 20 years. Seeing the writing on my own hand makes me feel his presence, and this unintended passing on of a practice has become a lifelong bond.

How a person behaves and relates to others is a key entry point for commemoration. In his contributions to applied theatre, John embodied gentleness, connection, partnership and benevolence.

He often talked about how he first got into teaching drama. He said that one day, as he was wandering the hallways of the College of Education trying to decide on a specialisation, he saw a classroom with people sitting in a circle, a teaching format he had never seen before that promoted equal respect in learning. He was immediately captivated and never looked back from drama education.

He immersed himself deeply in learning, practising and exploring theatre from schools to communities, children to the elderly, the artistry and practicality, the applications and theories of applied drama. John was a great founder in bringing people in the field together. He founded the MA in Applied Drama at the University of Exeter, a rare course that combined the teaching of drama in both school and community contexts; he was the founding director of the triennial Exeter Applied Drama Research Conference, which attracts researchers from all over the



world and is one of the three major academic conferences in the field, but the only one held regularly in Exeter; he founded *Research in Drama Education*, which has been the leading international journal in the field since 1996. All these endeavours were designed to bring people and their practices together more effectively, to link them in closer partnerships, to enable mutual visibility and dialogue, and to share and refine the work.

John's benevolence towards the community was also deeply manifested in his work in modelling and developing a form of interactive theatre that effectively engages audiences and communities. In 2003, he received the Lin Wright Special Recognition Award from the American Alliance of Theatre and Education. In 2005, his major interactive theatre creation *On the Edge* won multiple awards from the National Institute of Mental Health in England (NIMHE). This work focused on the issue of mental health, with over 120 performances reaching 5,000 young people between the ages of 14 and 22, raising their awareness of early stage psychosis through a combination of theatre performance and subsequent classroom interaction. This is a strong evidence-based practice that an applied theatre practitioner should be aware of.

As Artistic Director of the Tale Valley Community Theatre, John created and produced over 12 innovative community theatre productions in the East Devon community. His theatre company had actively developed a model for sharing theatre-making skills in communities. John valued people's memories and community stories, and connected with people by narrating the stories of the communities in which they lived. His annual community theatre productions repeatedly demonstrated how engaging community members in theatre-making could create social capital for the community. In 2007, he mobilised over 200 people aged 3 to 87 in his own community of Payhembury to perform *Foresight*, a historical story of their community, which is now a classic case study of community theatre in practice. The Award for Leadership in Community-Based Theatre and Civic Engagement, presented by the American Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) in 2014, is a fitting recognition of his lifelong contribution to community theatre.

His achievements in the field are well documented and you can find more information about him and his published work online. And I am sure that my fellow colleagues who worked with John in different parts of the world, particularly in Poland, Taiwan, Greece, the Czech Republic and Turkey, will have more stories to tell about John. Mine is just one of many and I am grateful to have shared memories of John with them.

Finally, as a student of the beloved John Somers, I have not wasted my mentor's teachings. On the morning of the 15th of March 2024 UK time (afternoon in Hong Kong), I received the news of his passing while teaching a drama class to my students. Although I knew that life has its limits, I still felt deep sadness and reluctance. But then I realised that he would be proud of me – 25 years after becoming his student, I am still carrying on the applied drama work he taught me, with unwavering commitment.

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**Yi-Man Au** holds a PhD (Graduate School of Education from the University of Melbourne, Australia) and an MA in Applied Drama (University of Exeter, UK). She is an applied theatre practitioner, trainer and researcher. Her work and research interests include applied theatre creation and aesthetics, drama curriculum design, adult education, trainer/teacher/teaching artist training, NGO capacity building, community theatre and educational theatre performance. She was a co-chair of the Academic Committee at the 6th International Drama/Theatre and Education Association (IDEA) World Congress held in Hong Kong, an external reviewer for the Applied Theatre and Drama Education Professional Diploma Course at the Hong Kong Art School and a member of the Arts Education Advisory Group for the Hong Kong Arts Development Council (2017–2019). She is currently an Executive Director of the Hong Kong Drama/Theatre and Education Forum (TEFO), a part-time lecturer at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Drama and Theatre Education in Asia* (DaTEAsia) and a co-opted member of the Art Form Sub-Committee (Community) under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department.

## About **John Somers**, an **influential** and **generous drama teacher**

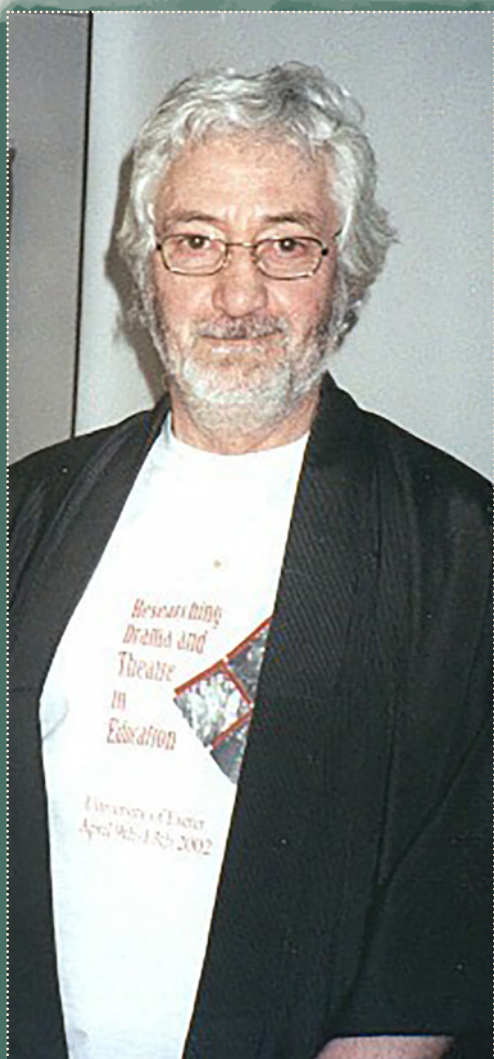
### Conversations with **Eirini Marna**

**T**he loss of a person opens up the powerful field of memory and connects those who knew them. Such is the case with the loss of John Somers. He was a drama teacher, director of the MA in Applied Drama at the University of Exeter in the UK, editor and founder of the journal *Research in Drama Education*, an inspiring facilitator of drama workshops and community theatre and a researcher in drama education. John Somers was a drama teacher who influenced the research, practice and dissemination of drama education from the UK, Brazil, China and South Korea to Palestine, Turkey, Poland and Greece. He was interested in drama education programmes in far-flung countries as well as in community theatre in his home town of Payhembury in the county of Devon.

To honour his memory, we asked some of his students and colleagues from different parts of the world to tell us how meeting him has changed them, both personally and professionally. We also sought to capture his impact on the wider drama community worldwide. Bellow, Helen Nicholson and Joe Winston from the UK share their thoughts on their work with *Research in Drama Education*, the key academic journal in drama education that John founded in the 1990s; also contributing are former students of his who, through their university positions, now act as leaders and multipliers of his vision: Hala Rashed Al-Yamani from Palestine, Shu-hwa Jung from Taiwan, Ha Young Hwang from Korea and Marios Koukounaras-Liagkis from Greece. In other cases, John's presence, both through his expertise and his personal contribution, helped to establish or expand theatre/drama associations or collectives. Testimony to his influence is provided by Maria Depta, Alicja Jaskulska and Aldona Żejmo-Kudelska, John's former students from Poland, Zeki Özen from Turkey and Nikos Govas from Greece.

All these great professionals, who inspire, teach and mentor young students and in-service educators and conduct research, were happy to share their thoughts, memories and stories of John Somers, answering to the following questions:

- *How has John's work, energy and approach influenced you personally and professionally?*
- *How influential has John Somers been in the field of drama education in your country?*





## *John and research (Research in Drama Education journal)*

John Somers was a man with a vision; he firmly believed in the power of drama and theatre to change lives and inspire communities. Most of us who work in this sector – whether as teachers, artists, therapists and academics – would agree with this sentiment, but few of us possess the kind of exceptional skills and energy that bring people together as researchers and pedagogues with John’s generosity of spirit. Sharing knowledge was important to John, and this was evident when I met him at the first conference he chaired at Exeter University in 1995. It was an inspiring event, and I was honoured when he invited me to serve on the editorial board of a new academic journal he was founding in 1996: *Research in Drama Education (RiDE)*. In his first editorial, he described his ambition for a research community that included different aspects of drama education. In John’s words, “We expect the journal to celebrate the variety of forms in which drama and theatre serve educational purpose around the world”. At the time, there was no academic journal of quality dedicated to drama education, so this shed much needed light on the field. He fully approved when the board agreed, under my co-editorship with Joe Winston, to add *The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* to the journal’s title, but in truth it was always eclectic and inclusive of many different practices across community and educational theatres. This was John’s vision.

John’s legacy and impact on the research field is immense. The journal he founded thrives today, and is read by thousands of students, researchers and academics. This is in no small measure due to the way in which he established the journal, and it is testament to his view that research matters, and that healthy debate is creative and productive. I was proud to learn from John Somers, and I pay tribute to his defining contribution as founding editor of *RiDE* – one of his many achievements – and to his warmth, wisdom and kindness.

**Helen Nicholson**, Royal Holloway,  
University of London; Editorial board (1996–2024), Co-editor (2005–2014),  
**Research in Drama Education**



I will always recall John Somers as a man infused with a deep love for drama education and a great believer in its intrinsic benefits in the education of young people. I got to know him when I worked in Devon schools, first as a deputy head and later as a headteacher. My later professional career at Warwick University owes a great deal to him. He wrote the reference that helped me get an interview and then offered me a place on the board of *RiDE* in its very early stages. Later, he was external examiner for the Warwick MA in Drama and Theatre Education, the practical structure of which was in no small way inspired by his own thriving Master’s degree at Exeter. As editor of *RiDE* and convener of the Exeter Conference, his influence on the international development of drama education was seminal, particularly in helping to establish it as a discipline of study with a serious research base. In doing so, he was always keen to be inclusive and took active measures to encourage educators from the developing world to be able to afford to attend and contribute. It is perhaps as a gifted and energetic teacher that many readers of this journal will remember him. He was ceaseless in his holistic support of his students, caring for their well-being and happiness as well as their intellectual development. He had a deep commitment to his work with overseas students and a profound love for Greece and its people. He is sorely missed by so many worldwide.

**Joe Winston**, Professor Emeritus of Drama and Theatre Education,  
University of Warwick; Co-editor of **Research in Drama Education** (2005–2015)





## ***Multiplying John's work in academia: Teaching future drama teachers***

Memory is very important for people because it helps them to make sense of their personal past experiences and to tell stories, especially about those that have had a strong impact on their lives. These stories determine how a person sees themselves and others.

John Somers was one of the people I had the honour of meeting while working on my PhD at the University of Exeter. He also collaborated with us at Bethlehem University, visiting to conduct a series of training workshops with BU students, pre-service and in-service teachers.

He was one of the academics who strongly influenced my professional vision, approach, skills and attitudes.

When I recall my past experiences with John, I immediately picture a person who was full of life, energy, knowledge, wisdom, humour and enthusiasm.

He believed strongly in drama education as a good learning and teaching process. The various academic and practical drama experiences I have gone through have created this deep understanding of the importance of creative pedagogies such as drama and theatre for us Palestinians living under occupation, especially the most recent and harshest Israeli occupation. This occupation has had a negative impact on our daily lives and has contributed to the dominance of traditional ways of life and approaches to teaching and learning.

My experiences with him have broadened and deepened my understanding of the power of drama and the performing arts in education to provide students with what Somers described as "a third space that is exploring issues on physical, emotional and social levels, but in a dynamic way" to delve into different life experiences, whether individually or collaboratively in small and large groups, and to discover themselves and become much more aware of themselves and the world around them. From his role as a model in leading the various sessions, I understood my role as a facilitator in working with a group of people.

All these experiences have helped me in my professional life at Bethlehem University. I have therefore worked on integrating applied drama into my various courses. I have also worked with colleagues to develop courses and use creative and active teaching methods. I had the opportunity to establish the Drama Society at Bethlehem University, and we worked on developing performances based on community and street theatre, where the students played an active role in selecting and developing the whole project of the performance.

Recently, I have been working with a number of colleagues to develop an MA programme called Creative Pedagogies and Community Practices. It is aimed at anyone interested in developing their professional skills. Students on the programme will experience first-hand creative pedagogies (arts in education: visual and performing, including music, drama and theatre in education), methods and techniques that will enhance their learning and develop their skills.

John Somers has physically passed away and left our world, but his spirit, thoughts, beliefs, principles and positions will continue to live and spread throughout our world, and in my opinion that is eternity.

***Hala Rashed Al-Yamani, Bethlehem University, Palestine***





### *The grandmaster mapping the landscape of drama education*

In October 1999, I went to the UK to continue my studies at the Drama Department of the University of Exeter. I was fortunate to meet my mentor, Professor John Somers, who introduced me to the field of applied drama. Both the theoretical research and the practical application opened my eyes to the value of drama in a liberal education, so I focused on the study and practice of theatre in education.

John's working methods and attitudes influenced me greatly. When I completed my PhD and returned to Taiwan, I taught at Taipei National University of the Arts. Theatre in Education, Applied Drama, Sociology of Theatre and Community are my main teaching subjects. My teaching approach is very similar to John's, integrating teaching, research, and practice. As a result, graduate students have followed me into juvenile detention centres for teaching and research,

into middle schools for practical theatre in education projects and into narrative theatre interactions with the elderly through drama.

John was always concerned about the state of drama education in my country. He was like a map-drawer of drama around the world. Many of his students are working diligently in the field of drama education in Taiwan, some teaching drama in formal schools, others interacting with communities or specific groups through applied drama. Meanwhile, I continue to have a subtle influence through teaching, research and practice at the university.

**Shu-hwa Jung,**

*Taipei National University of the Arts, Taiwan*



### *Remembering John Somers*

I met John Somers in the summer of 2000, before I started my MA in Applied Drama with him at Exeter. At the time, he was directing a community play, *Parson Terry's Dinner and Other Stories*, to celebrate the turn of the millennium in Payhembury, the village to which his family and he belonged. The production took place in different parts of the village, telling stories of different times in Payhembury between 1650 and 1943, and children and adults from the community were all cast in the performance. It was such a sensational and thought-provoking experience for me because of the way in which it highlighted the vivid connection between drama/theatre and life, and also because of the incredible participation of villagers with sheer joy, passion and humour. John's presence was behind every scene and his genuine interest in working with people shone through. It was also his enthusiasm for both practice and research, which was clearly evident in the project, that led me to become involved in this area of study.

Teaching on a postgraduate programme in Korea, I continue to cultivate the dynamic relationship between practice and research as part of John's legacy. Whether I am teaching site-specific performance or theatre in education, I believe that insights for me and my students always come from the experience of practice. Such insights are in the flesh and inevitably breathe like living creatures. My approach owes much to John, who taught me the courage to engage in practice and research in a symbiotic relationship. Research can be alive, as if it could breathe in and out, and practice gains momentum to develop in its own intelligent way.



What resonates strongly with me is John's practice of immediacy and transparency. He was such a courageous practitioner in that he was not afraid to push boundaries. He would just do it! He was also such a humane, generous teacher who cared for his students with his positive will. I find myself driving for my students to their practice sites in Korea with my car full of their handmade props and objects. And I tell my students, "My teacher used to do that for me too".

**Ha Young Hwang,**  
*Korea National University of Arts,  
South Korea*



I will tell you exactly how I feel about John Somers and I will back it up with our history and, of course, with his work and his influence on my work. He changed the trajectory of my life, quite frankly. My encounter with John as a person and with his work at a conference in Thessaloniki in November 2005 was the starting point for me to make big decisions, to get to know him and to work with him. It was also the beginning of a path that has led me to be a university professor today, following in the footsteps of John Somers. I will explain as briefly as possible what happened.

A friend from Corfu – I had just been appointed as a teacher of theology in formal education – urged me to attend the conference organised by the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (TENet-Gr) in Thessaloniki. It was a Sunday and I found myself unsuspectingly exposed to the lightning storm of John Somers, who spoke about the dynamics of drama education and showed a video of a drama in education project with autistic children. In addition, Persephone Sextou and Maria Lourou discussed a theatre in education project about road accidents on the island of Chios, where there had been fatalities due to motorcycle racing. I had never imagined that education could be so liberating, transforming and transfiguring. I saw before me a man who was changing the world and he had a method. He knew how to do it. This opened a wide window for me to change my personal educational paradigm, and a research idea was born. At that time, John stressed the need for research into the impact of drama education. I remember him saying that we need to study the shadow of the "bird of art" while it is still flying close to the earth, but also the "bird of art" itself. This idea was fixed in my mind that day: to study drama in education in depth and to highlight its transformative and multifaceted dynamics. In the end, I approached John, but what could I tell him? Stunned, I just mumbled, "Congratulations! Amazing". Still, I dared to ask TENet-Gr members to attend John's 5-day seminar, but there was no availability. They asked me if I was a drama education practitioner and I said, "No, but I'm doing a PhD!"

So, I returned home enlightened and determined to do a PhD. I had found a teacher and also the people at TENet-Gr like Jenny, Nikos and Dina, to name a few, who were at first cautious, thinking that the cobbler should stick to his last, but eventually supported me and put me in touch with the teacher. And John left no point, no moment, no place, no question, no idea that he did not embrace and illuminate. It was him who introduced me to people, literature and ideas. He wrote to me constantly to clarify any question, to help me with anything I needed, to illuminate any path my research and study took, simply because he loved drama education and research. And he was not even on my seven-member PhD committee. We would meet in Thessaloniki, go to seminars and conferences, eat and drink, laugh and be sad, always as a teacher with his student. That is who he was. A minister of learning, a unique seeker of truth, a rational revolutionary of change, a father of love and giving, and above all a great teacher who dared. Our model and our guide!

**Marios Koukounaras-Liagkis,**  
*National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece*



## *John and field work: Empowering theatre/drama associations*

It was 13 July 2000, when I received his first email. We were introduced by Maria Lourou (his MA student) and Eleni Papazoglou. We immediately started exchanging messages about drama (at that time I was not sure how to translate it into Greek), the role of the arts in schools, the need for teacher training, etc. And of course, I invited him to the 1st International Conference on Theatre/Drama & Education that the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (TENet-Gr) would organise in Athens in December of that year.

Since then, our collaboration was continuous and frequent. He came to Greece many times to attend conferences, seminars, lectures, celebrations and parties. Each time, we would have conversations – usually in a tavern over a glass of wine – about teacher training (he often mentioned the need for organised support), about the different versions of drama or theatre (in/for) education, about community theatre (which was probably his favourite) and about the content of university studies, especially the MA in Applied Drama that he had designed at the University of Exeter. He always spoke highly of the students from Greece who went to Exeter to do the MA and the high quality projects they designed (one of TENet-Gr's earlier projects called "Escapes" grew out of such work done by Maria Lourou, Gianna Pitouli and Christina Mouratidou for the MA with John Somers).

John Somers was multifaceted, versatile, a traveller and a reveller, inventive and innovative (everyone remembers him coming to seminars with his favourite "shoebox" – which was described as a "compound stimulus" – from which he would take out the most unexpected objects to stimulate us to enter, as he said, "imaginary worlds" and start a new drama lesson).

For TENet-Gr, he was one of the first and most influential teachers and inspirers. It is an honour that he accepted to be our association's first honorary member. John Somers paved the way for many of us. A generous teacher, a friend, it is a great pleasure for me to have known him.



**Nikos Govas**, theatre pedagogue,  
Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network, Greece





In the mid-1990s Mrs. Jadwiga Królikowska who was an academic and a lecturer at the University of Warsaw began to work with John Somers, seeing the potential of the drama method applied to educational, preventive and social rehabilitation work. This collaboration resulted in annual drama workshops and the opportunity for students to participate in international drama conferences. In addition, some of the students were able to take advantage of Erasmus scholarships and attend the MA course in Applied Drama at the University of Exeter, run by John Somers. It is worth noting that Poland at the time was a post-communist country in the midst of intense socio-political change, formally outside the European Union, in a poor economic situation. Understanding this reality and showing a great empathy, John ran many workshops pro bono, helped us to get discounts on conference fees and financial support. From the outset, his commitment to the development of drama in Poland went far beyond a standard partnership between two universities. The graduates of the scholarship programmes and other participants of John's workshops founded the first drama association in Poland in 2002, called The Association of Drama Practitioners STOP-KLATKA. With John's great support in terms of content and organisation, members of the association carried out drama projects in educational centres, prisons and schools on topics such as human rights, bullying, violence prevention and mental health problems among teenagers. At the same time, following John's advice, they built up and integrated the community of drama practitioners in Poland by organising open workshops on the method and conferences. Today, community theatre is very well known in Poland, associated with John Somers and practised by facilitators from Krakow, Warsaw and Gdańsk – from the sea to the mountains.



When we think about John's legacy, we believe that one of the most important things he has left us (which seems particularly important today) is the belief that we can work and create together, despite our differences. People who have had the experience of working with him always find something in common, and it is not just a memory of having met John, but a specific sense of a deep existential experience.

**Maria Depta, Alicja Jaskulska  
and Aldona Żejmo-Kudelska,**

*Drama Way Foundation for Education and Culture,  
Warsaw; Community Theatre Project, Supraśl, Poland*

### *John Somers: A warm, friendly, sincere, wise drama companion*

John Somers contributed to the development of drama studies in Turkey by offering new perspectives and was always loved by the participants of his workshops. The international conferences organised by the Contemporary Drama Association (Çağdaş Drama Derneği) since 1985 have aimed to integrate international developments and new approaches into drama studies in the country. To this end, field experts from different countries have conducted workshops at these international conferences. John Somers supported these conferences more than once in cities such as Ankara, Kocaeli, Istanbul, Antalya and Bursa, passing on all his wisdom to the drama participants as if he were a family member. He introduced the role card technique to the Turkish drama world and gave details on its use. Role cards were found to be very practical and effective by drama practitioners and were used frequently because of the dramatic structure they provided. In fact, the technique was directly included in the curriculum of the Contemporary Drama Association, which is recognised by the Turkish Ministry of National Education.



One of the lifetime achievement awards given by the Contemporary Drama Association to drama pioneers from around the world who have contributed to the development of drama in Turkey was presented to John Somers.

In the years that followed, John Somers introduced practitioners to the interactive theatre approach of applied theatre, enabling them to gain a whole new perspective. He sincerely taught his drama friends how to think, how to create a story, how to use personal material to understand and analyse the character and how to bring theatre and drama together in an organic way.

Whatever date or city John Somers ran the workshop in, they all had one thing in common. His smiling face, his boundless energy, his patience and his wisdom. I have personally had the opportunity to interact with him in his workshops, sometimes as a participant, sometimes as a translator and sometimes as a representative of the organising entity. Whatever the role, I learned a lot each time.

The conversations between the workshops, the feedback he sent after each event and the projects he carefully designed allowed for a sophisticated development of a country's understanding of drama.

I will never forget what he said during one of his workshops: "A drama teacher should also be a good storyteller". We will try to tell your story well.

I am glad you were there, I am glad you are still here, John Somers...

**Dr Zeki Özen,**

*Ankara University, and on behalf of the Contemporary Drama Association, Turkey*



**Eirini Marna** is a kindergarten teacher, drama teacher, facilitator and adult trainer. She holds a degree in Preschool Education from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, a postgraduate degree in Applied Drama from the University of Exeter, UK and a DEA in Theatre Studies from the University of Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris III, France. She has participated in various training programmes in collaboration with the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network. From 2020 to 2024, she participated as a trainer in the project "Schools for All - Inclusion of Refugee Children in Greek Schools" of the European Wergeland Centre, the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and the Institute of Educational Policy. Since 2007 she has been working in public kindergartens and since 2023 she has been supervising the practical and laboratory exercises of the students of the School of Drama at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.



# Narrative, drama and the compound stimulus\*

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**John Somers**  
University of Exeter, UK

## Abstract

This article is divided into six sections. It highlights the centrality of story to human existence, the key to drama's effectiveness as a change agent, and then explores the implications for young people and for the drama they create. Section three describes the theory that underpins the use of a "compound stimulus", a way of drawing participants into the fictional world and the exploration of specific stories. It also outlines the ways in which the compound stimulus should be used and provides case studies of its use. Finally, section six reflects on applications of the compound stimulus.

**Keywords:** *story, narrative, drama, compound stimulus, workshop*

## 1. The centrality of storying

Storying – the creation of narratives – is an indispensable aspect of human existence. As Barbara Hardy (1977) comments, it is "a fundamental act of mind transferred from life to art" (p. 12). Story permeates our whole existence for, without its organising frameworks, we would exist only in the moment of experience. Storying allows us to engage in three fundamental processes to:

- Organise momentary experience into a series of memories;
- Predict a future;
- Experience, vicariously through the stories of others, aspects of the world we ourselves do not experience.

The first gives rise to notions of who we are: identity rooted in memory. The second allows us to have hope, expectation and to organise our actions. The third forms the basis of much of our learning and is the source of most formal education.

### *Personal story*

The most fundamental psychological need humans have is that of knowing "who we are". Our personal identity is painstakingly built throughout our lives, and embedded in it are our notions of self-worth. David Novitz (1997) maintains that we construct our personal story much like an artist makes a work

of art, selecting and ordering experiences into a personal memory bank that becomes our signifier of identity. Much of what happens to us in life is deemed by our memory to be insignificant, and left on the cutting room floor as the "film" of who we are is continuously edited by us.

### *Meta-stories*

We move in a world that contains stories other than our own; in fact they constantly surround us. Some we elect to experience, such as the novel, film or TV programme, whilst others are as invisible as the air we breathe: national identity stories, the unspoken narrative of our family, social behaviour patterns that we absorb from life. Some of these are benign and consensual; others are created by sections of society with an aim in mind: for example, to demonise another nation, to support a political stance, to sell us something.

### *Intertextuality*

We are unavoidably affected by some of the stories we encounter. Certain of them, especially those that reinforce our own, personal story, attain the state of intertextuality, the active interrelationship of our personal story with another narrative. From this process comes the possible modification of the individual's personal story.

## 2. Young people and stories

The telling of stories is a major means by which adults represent the world to children, passing on the seminal stories that encourage knowledge, understanding, appropriate action and the tenets of moral behaviour. Where major commercial interests control the making and broadcasting of story, an unhealthy dominance of the narrative diet may result, true diversity may become stifled and consumers be encouraged to adopt global values and behaviour alien to their culture. Whilst the intertextuality of personal story and commercial narrative can be stimulating, it is also important to encourage children and adults to become producers of their own stories, and not just receivers of those of others. Given a free choice, I believe individuals choose to experience stories that have the most relevance for them, that have the greatest chance of productive interaction with "who they are".

### *Drama and story*

Participants in Drama in Education are encouraged to enter a fictional world. This world has similarities to that enjoyed by the child at free play. The difference is that the object of the play is chosen, usually consciously, by the leader and/or participants. The medium through which the object is modelled, the dramatic language, is deliberately acquired over time through the learning of skills. There is no doubt that drama leaders intend not only to make effective drama, but also to change attitudes, although they are often reluctant to admit it and see no reliable way of judging that attitude change has taken place (Somers, 1999). My research shows attitude change to be possible (Somers, 1996). Even though they are cautious in claiming positive change in attitude, teachers' implicit aim is to develop more humane, sensitive people and they become troubled if it is suggested that their students remain unchanged by drama experience, or even become more negative as a result of it (Somers, 1999).

### *Devices to get participants into the fictional world*

There is a huge variety of techniques to get participants into the fictional world of drama. Often, the stimulus used becomes less important as the drama ideas that the participants originate gain strength. The compound stimulus described in the first case study can be seen as a booster rocket that gets the main craft (the participants' dramatic story, its characters and the world they inhabit) into flight, before falling away. The energy and interest generated by the compound stimulus are crucial to ensuring participant involvement. It provides an initial strong

stimulation to the users' story-making powers and, once the latter are established, can serve as a continuing reference in the drama-making process.

## 3. The theory of the compound stimulus

All inanimate objects designed for personal use are redolent of their owners. A tool can suggest labour and the labourer; an item of clothing the wearer and their behaviour; a letter a motive for writing and a relationship. Individual artefacts have limited story-generating potential. The picture of a baby is, well, a picture of a baby and it is difficult to generate any stories other than simplistic ones based on the concept of "baby". Add the sound of a metronome to the image and a new impetus for story making is generated. The story often is not rooted in "image of baby" or the "ticking", but is held in the creative force field of their interaction.

Documents can be subtler and more complex in the story they suggest – the two letters shown in Figure 1, for example. Here, the formality of a solicitor's letter is set against the informality of a personal note. The users conjure visions of a relationship that has gone wrong, an intimacy that is now exposed to legal wrangling. The story hovers between the documents, is to be found in the territory which exists between them.

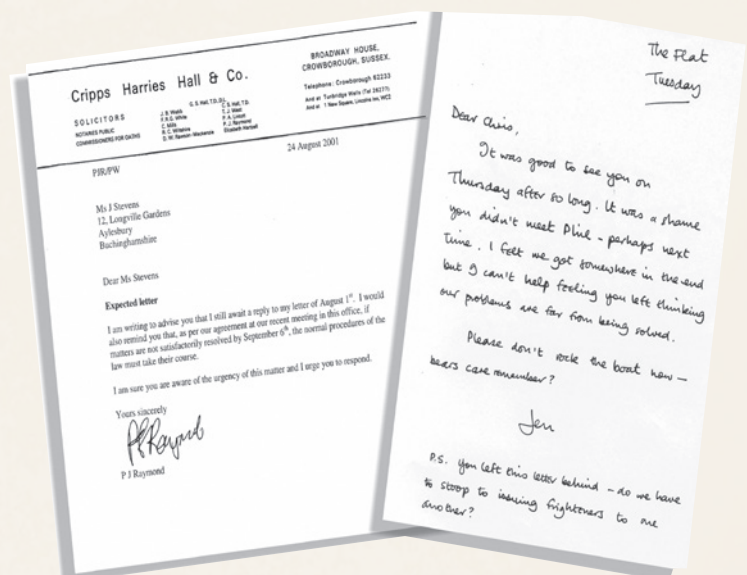


Figure 1

The compound stimulus is so named by me because it is *compound*, i.e. made up of more than one element, and a *stimulus* to story-making. It is composed of a number of artefacts – objects, photographs, letters and other documents, for example, enclosed



in an appropriate container. The compound stimulus and the story that flows from it is given significance by the careful juxtaposition of its contents (the relationship between them) and how the detail of the objects suggest human motivation and action – a crushed photograph or torn-up letter, for example.

Herein lies the secret of the creation of a compound stimulus. The elements of the story that each artefact represents must, when juxtaposed, create a web of relationships that are neither so quickly understood that the story becomes immediately obvious, nor so remote from one another that no obvious narrative possibilities, based in the felt story tensions, emerge. The differing relationships of the tensions between artefacts in a compound stimulus can be represented by the quality of distance. I have tried to represent this principle in three diagrams. In Figure 2, the relationships of the artefacts are too close, giving rise to too obvious a connection. In

Figure 3, the relationships are too remote, making it too difficult to arrive at a story that adequately connects the artefacts. Here, there are no felt tensions that can be productively explored in the drama. In Figure 4, the relationship is just right, leading to productive exploration through improvisation.

This state is achieved by giving enough information for there to be plausible links between the artefacts, the nature of which can only be defined by participant hypothesis. Examples are: placing names within letters that are echoed in initials on other artefacts; correspondence of dates; a photograph that could be of a person mentioned in an official form; a keepsake that may have been cherished as a result of a relationship hinted at in a diary entry. The juxtaposing of the artefacts represented in Figure 4 provoke a series of narrative tensions that will suggest to the users story possibilities that can be followed up in the drama.

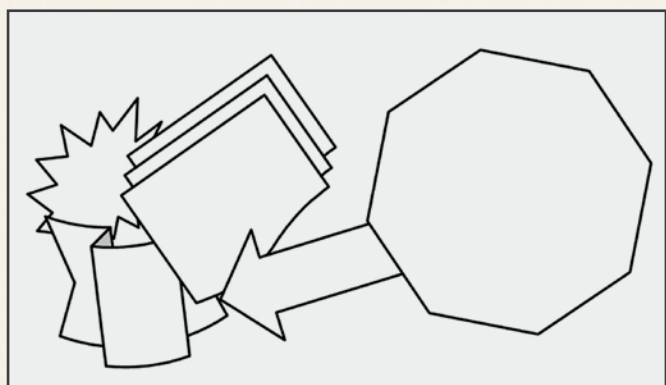


Figure 2

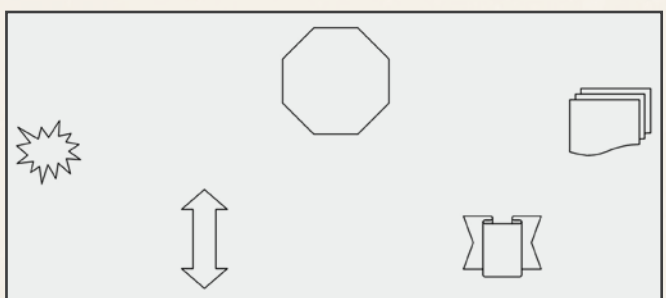


Figure 3

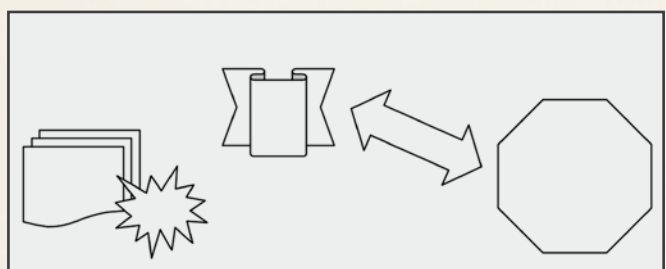


Figure 4

#### 4. The processes of use

When confronted by a compound stimulus, the users must invest imaginatively in its use in order to generate story. The first act of the leader is to show the container to the participants and to explain where it was found – under a bed, left on a bus, thrown on the street, for example. As with all drama work, a spirit of playfulness is required, a willingness to enter into the spirit of the “game”. As such, the leader needs to conduct early exercises with the participants in order that they “learn the rules of the game”. The rules here are of speculation and hypothesising. And game it must be, for the users need to know that this story and this stimulus have been created for their use and are not “real”. There are two basic questions that I always pose to participants: “who are the people involved in this story?” and “what is happening to them?” There is only so much to be gained by discussion and speculation in this, the imaginative/association phase, where a plausible story in which the artefacts are embedded emerges.

If the compound stimulus is being used in an Interactive Theatre programme, the performance may now follow. If the work is taking place in a workshop or lesson, participants then need to move to the exploration stage, where drama improvisation is used to explore the lives of the people who are suggested within the story. This is the use of the drama space as social laboratory. The guiding question here is “What situation would you like to create within the drama that will allow you to find out more about these people?” It is essential that a dramatic tension exists within the improvisation if it is to have dramatic energy, and one of the skills participants develop in this stage is identifying situations that



contain such tension. Participants work best in small groups, using drama as a research device to find out more. It is in this phase that the people from the story come alive, for drama allows us to create the detail of human circumstance. Further improvisations are set up progressively to discover more. Such investigation clarifies on the one hand (the basic story achieves coherence), but complicates on another (further dilemmas and questions emerge that demand investigation).

The third phase is one of selecting and shaping. Here the group sifts the information it has discovered from the research phase to select that which has coherence and value in relation to the story and its characters. The manner of finding things out in the research phase may not be the way of recording in the shaping phase. The participants may, for example, have discovered something about a relationship through naturalistic improvisation, but choose to shape it in a stylised form. What is shaped can be seen as the insight, the wisdom the group has acquired through the research. It is in the selecting and shaping that the group comes to understand the significance of the story it has made and inhabited.

The fourth phase that follows naturally is that of communication. Here, what has been selected and shaped into a statement in the dramatic medium is communicated to others – most usually other main group members. If done within the group, the communication is offered as the outcome of a research process to fellow researchers. Many of the accoutrements of performance are therefore not present. What we get is the basic story, ordered and shaped to give coherence. This phase can use human resources skilfully however – the use of narration, song and live instrumental music to join together the sections of the dramatised story, for example. It is essential that the material communicated have dramatic form and power. Almost always, applause is inappropriate as we are not “performing” but sharing the outcomes of a communal research process – sharing our insights and findings with fellow researchers. With a sophisticated story, sufficient time and the willingness of the group, however, the communication phase can be developed to establish a more formal performance.

I mention the term “research” frequently. This is because I think the whole process is a research one:

- *Phase one, **imagination/association***, is where the speculation, hypothesising takes place;



Figure 5



- *Phase two, **exploration***, is where the fieldwork is conducted. In a dynamic relationship between hypothesising and empirical work, the speculation experienced in phase one is modified by what is discovered;
- *Phase three, **selecting and shaping***, is where the data are analysed and ordered and meaning is made;
- *Phase four, **communication***, is where the research outcomes are shared with the wider research community (in an education setting, the rest of the class).

The choice of artefacts that go into a compound stimulus dictates the kinds of stories that emerge. It is possible, therefore, to organise the stimulus to take participants into a particular aspect of life. The quality of the artefacts and their presentation should be of the highest possible standard and seem authentic. Users should take care to get the detail right. If originals cannot be used, authentic copies must be made. The artefacts should be placed in an appropriate container that gives the collection coherence. The stimulus also needs to be introduced with an appropriate story that positions the container and its contents in a suitable human context. In Figure 5, prior to an Interactive Theatre performance in Taiwan, for example, a facilitator invites audience members to look inside a school

bag. Note the prepared surface for displaying the contents. The actors stand at the side of the performance area.

The aim of the exercise is to intrigue the participants, to develop a sense of empathy for and identification with the people and dilemmas that are represented in the compound stimulus. It is also most important that the leader should respect the compound stimulus and appear as ignorant of the meaning of its content as the participants. If she appears not to find it interesting, or knows their meaning, the users may feel it devalued at the outset. The leader's appropriate handling of the artefacts and the ways in which the contents of the container are revealed are crucial for its effectiveness. If, for example, the group seems to be delving into private possessions, due respect for what is revealed will be appropriate. As noted above, it helps if the contents are displayed in some way so that the users become aware of inter-artefact relationships.

The contents are progressively revealed and as many users as possible get a chance to take something from the container and to describe it to the rest of the group. The significance of each artefact is considered and its potential links with other objects are explored. Some of this happens through open discussion in the group, but much more occurs within the thoughts of individuals. The exposure of the



Figure 6

compound stimulus is often followed by participant need to examine certain aspects of the contents in more detail. It is normal to keep the contents together in the place of display so that users can refer back to them during the exploration stage.

## 5. Examples of compound stimuli

I have tried here to present, with the use of photographs, the nature of two compound stimuli. No picture can fully compensate for touching or reading the actual artefacts, of course, but I hope the reader will discover the secrets of the essential decisions about choosing the ingredients of the stimulus. Depending on the size of the group being worked with, the ideal group format is a single circle if the group does not exceed twenty in number, or a semicircle of several rows if there are more. It is possible to duplicate the compound stimulus for ease of examination (see example two below), but this can undermine its sense of uniqueness.

### Example one

The first description is of a memories box that I have used for many years in several different countries. It never fails to intrigue. The container is a cigar box tied with red ribbon. I introduce the box with the story that I visited an auction room to buy a chest of drawers. This I did, selecting the chest from other furniture that seemed to come from the same house – suggesting a house clearance after the owner has died. The chest of drawers appeared empty, except for old newspaper in the bottom of each drawer. On getting it into my house, however, I discovered the cigar box. At this point, I untie the ribbon, open the box and invite participants, in turn, to take one artefact out and describe it. It is then placed on a white cloth in the centre of the circle.

As can be seen from the photographs, the box contains material from around 1920:

A dried flower;

Seed heads from a plant called, in English, “honesty”;

A feather;

A posed photograph of a group of people in formal dress;

A photograph of a man;

A birthday card with the hand-written message:

*Just to wish you many happy returns of the day. Read carefully the verse on the other side. And accept a small token of friendship from me.*  
*Yours sincerely,*  
*Florence.*

Figure 7

A hand-written letter that reads:

*Dear Florence,*  
*Great news! You know that I had told you that I had written a letter to my Uncle Richard in Vermont – well, I heard from him this morning, and he tells me that if I come prepared to work hard, there may be an opening for me. Florence, this could be the chance I have been looking for. I know that after what I have been through could never stay in Bleadon, but one day when I have made my fortune, perhaps I will return.*  
*I have managed to get a berth on the liner 'Oriole' which sails this Friday, and as there are some affairs to be attended to in London, I leave for there this afternoon. Mother is informing everybody that my birthday celebrations are cancelled. I regret this robs us of another opportunity to meet again but I know that after our discussion at the garden party on Saturday you will be pleased for me.*  
*Thank you for helping me to see things so clearly. I will write to you from America when I am settled in.*  
*Your affectionate friend*  
*Peter*

Figure 8

Stories of different kinds emerge from this compound stimulus. A description of one may help the reader understand how the stimulus works to facilitate story making. A group recently created this story:

*A woman, Florence Astell, from Bleadon, a small Cambridgeshire village, met a man, Peter Connaught several times whilst they were growing up. At a garden party, held in the garden of the Rectory, they met again and, after Florence had helped Peter come to terms with his arguments with his father which led to his being sacked from the family firm, he invites her to his birthday party. She is attracted to him and she thinks it is mutual, although nothing explicit is said. He picks a flower from the priest's garden and places in her dress front, and at some point, she tickles his neck with a feather found in the garden. In anticipation of his birthday party, she writes a birthday card for him, but gets his letter before she has the chance to send it. She did not see him again before he left for London. Whilst alive, she kept the objects in the box as memories of a relationship that never developed.*

Groups use improvisation to explore situations from the story: what happened to them both on their walk in the garden; how Florence responded when she learned that Peter's birthday party had been cancelled; what happened when Peter returned to Bleadon some time later and met Florence, for example. Each piece of useful information garnered from the improvisations is used to clarify and strengthen the participants' story.



It is possible to use this compound stimulus to explore over, say, four hours, the relationships of these people set in the social context of the 1920s. It is also possible to extend the work over greater time to create more sophisticated outcomes including the creation of full-scale performance.

### *Example two*

This compound stimulus was used as part of a Theatre in Education (TIE)<sup>1</sup> programme delivered to students of thirteen years of age in schools in the county of Devon, England. The compound stimulus was used to involve the student participants in generating a story prior to a visit from the Theatre in Education Team one week later. Because we worked during the course of a day with two hundred and seventy students, in three groups of ninety (each containing three classes of thirty students), it was decided to duplicate the stimulus for ease of use. Accordingly, each class of thirty received six compound stimuli so that discussion could take place in groups of five. As fifty-four compound stimuli were needed, for ease of duplication, we restricted its content to documents and a photograph.

The pack contained:

- A confidential school record-card of Lucy White, aged 14. It recorded a series of statements by teachers, including comments about Lucy's successful early adjustment to her new school on transfer from Primary to this Secondary school. As Lucy gets older, it notes that a girl called Sarah Richards increasingly puts her under pressure, and jeopardises her relationship with her special friend, Rachel.
- A postcard from Rachel to Lucy whilst the former was on holiday.
- A page from a rough book where a student is trying to do some French work, but is interrupted by the scribbling of others on her work.
- A document folded and taped together with "keep out" boldly marked on its outside. On opening, the document reveals a photograph of a group of students labelled "our French class on a trip to Caen" that has been annotated to show the owner's feelings towards other members of the class.
- A Devon and Cornwall Police report by a "Detective Constable Denise Walters" who was called to the Accident and Emergency Department of the local hospital at 2.28am to see a young girl, Rachel Hurst, who had been brought to the Department unconscious with a blood/alcohol level three times the adult legal limit. It also gives some of the context in which this incident occurred, and what lines of enquiry the policeman is contemplating.

A "special report form", for Sarah Richards that she is required to take to each class she attends and which is signed by the teacher following the entry of a comment on Sarah's behaviour.

Five pages of Lucy's diary revealing inner thoughts on relationships, pressures, fears and hopes.

An ambulance call-out record sheet from the local hospital giving brief details of the circumstances of a call from someone requesting an ambulance at a given address, and the record of the despatch of paramedics and an ambulance.

A set of four photo-booth photographs of two girls. A receipt for the purchase of a considerable amount of alcohol.

An invitation for a "sleepover and video party".

All of the documents were contained in a plastic bag advertising a shop that sells alcohol.

Teachers in the schools were briefed by a TIE team member on how to use the compound stimulus. Having organised the class into six groups of five, the teacher told the students that a group would be coming into school next week to deal with issues of alcohol use. They would be working on a story that involved the contents of the bag and that, prior to the TIE group's arrival, their job was to find out as much as they could about the people in the story and what was happening to them. Teachers subsequently reported a high level of interest and involvement in the contents of the bag and the emerging story (see Cousins & Somers, 2001).

During the following week, the TIE team visited the schools. It presented a performance element of around 25 minutes showing a story utilising the contents of the bag. The students were now able to meet Sarah Richards and see her affect on Lucy and Rachel; they saw the circumstances in which Lucy and Rachel took the booth photographs; they witnessed how the party was changed from an innocent sleep-over and video party to one where hard drink was obtained and consumed – particularly by Rachel, whose drink was spiked by her long-term friend Lucy, who was under the malign influence of Sarah Richards.

During the time following the performance element, the students were asked to decide who was responsible in any way for Rachel being in hospital intensive care (she had choked on her own vomit and was unconscious). To aid the discussion, large cards bearing the names and photographs of characters in the story were given to the three classes present at each of the programme's three deliveries. As a focus for their discussion and decision-making, they were invited to place the cards in the order in which they thought characters had some responsibility for Rachel being in hospital. These characters include

Lucy's parents, for example, who had left the house whilst the party took place. During their discussions (each class of thirty was in a separate room) they could invite any character to be hot-seated, a process by which they can ask the character any question they wish to clarify motive and story.

Finally, all three classes were brought back to the performance space and their cards were prominently displayed in three columns (one for each class) in the order in which they felt the characters had responsibility for Rachel's hospitalisation. A discussion then ensued about why they had put the characters in the chosen order. Teachers followed up the activity in the following week during their twenty-minute morning tutor periods.

One week later, and to achieve "closure" of the programme and its story, a letter was sent to each class from Rachel's mother. This informed them that Rachel was now out of intensive care and would soon be home. It thanked the students for their help in unravelling the events that led to her being in hospital. In addition to the briefing given to teachers who would use the compound stimulus with the students, teachers were also given notes outlining the nature of the programme and possible follow-up activities that could flow from it. As the delivery of the TIE programme usually formed part of the school's health education programme, schools sometimes used additional material of their own choosing.<sup>2</sup>

## 6. Applications of the compound stimulus

The function of the compound stimulus is to engage the users in making stories. It therefore has usefulness wherever story-making is required. This could be in a mother-tongue lesson, where talking and writing were the main activities and not drama. Thus the moral dilemma suggested by the stimulus might be explored through discussion, and the story furthered by the writing of additional letters, or the written reflections, in role, of a character from within the story, for example. It works best, however, when drama techniques are used to bring the story alive.

As stated earlier, human behaviour depends on the nature and interaction of individuals. How a father responds on hearing that his son is experimenting with drugs flows from his attitude to drugs, whether he loves his son, his attitude to possible social stigmatisation, for instance. Any discussion about the detailed response of individuals to particular circumstances brings the response "it depends what the people are like". Drama allows us to invent this kind of detail, to create authentic contexts for the exploration of issues of concern.

Used in this way, it can be of assistance in many parts of the curriculum. In History, it allows us to bring alive people involved in past events. The compound stimulus can be used as an introduction to a new topic or can be used to explore the human aspects of a situation well understood in a factual sense by the users. Its main role is to look at the implications of events for the humans involved, to create empathy. Thus, for example, the users might fully understand the dates and facts of Azorean migration to Brazil, but not "feel" what it was like to make such a journey, in privation, to an unknown shore, or the tension of the first meeting between an Azorean immigrant and indigenous inhabitants. Students might know the facts of Jenner's smallpox vaccine discovery, but not understand the feelings of a woman who is saved by his knowledge, or the suspicion his ideas generated amongst his colleagues.

In Geography, a compound stimulus that records the final years of life on a farm, the land of which is to be sold for industrial development, could help focus attention on the competing interests and rights to land ownership and use. In a foreign language lesson, elements of a compound stimulus could require translation from the target language before sense can be made of its meaning and improvisations undertaken.

The two examples given describe the use of the compound stimulus in contrasting contexts. Example one can be used within drama sessions for drama-making that could, if required, grow into performance. Alternatively, it could be adapted to focus on a particular historical situation or to deal with issues of relationships, families or migration. Example two shows how the compound stimulus can be used by a TIE team to raise social issues. It can be adapted to deal with issues such as bullying, drug taking or petty crime.

In all of this work, there must be a respect for the story being created. Fledgling ideas are easily crushed by incautious statements by the leader or fellow students. The knowledge that emerges in the exploration stage is often tentative and must be treated as such. The improvisations undertaken must be seen as a way of generating hypotheses, rather than the rehearsal of certain knowledge. Only if the practical drama work takes the participants beyond the understanding acquired from discussion will the exercise truly work. The leader of the group must decide how she wishes the participants to use the story-making impetus that a compound stimulus generates. As I show above, it can form part of a wide variety of broadly educational contexts.



## Conclusion

I do not claim the idea of the “compound stimulus” as innovation. I accept that many “story boxes” or “drama packs” have been used in the past and are described in publications. What I have tried to do here, however, is to unravel the basis on which these stimuli work, to expose the underlying theory in ways that will aid their creation and use. In order to extend my knowledge of practice and theory, I would be interested to hear from people who have used such approaches in their drama work and how their experience reinforces or challenges what I have stated here.

**John Somers** was an Honorary Fellow at the Department of Drama, Exeter University, England. He was founding editor of the journal *Research in Drama Education* and director of the international conference *Researching Drama and Theatre in Education*. He founded the Exeter MA Applied Drama. He was artistic director of the Exstream Theatre Company, which specialises in interactive theatre in non-theatre sites. He wrote and directed major original community plays. His play *On the Edge* won prestigious awards for its contribution to better understanding of mental health issues. He worked extensively internationally, in Finland, Estonia, Turkey, Poland and China. He won the American Alliance of Theatre and Education Special Recognition Award in 2003. His books include *Drama in the Curriculum* (1995), *Drama and Theatre in Education: Current Research* (1996) and *Drama as Social Intervention* (2006). A writer of many published articles, his research interests focused on Applied Drama and the role of narrative theory in drama.

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## Notes

1. Theatre in Education involves the use of theatre in educational contexts. It always involves a performance element that is embedded in an inter-active programme of other activities that involve the students in exploring character motivations and in being able to influence the story through their often moral, engagement with the story and its characters. For a fuller explanation, see Jackson (1993).
2. For a full evaluation of this programme, see Cousins and Somers (2001).

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## The 10th IDEA World Congress Beijing, 15–20 July 2024

**Miao Bin**

Director of Projects of the International Drama/Theatre  
and Education Association



*IDEA 2024 Congress*

### **Hesitating and waiting**

Bringing the IDEA World Congress to China did not seem easy if we go back to an IDEA webinar about a year ago when the possibility of holding the event in Beijing was discussed. There were a number of voices against it, on the grounds that people would not be able to express themselves freely, that there would be security problems, and so on. I was asked for my opinion, which was of course a positive YES.

During the congress, I heard many people say that Beijing was different from what they expected. It is an international city with a distinct cultural identity and has hosted two Olympic Games, so it would

not disappoint drama educators from around the world. At the same time, this is a congress that China has long waited for. Drama education is now vibrant in the country, but it also faces many problems and difficulties. Therefore, the IDEA 2024 Congress provides an opportunity to further activate the development of drama education in China.

The IDEA 2024 Congress was held at Beijing No.2 Middle School Chaoyang School from 15 to 20 July and attracted over 500 participants, most of whom were teachers from schools across China. They were eager to meet drama educators from other countries to clear up misconceptions and learn additional





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methods. Over the 5 days of the congress there were 6 keynote speeches, 5 short performances, 5 Special Interest Groups (SIGs), 3 roundtable forums, 48 paper presentations, 41 workshops and 1 Young IDEA international cooperation project with a performance. The IDEA General Council Meeting also took place during the congress, with the election of the new IDEA Elected Officers.

### Sharing and discussing

Professor Ma Wenqi of the Chinese Central Academy of Drama discussed his long-term research into what drama in education adopted and transformed from theatre. According to his findings, drama conventions are derived from the various aspects of theatre (writing, directing, acting, etc.), with the original aspects being creatively transformed into playful and participatory activities. The purpose of these activities is educational rather than performative, encouraging students' experiences, perceptions, reflections and judgements. The conventions of drama share with theatre a focus on the characters of the story. In his opinion, drama in education has developed around two methods, those of Konstantin Stanislavski and Augusto Boal, but new possibilities could emerge from the ideas and practices of Antoine Artaud, Bertolt Brecht and Jerzy Grotowski. Professor Jonathan Neelands introduced the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry, England with the theme: "Make Theatre a Source for Learning, Imagination and Creativity". Professor Katie Dawson from the University of Texas in Austin spoke about building bridges between drama and education, schools and communities, and students and teachers. She intro-

duced drama for schools and drama-based pedagogy with examples from Galena, Austin, Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, Professor Jo Raphael from Deakin University, Australia spoke on "Harnessing Drama and Theatre in Education for Planetary Well-being", in keeping with the global perspective of the congress. She focused on the symbiotic relationship between science and drama, arguing that there are a number of issues in science education that drama can address. For his part, Professor Kwok Kian-Boon, Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Arts Singapore, spoke on "Arts Education in the Service of a Broken Humanity on a Fragile Planet", offering further thoughts and insights from a Southeast Asian perspective. He expressed his belief in the urgency of arts education because we are now living in a time of great contradictions, where science and technology are impressively developed, but our humanity is broken and under serious threat.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are an important part of the IDEA congress and consist of a team of coordinators and a group of teachers, researchers and artists who work on a specific theme to develop ideas, methods and approaches. This year, there were five SIGs working on five different themes including *Drama and Peace Education* coordinated by Asa Ragnarsdottir (Iceland) and Monika Necpalova (Slovakia), *Puppetry within Drama Education: processes, skills and applications* coordinated by Cariad Astles (UK), *Drama Teaches 21st Century Employability Skills* coordinated by Jane Carter (Australia), *Exploring the Integration of Drama in Chinese Language Education: Enhancing Learning and Engagement* coordinated by Xinyi Wang (China) and *Theatre for all* coordinated





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by Joachim Reiss (Germany). The SIGs presented the results of their research in the form of short performances at the closing ceremony.

A large number of workshops and paper presentations took place during the congress, and I will not list all the details here. To experience so many workshops and exchanges of ideas in a few concentrated days is perhaps the very meaning and value of the IDEA Congress. Chinese drama educators remember the IDEA Congresses of 1995 (although perhaps only one Chinese attended) and 2007 (Hong Kong) because both events inspired the development of drama education in China. However, the IDEA 2024 Congress will be the most important because it was the first time such an international congress was held in mainland China and the Chinese drama educators had the opportunity to meet famous drama educators face to face. In addition to the boom of drama education in China, such an event is helpful in connecting local drama educators with the international community.

### Debating and voting

On three evenings during the congress, the General Council Meeting met with members in Beijing and others online. IDEA members reviewed reports, voted on motions and also elected new officers for the Executive Committee, General Meeting Committee and Accountancy Committee. The newly elected officers represent all five continents. For the first

time, Asian members have been elected to these bodies, including myself from China as Director of Projects, Fredyl Hernandez from the Philippines as Director of Young IDEA and Aishwariyah Nathan from Singapore as Secretary of the Accountancy Committee. With a stronger Asian presence, I believe there will be more intercontinental exchanges.

At the meetings, there were arguments and debates on a number of issues, and some decisions had to be postponed because they were so controversial. The General Council Meeting decided which country would host the next world congress. Sanja Krsmanović Tasić, the President of IDEA, announced at the closing ceremony that Turkey would host the next congress and also presented the list of elected officers.

### Awarding and creating

During the congress, IDEAC, the Chinese member association of IDEA and local organiser, held the "2024 Golden Mask" Drama Education Awards Ceremony to honour drama educators who had made outstanding contributions to the development of drama education in China. Tianfu No.7 High School and Eley Yuan, a member of IDEA, were awarded the Distinguished Drama Education Administrator and the Outstanding Teacher of Drama Education.

Most of the congress participants were young teachers, who were enthusiastic but inexperienced. We cannot ignore the important role and power of

young people in creating the new world through drama education. Nine young people from Young IDEA, after about two weeks of collaborating and creating together, presented a performance to show their understanding of the IDEA 2024 Congress theme “天下大同 (tiān xià dà tóng)” — Constructing a harmonious Cultural, Artistic, and Spiritual Home for Humanity through Drama and Theatre”, creating a gourmet feast with a variety of ingredients such as intuition, coexistence, diversity and responsibility.

This congress successfully connected the Chinese mainland with the international drama education community, leading to an in-depth exchange of drama education between the East and the West. Drama education in China has shown a booming trend in recent years, especially with the inclusion of the subject of drama in the new version of the Arts Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education issued by the Chinese Ministry of Education in 2022. Therefore, holding the congress in China has also enabled more local drama educators to become familiar with IDEA, and has laid the foundation for IDEA to expand its influence in China. After this congress, it is foreseeable that more Chinese drama educators will participate in international exchanges, which will give a strong impetus to the development of drama education.

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## Conference reports

Betty Giannouli and Nassia Choleva

### **A. Harmonious coexistence of arts, nature, technology and education** **World Alliance for Arts Education Summit**

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#### **The World Alliance for Arts Education**

In 2010, international arts in education associations realised that by joining forces they could strengthen their voice in advocating for the place of arts in education at the policy-making level, both internationally and locally. Since then, they have been working together to create the conditions for open dialogue and joint action, such as hosting relevant panels at their conferences and issuing joint manifestos or advocacy texts. The World Alliance for Arts Education (WAAE) was founded by the International Drama/Theatre and Education Association (IDEA), the International Society for Music Education (ISME), the International Society for Education through Art (InSEA) and the World Dance Alliance (WDA). WAAE maintains close ties with UNESCO as they engage in dialogue on issues concerning arts in education. The chairmanship, currently held by IDEA President Sanja Krsmanović Tasić, rotates between organisations. The main event of the WAAE is the world summit, which is held in a different country each time.

#### **The event**

So this year, the 10th International Conference of the World Alliance for Arts Education took place in Athens on 17–19 October, under the title: Arts, Nature, Technology, Education: Harmony in Unity. Through concrete examples of research, artistic and educational practice, the aim was to explore how to create a transformative learning and teaching environment in diverse settings: at all levels of education, in the community, in health-enhancing the whole human experience and the shaping of intercultural practices and interventions.

The conference was organised and hosted by the Department of Music Studies and the Department of Theatre Studies of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. This major undertaking was actively supported by many other departments of

the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, as well as organisations such as the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network. Representatives of the organising bodies spoke at the opening of the conference, which ended with a welcome from WAAE President Sanja Krsmanović Tasić, who directly linked the development of arts in education to the political will and economic decisions made worldwide in relation to educational policies. Artists, teachers, academics, researchers, scholars from 33 countries and over 55 universities, as well as representatives of international multicultural, educational and interdisciplinary organisations gathered in the very welcoming and pleasant space of the Modern Greek Language Teaching Centre. Special mention should be made of the Greek Sign Language interpretation, which contributed to the effective and inclusive organisation of the conference.

#### **The programme**

The very rich conference programme included a wide range of activities: keynote speeches, announcements and papers, research findings, events and short performances, poster presentations, workshops and panel discussions.

#### *Keynote speeches and key ideas*

The key themes implied by the title set the tone and provided creative links at all levels of the conference. The opening keynote speech was delivered by Cecily O'Neill, Professor Emeritus of Ohio University, an iconic figure in the field of drama education. Ms O'Neill, one of the founders of the use of theatre/drama in education and part of its living history, honoured the conference and our country with her presentation entitled "Makers of the Future". The following day, Professor Rhoda Bernard from Berkeley College of Music addressed issues of universal access to the arts and education in her presentation



titled “Accessible Arts in Education: Personal, Philosophical, Political and Practical Perspectives of Arts in Education for Individuals with Disabilities”. In addition, actor and director Vasilis Koukalani, founder of the group “Guild of Laughter”, represented the writer and founder of the GRIPS Theatre in Berlin, Volker Ludwig, and spoke about the history, course and fundamental role that GRIPS has played in Germany for decades in a speech titled “The World is Full of Contradictions and Injustice: Theatre for Children in the 21st Century”.

Of key importance was the presence of UNESCO representative, Ke Leng, Programme Coordinator, Cultural Policies and Development Entity, Culture Sector, who delivered a keynote speech titled: “Multi-Stakeholder Engagement Towards Effective Delivery of Culture and Arts Education”. After presenting the “Framework for Culture and Arts Education”, launched by UNESCO earlier this year, which is based on the fundamental values of human rights and the philosophy of lifelong learning, Mr Leng underlined the importance of mapping the use of the arts in education in order to provide the appropriate background, with the support of UNESCO, to convince governments to implement the Framework. He stressed the need to collect measurable research data in order to make the case for the arts in education more convincing at the level of education policy. This is a parameter that will be at the heart of our next programmes or research projects.

However, his contribution to the WAAE Summit did not end with this central presentation. At a pre-determined time, the plenary of the conference was divided into sub-groups, according to the type of

arts they represented, in order to provide answers to the key questions raised by Mr. Leng:

- How can we ensure equal access to culture and the arts in education?
- How can we integrate the different knowledge systems?
- How can we use digital technologies and artificial intelligence responsibly?
- How can we improve the professional development of teachers/educators and cultural professionals?
- How can we promote lifelong learning?

These issues were addressed along three axes:

- a) Suggestions for implementation and ideas for actions to promote the visibility of the Framework (by individuals, institutions or international associations);
- b) What might be the challenges in implementing the UNESCO Framework in each country or institution? (e.g., lack of resources, insufficient training, resistance to change, insufficient support from leadership, etc.);
- c) Ideas for monitoring the implementation of the Framework for culture and the arts in member countries.

The groups deliberated, documented their ideas, opinions, concerns and proposals; their reports were presented in the next plenary session, with Mr Leng taking careful notes. The full reports will both constitute a WAAE Manifesto and a report text to be officially submitted to UNESCO to promote dialogue.



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### *Parallel sessions: papers, panels, posters and workshops*

The main part of the conference was the open parallel sessions with papers, workshops, posters and panels from the four WAEE member organisations, covering music, theatre, dance and visual arts, as well as interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches. Of particular interest was the polysemy in theories, research and practices, as well as interdisciplinarity, such as the connection between mathematics and dance, but also other connections between the arts that promote innovative educational approaches. The section on the use of AI in education and the arts was very important, as this is a key issue whose parameters and possibilities are still little known, such as the responsibility of using and contributing to this field. Also of great interest were arts-based presentations, which involved the active participation of conference participants. Projects in schools, communities, research data, useful practices and methodologies, approaches that creatively combine environmental issues, different arts and technologies were also discussed.

### *Artistic events and performances*

The programme included a wide variety of artistic events representing all the arts, as well as events that provided opportunities for communication between participants. Performances by students from

the education, music and theatre studies departments as a result of their work in arts courses illustrated the importance of the arts in education.

### **Afterword**

The Summit organisers masterfully combined the diverse elements of the four-day event, maintaining a balance between different arts, sciences and spaces, theory, research and practice, different languages, approaches and perspectives. Pluralism, meaningful intercultural dialogue and shared intentions to promote the arts in education internationally were the elements with which we left the conference, full of inspiration and empowerment for our next steps.

The next important date for the international community is the International Conference "Theatre/Drama & Inclusive Education", organised by the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network in Athens in March 2025. Endorsed by IDEA as an "IDEA Regional Conference", it will mark the end of the project "Theatre Makes Politics" (Erasmus+, 2022–2025) and will celebrate the 10th anniversary of "it could be me – it could be you", a project for raising awareness about human rights and refugees (2015–2025). The next meeting of IDEA members will take place in Ankara with a major conference in July 2027. The *Education & Theatre* journal will be there to report on what happens.



## B. IDEA Europe Annual Meeting

The presence of many members of IDEA Europe associations at the WAAE World Summit provided a fitting occasion for the annual meeting of IDEA Europe to be held in Athens. The meeting, hosted at the School of Modern Greek Language of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, was attended by representatives of organisations from seven countries: Greece, Germany, Finland, Czech Republic, Romania, Estonia and Serbia. In addition, individual members of IDEA from Spain and Slovakia took part in the meeting, making a total of 17 participants.

As part of the objectives of the meeting, the representatives presented the main actions and developments regarding Theatre in Education in their countries. At the same time, the changing position of Theatre in Education in each country was discussed. Particular mention was made of the Czech Republic, where the introduction of a theatre curriculum in schools is being considered. Another important development is happening in Germany, where BVTs (Association for Theatre in Schools) is promoting the integration of theatre in the secondary school curriculum and its inclusion in the final examination. It is expected that this initiative will be extended to several German states. Unfortunately, no significant developments were reported in most of the countries represented, a common element being the limited presence of theatre in the educational process compared to music and the visual arts.

During the two-day meeting, particular emphasis was placed on the establishment of working groups to discuss the following issues:

### 1. WAAE Summit and the Athens Manifesto

They discussed the importance of the WAAE Summit and agreed that it was a well-structured event with a rich programme, including all the arts and important presentations and workshops. The positive outcome of the WAAE Summit, the Athens Manifesto, was emphasised, as well as the responsibility of IDEA Europe associations and members to help promote it.

### 2. Advocating for Theatre in Education

The promotion of Theatre in Education was identified as a priority. The main actions proposed include:

- **Webinars:** Focus on highlighting good practices and methods for using theatre in education.

- **Communication policy:** Promoting the importance of theatre and implementing artistic actions at a national level.

### 3. Academic education and training

The need to strengthen academic education in Theatre in Education and in-service teacher training in theatre/drama was highlighted.

### 4. Environmental sustainability

A webinar was proposed to inform and explore sustainable practices and their relation to theatre, both in the context of courses and in wider educational programmes.

Members of the meeting focused on proposals for specific actions and international programmes in which their institutions already have experience and which could strengthen European cooperation. More specifically:

- A programme on gender inequalities in primary and secondary education, including programmes for teachers to recognise and address gender-related issues.
- The organisation of a conference on theatre/drama that will create a framework for dialogue between experts in the field, focusing on the objectives set out in the UNESCO texts on the protection of the arts.
- An awareness-raising programme on racism and xenophobia, to be implemented at European level, with the aim of combating stereotypes and producing an activity guide for inclusive education through interdisciplinary methods in the educational process.

The meeting concluded with a commitment to strengthen the cooperation between IDEA members in Europe and to promote theatre as a key tool for educational and social empowerment. The members will continue to communicate and take initiatives until the next IDEA Europe meeting, to be held in Romania in October 2025.



# In-person and online **drama-based interventions** for emergent **bilingual student populations** The application of a mixed methods research for **reading literacy** and the management of **learning difficulties**

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**Keywords:** *theatre pedagogy, theatre in education, reading instruction, bilingualism, distance education, learning difficulties*

The educational approach to reading instruction using arts-based methodologies represents an innovative interdisciplinary transfer of distinct theatrical forms from the field of performing arts to the realm of language teaching within the framework of theatre pedagogy. While theatre scripts, readers' theatre and dramatised storytelling are present in Greek education as means of theatrical expression to support the cultural activities of schools, their effectiveness as teaching tools for the development of second/foreign language skills has not been evaluated, as is the case with other artistic events (e.g., process drama, dramatic play, etc.) that have been used in teaching. Therefore, the focus of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of a set of comprehensive theatre pedagogical methodologies for language education and literacy of emergent bilingual student populations aged 10–12 in times of socio-health restrictions. Specifically, the research aims to investigate the impact of urgent remote and in-person instructional interventions of language immersion based on applied theatre and drama for teaching reading in Modern Greek as a second language.

The first part of the dissertation is structured in four chapters that provide a theoretical underpinning to the research. The first two chapters present the scientific basis of theatre pedagogical methodologies for language education and highlight the importance of cultural activities in education for strengthening bilingualism and addressing learning difficulties. Reference is made to scientific views

on reading performance in the second language, covering topics related to literacy, reading practices, cultural integration, reading performance and social constructivism. The third chapter shifts the focus to literacy interventions in the second language in face-to-face or distance education settings. Topics such as reading skills in the second language and urgent remote interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic, literacy interventions for emergent bilingual students and the basic principles for developing and evaluating reading interventions in second language educational settings, whether face-to-face or remote, are discussed. In addition, the role of applied theatre and its techniques in promoting reading skills is presented, and how the use of technological and cultural tools can be used to create reading programmes is explored. The first part of the dissertation concludes with a chapter that addresses issues related to theatrical performance in schools, theatre pedagogy and the acquisition of reading in a second language, as well as the relationship between these fields from an interdisciplinary perspective, examining the use of applied theatre and drama techniques in the second language.

The second part of the doctoral dissertation focuses on the methodological design of the research. Through a mixed-methods nationwide study involving 388 emergent bilingual students and 204 teachers from the last three years of primary school, the holistic impact of theatre pedagogical approaches on improving reading decoding, reading fluency, reading comprehension, reducing reading errors, modifying reading ability and strategies of the reader was investigated. In addition, the contribution of these methods to reading anxiety, the psychosocial adjustment of bilingual students, the management of learning difficulties and the self-efficacy of teachers to teach

reading either face-to-face or remotely during periods of health restrictions were studied. This research used a quasi-experimental design between experimental and control groups of students and teachers. This included pre-testing with a set of standardised scales, face-to-face and remote interventions lasting a total of seven weeks, post-testing and statistical comparison to draw conclusions. The comparison between the two phases was combined with clustering of participants to highlight reading profiles in terms of readers' cross-linguistic characteristics and learning difficulties, as an added value practice for evaluating the interventions. Subsequently, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and from teachers' reflective journals were analysed according to the principles of grounded theory.

In the third part of the dissertation, the sixth chapter summarises the results of the pilot and main studies conducted as part of the dissertation, while the seventh chapter presents the findings. The dissertation concludes by presenting the findings and the main conclusions of the research, which indicate that:

- a) Theatre pedagogy, applied theatre and drama in education can be effective tools for reading literacy and for managing the learning difficulties of emergent bilingual learners.
- b) The use of technology to enhance the educational function of drama can be beneficial in improving the effectiveness of educational interventions in times of health restrictions.

Finally, the dissertation offers educational implications as well as suggestions for further research.

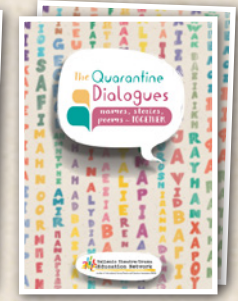
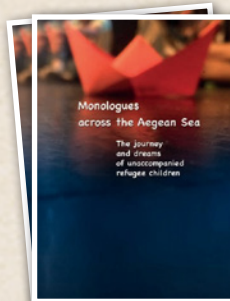
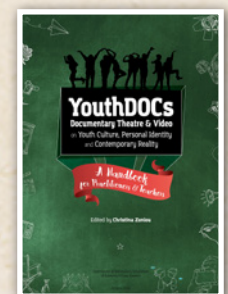
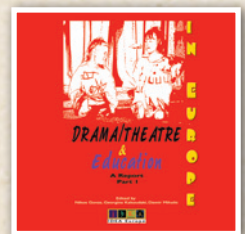
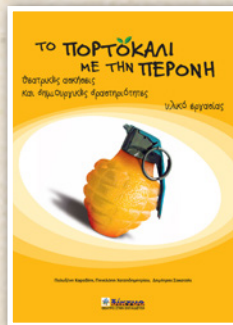
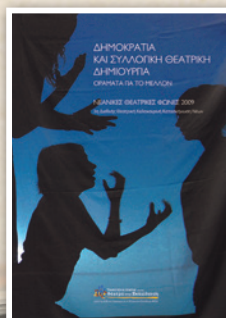
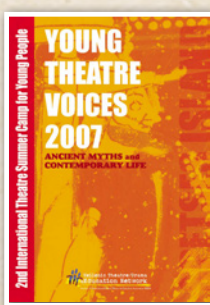
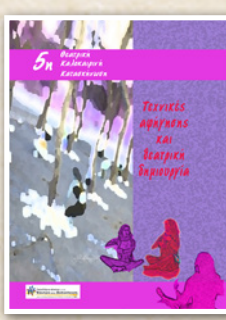
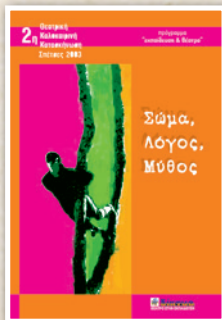
The doctoral dissertation was defended at the Department of Primary Education of the University of the Aegean in April 2023. It can be accessed via the following link: <http://hdl.handle.net/10442/hedi/53805>

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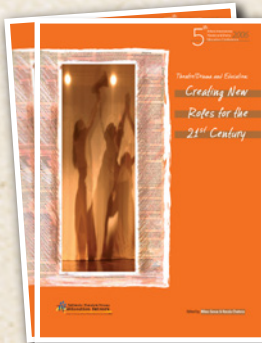
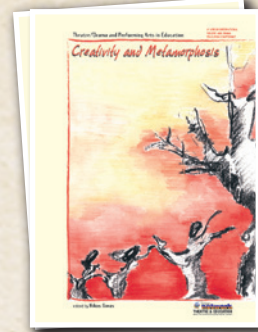
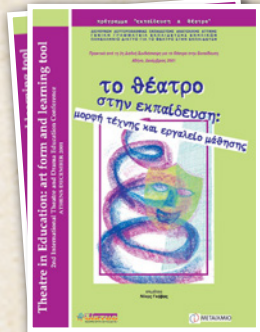


### THEATRE SUMMER CAMPS

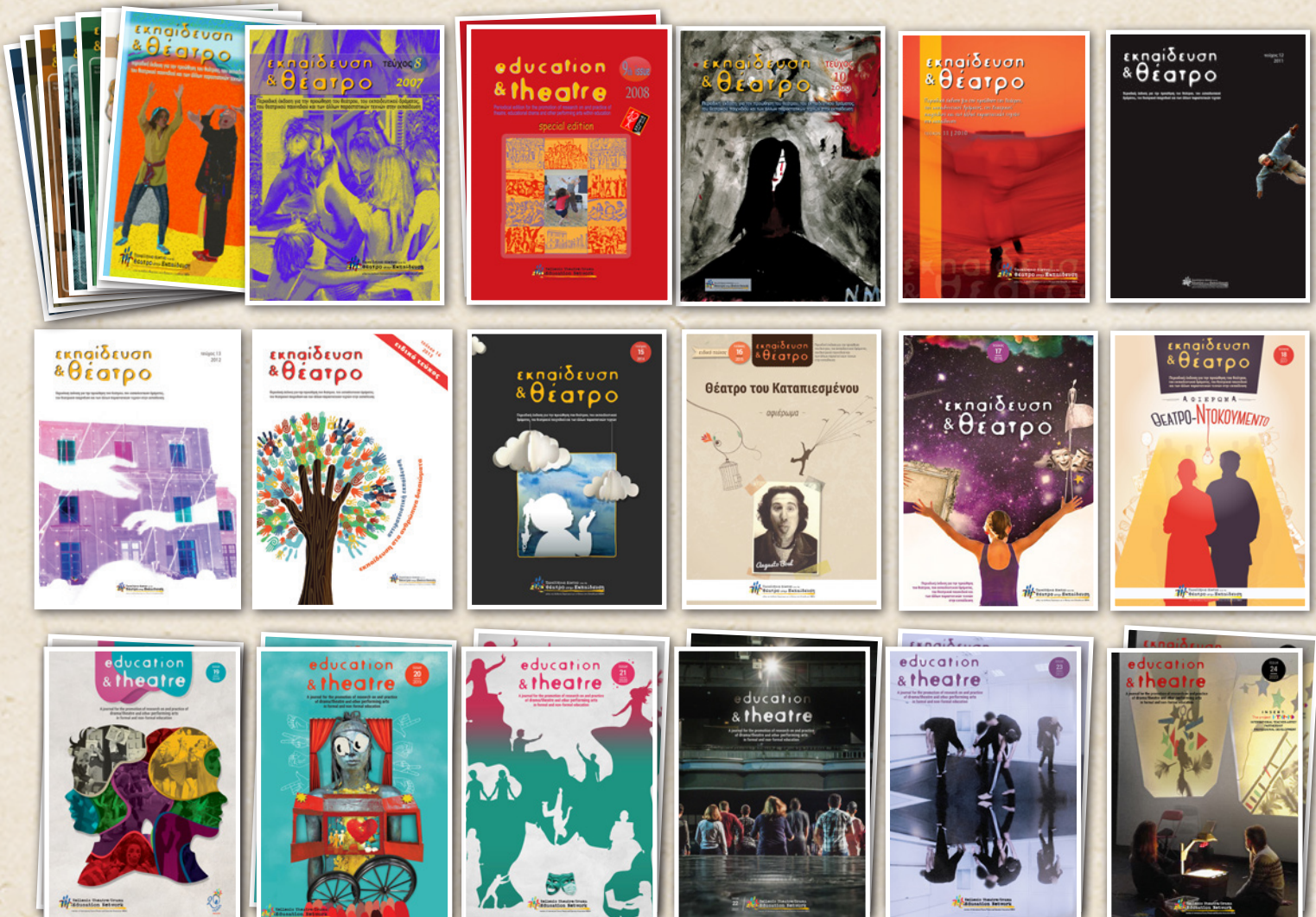




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