

SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH APPLIED DRAMA:

Important topics for implementation
of applied drama techniques
with vulnerable groups

The publication is the result of an Erasmus KA2
Capacity Building in the field of Youth 2017 project
"Social Inclusion Through Applied Drama".

Summary of the seminar held in Vršac, Serbia in April 2018



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The publication is created by:

CEPORA – Center for Positive Youth Development

Open Circle Association

Pirineus Creatius

Uniamoci Onlus

Association Practicum

Youth 4 Society

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About the project

Partners

SERBIA – CEPORA – Center for Positive Youth Development
(co-ordinator)

SPAIN – Pirineus Creatius

ITALY – Uniamoci Onlus

HUNGARY – Open Circle Association

ALBANIA – Youth 4 Society

CROATIA – Association Practicum

Social Inclusion Through Applied Drama aims at improving capacities of organizations for implementing applied drama techniques for social inclusion of people with fewer opportunities. The consortium consists of organizations with different experiences in the field, and is focused at exchanging good practice, horizontal non-formal learning and enriching of partners programmes with new methodologies. It consists of organizing a seminar, a training course for youth workers and a follow-up meeting. During the project organisations will create new partnerships, exchange different effective approaches for using applied drama, enrich their programmes and raise their staff competences. As a result a new comprehensive training module will be produced, with direct inputs for replication through publicized project results. The project will have impact on organizations involved, their staff, participants in their programmes, but also on other organizations, communities their users live in, communities the organizations work in, practice in the field of social inclusion on the local, national and international level. The project is funded with the support of the European Commission, Ministry of Youth and Sports of Republic of Serbia and Ministry of Culture and Information of Republic of Serbia.

Aims:

- Creating a long-term collaboration between organisations from different European countries focussed around using applied drama with vulnerable groups;
- Improving programmes of participating organisations;
- Enhancing skills of youth workers in the field of applied drama for social inclusion;
- Promoting transnational non-formal learning mobility.

CEPORA – Center for Positive Youth Development (CEPORA – Centar za pozitivan razvoj dece i omladine), based in Belgrade, SERBIA: www.cepora.org

Pirineus Creatius (Associació Pirineus Creatius), based in Bellestar, SPAIN: www.pirineuscreatius.org

Uniamoci Onlus (Associazione Uniamoci Onlus), based in Palermo, ITALY: www.uniamocionlus.org

Open Circle Association (Nyitott Kör Egyesület), based in Budapest, HUNGARY: www.nyitottkor.hu

Youth 4 Society, based in Tirana, ALBANY: www.youth4society.org

Association Practicum (Udruga Praktikum), based in Zagreb, CROATIA: www.udruga-praktikum.hr

About the publication

The publication “Social Inclusion Through Applied Drama: Important topics for implementation of applied drama techniques with vulnerable groups” presents the summary of the first activity of the project – a seminar about applied drama techniques and social inclusion, held in Vršac (Serbia) in April 2018. On the seminar experts from all the partner organizations gathered and discussed about the important topics for facilitators and organization of applied drama projects with different participants from vulnerable groups and for the activation of the community. In the publication, the conclusions from the seminar are presented, gathering different relevant experiences and expert opinions in one place, allowing facilitators from all over the world to create, refresh or evaluate their current and future projects involving applied drama for social inclusion. At the end of the publication, evaluation of the seminar is presented as well.

Introduction: About applied drama

In the broadest sense, applied theatre implies every drama process that aims at cooperation, interaction and exchange of ideas, thoughts, energy and emotions between the participants, and not the artistic result in the mind a theatre play or a performance. In other words, applied theatre, which is in its basis of participatory character, is used as an umbrella term for a variety of artistic processes aimed at empowering participants, whereby these processes can or don't have to result in a theatre play or a performance. In this context, in terminology the difference between the applied drama, which includes exclusively the dramatic process, and the applied theatre, in which the dramatic process always ends with an interactive performance, is often used. Additionally, applied theatre, unlike the traditional one, always happens in the community with different target groups, and the participants in the dramatic process and, most often, later the actors in performances are people who don't have to be professionally involved in acting or necessarily have an acting experience.



Using ourselves to connect

The most important thing when working with people with disabilities is to create opportunities for them to contribute to the community, and to create opportunities for joint activities with other members of the communities.

One of the ways of dealing with the perception of people with disabilities is engaging them in activities found popular, like creating amusing videos (eg. Do the harlem shake: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIV5mL1O1wo>) and involving them in activities that benefit the whole community (eg. gardening and care of public greens, cleaning the city). It is important to continuously raise the awareness for the issues of people with disabilities or from vulnerable groups, and for that frequent use of videos and publications for promotion of social inclusion are created.

Uniamoci Onlus gives us an example on how the use of different media can be useful in addressing the issues of social inclusion of people with disabilities. They have the experience in management of a web radio programmes with weekly broadcastings, creation of popular funny videos, videos about social inclusion, editing a magazine, implementing theatre shows.

One of the main issues that still remains a problem with people with disabilities are prejudices and stereotypes. In modern age, the hostility towards people with disabilities is lowered, but other issues appear.

Feeling sorry for people with disabilities. It is difficult for people who don't have disability in their experience to "step in the shoes" of a person with a disability. Most commonly people feel sorry for them, especially if the disability is visible by just looking at a person. Because of that, people with disabilities are constantly interacting with people who feel pity for them, which is a very unpleasant experience to be having on a regular basis.

Wanting to help but not knowing how. People are not informed enough about different disabilities and often have the impulse to assist or help them, but not knowing how or not asking them how they like to be helped. Feeling like that brings to different kind of uncomfortable situations.

Thinking that we know them – forgetting that they're individuals like anybody else. When we know person has a disability, sometimes we unconsciously think we know the personality of the person.

Presuming they can't do something they can. People who see a disability tend to make their own picture of what that person can and cannot do. This leads to excluding people with disabilities from activities because of our beliefs that they can't do something.

Presuming all disabilities come with a slow mental development. Most common mistake people make is believing that mental disability follows all other disabilities. This leads to communicating and acting to people with disabilities in a different way than they would communicate to anyone else.

Preventing young people to get involved. "You will catch it". Prejudices about people with disabilities can still get very intensive, preventing young people to get involved in activities with them.

Every person is the expert of their own life

(Social) inclusion is the process by which efforts are made to ensure that everyone, regardless of their experiences and circumstances, can achieve their potential in life.

Inclusion does not mean we are all the same. Inclusion does not mean we all agree. Rather, inclusion celebrates our diversity and differences with respect and gratitude. The greater our diversity, the richer our capacity is to create new visions. Inclusion is about welcoming differences, and recognising them as capacities rather than deficiencies.

Through the process of social inclusion our goal is to break down the barriers to social opportunities constructed by:

- low income;
- discrimination;
- fear of the unknown;
- lack of access to relevant learning experiences.



Obstacles that create vulnerable groups among young people:

- **Educational:** young people with learning difficulties;
- **Social:** (ex-) offenders, (ex-) drug addicts, single parents, orphans, discriminated for certain reasons;
- **Economic:** low standard of living, low income, dependence on social welfare system, long-term unemployed;
- **Mental:** mentally disabled young people;
- **Physical:** physically disabled young people or with a chronic health problem/illness;
- **Cultural:** young immigrants or refugees, ethnic minority, linguistic adaptation problems;
- **Geographical:** young people from remote rural/hilly areas, small islands, and urban problem zones.

Levels of social inclusion:

- **Exclusion** – when the group is completely excluded from activities or resources in the community.
- **Segregation** – when the group is separated from the rest of the population, with their own, separate activities and resources.
- **Integration** – when the group is formally included in to the community activities and resources, but there are still obstacles for their participation in them, so there is a risk of their inclusion staying only on a formal, but not a genuine level.
- **Inclusion** – all groups are included in the community activities and resources, with possibilities for their full and equal participation.

Dealing with stereotypes and discrimination in practice involves an interaction between personal and social identity.

Eg. The exercise: Take a step forward – feeling like a particular social group and stepping forward every time the moderator speaks of a resource you feel is available for you in that position.

The workshop brings up the questions of how much does society influence our place in it and how strong do we need to be in order to break the obstacles society places in front of us?

Even though we believe that personal development and empowerment can bring a lot of positive changes to the position of any individual in the society, some obstacles remain very powerful even if we feel that we can break them, and they continue to block us in reality (Eg. A participant having the identity of a prostitute in the exercise said: “I feel like I’m strong, but I still couldn’t make a single step forward”). That is why social inclusion needs to involve the whole community, and not only the vulnerable groups.

Possible variation for the exercise with the participants for addressing their issues and not discrimination in general: Use everything the group gives you, no need of adding “made up” characters, you can use their personal material, their personal position in society as a base for the exercise.



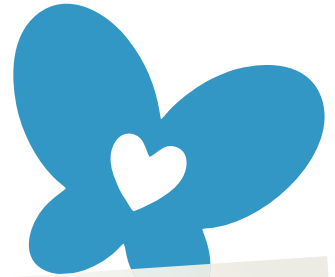
The possibilities of applied drama

How can we use applied drama in different contexts

Applied drama games and techniques give us a lot of possibilities to empower individuals, groups and whole communities in a very flexible way. It gives us freedom of using the same exercises for different purposes and with different groups, adjusting the methodology. We combine the techniques for the purpose we define. The use of applied drama can be aimed at personal development and at community/social development.

The **purpose** of applied drama for **individuals**:

- Provoking the social norms
- Educational process
- Development of life skills – personal growth
- Helping individuals understand their social surroundings
- Change of perception about oneself and about others
- Individual and group expression
- Finding yourself from others
- Possibility to change attitudes
- Learn about yourself – to know your strengths and weaknesses and to improve
- Building self-confidence
- Ventilation of emotions
- Building your identity
- Speech improvement
- Becoming the best that we can be
- Higher empathy and compassion



The **purpose** of applied drama for the **society**:

- The empowerment of vulnerable groups
- Evoking the society – making them think, raising awareness about important topics
- Making positive social changes
- Making the community go into action
- Policy changes
- Change of perception for certain topics, educating the wider community
- Expressive method of teaching
- Breaking social barriers
- Group cohesion, building and exploring the group identity, creating shared experience
- Sensibilisation of the community

Important points for **planning the process**:

- Knowing the group – who are we working with
- Knowing the topic – the level of expertise necessary when dealing with specific topics
- Group dynamics – cohesion, outsiders, is the group familiar with the methodology
- Location – adjusting the process for the space the workshops are being held

Important points for **facilitating the process** with the group:

- There are no wrong answer or mistakes in participants response to facilitators request
- Follow the group – be flexible with the workshop structure and change the plan on the spot
- Push the participants limits step by step – do not give them something that is too much for them, but keep them in the “learning zone”.

Dilemmas of the facilitators: Do we need to know the background of our participants? CEPORA's view: No, we need to create a safe space in the workshop, where everybody feels accepted and where we give our participants the opportunity to be whichever versions of themselves they want to be, give them opportunity to be a “tabula rasa”, and prevent ourselves to act upon a pre-composed opinion about them.

When working with the group the facilitator is always thinking about several **parallel processes**:

1. Building the group
2. Learning the techniques
3. Make it personal

Each exercise in its structure has elements for all three processes, which means that a different set of exercises can be used at any stage of the work with the group, but with a different goal if a certain element of the exercise is singled out as a priority.

For example, energy exercises (such as The bomb and the shield) can be used at the beginning of a process or a beginnings workshop with the primary goal of raising the energy of the group, but it can also serve for the development of the story (if the roles in the game are given another meaning), or to learn a technique that will be used for later performance or presentation (movement in space).

Looking back on our work helps us “get of the autopilot” and prevent burnout from working constantly in facilitating different groups. It helps us connect again with our work and reminds us why we use the particular game in the particular moment of the group process. For the process to have real meaning for the participants, it is important for the facilitator to keep involved with the process and not allow the groups to become just showcases for the director/facilitator.

Some of the most important **features of the process** involving applied drama:

1. The context in which the process of applied drama takes place has the character of continuous learning, change of perspective and acceptance
2. Applied drama has effects on the individual, the group and the community
3. Applied drama has a cascading/domino effect. Small changes can change a lot

Building up characters

Breaking the stereotypes – using the element of shock

Following the needs of the group is one of the main principles in working in the field of applied drama and applied theatre. So, when a problem comes up within the group, it is not the facilitators task to “make it go away”, but to use it and focus on the problem, giving the group the power to solve it.

Using the shock – asking of the participants something they don’t expect. When they’re shocked, there is no room for stage fright or overthinking. That is why in more simple or more difficult games, we include non-stereotypical elements to help the participants to free themselves, open their minds and think outside their and societies boxes.

For an example – Secret hobby: creating the character of a big, strong bounty hunter who adores and collects the pictures of tiny kittens playing.

One of the examples of dealing with stereotypes involves bringing “real people” to be interviewed by the participants – with appearances of a stereotypical representative of their category. Or recreating the story about violence from the newspapers, developing the before and after, with going “deep” in exploring the characters.

Depending on what we want to achieve and with whom, we plan the process and plan the methods we will use. For example, for discussing some sensitive topics, or talking about personal issues with participants, the use of objects we then talk about is used for creating a safe space for participants to “detach” and put themselves into an object (we then talk about who he or she is, what he/she likes, and everything is ok to be said, because we “are not talking about us, but about the object”).



Game, theatre, education

Begin with a game, slip into theatre, educate through theatre

Using a game is always a good option to introduce the participants to a central topic. In TIE (Theatre in Education), theatre is used to address central topics of the school curriculum and make it more appealable, understandable and connected to real life.

For an example based on the practice of Open Circle Association, the topic of power is introduced through a game of live Packman, after which TIE actors “slip” into acting a scene from Antigone, and what follows is that the facilitator involves the participants in the story and discusses with them through theatrical means the question of power.

Often, the central issue is materialized in an object. In the Antigone example, the power is represented in a rope, so participants discuss about it while having physical interactions with it, allowing them to explore an abstract issue in a very concrete way.

Every TIE is centred on an issue – just one focus around which the whole process is created.

Different elements are used during the TIE performance for the **involvement process**:

- location – the participants are brought to a new location, outside of their everyday life
- facilitator - an expert to lead the process
- contract – everybody agrees on the “rules of the game” before entering the space
- acknowledging the participants – facilitator always asks for their opinion and take seriously the reflections
- using the game – the game at the beginning is there to help the participants “forget” what has happen before – to get them out for the previous mood, problems, allowing the participants to get involved to the fullest extent in the process
- make a surprise – give the participants elements they don’t expect
- provoking in role – use the drama elements to raise discussions

A TIE experience gives the participants the chance to explore a topic in a different manner, in a safe environment, but through an emotional experience and an intellectual reflection.

The goal of the facilitator is to keep the participants in the **learning zone** throughout the process – to move them from their comfort zone, but keep them safe from their panic zone. One of important points in TIE is to **“finish with an open issue”** – to not give the participants some final answers on the matter explored, but to leave them with thinking about their experience and all the “unresolved” issues. To explore those issues in the real world, their everyday life and build up their own opinions and attitudes towards it.

“Give them an experience they can’t put in any box.” _____

Theatre of the Oppressed

Following the steps of Boal



Introductory to Theatre of the Oppressed (TO):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DurTtMHwQ0Q>

Any conflict, oppression can be worked on through the means of TO. TO is fluent, transforming, practices of TO are different from country to country.

All involve these **elements**:

- **SpectActors** – The audience is always active, never just watching the performance
- **Joker** – A facilitator who moderates the discussion and the interventions with the audience and on the scene
- **Building up** – using different TO techniques for the basis of creating the story and the theatre play

In contemporary TO practice Boal's experience serves as a basis, grounds, but practitioners make modifications in the performances, as well as during the creating process for the theatre plays. The principle becomes: Feel free to modify it, adapt it to your group needs!

Some of the most used TO approaches: image theatre, legislative theatre, forum theatre, invisible theatre

TO is social, not therapeutical – TO is for addressing social issues, it is not aimed at dealing with individual sufferings, although participating in TO has therapeutical effects on the participants. TO plays are always based on real stories and experiences of the participants.

Creating a **TO project** basically follows the steps of general project planning and needs answering the following questions:

- Why – which problems we want to face – which conflicts?
- When – the time frame, the length of the project
- How – resources, logistics, plays, institutions, style
- With whom – Choosing the actors – the target group on stage
- For who – Choosing the SpectActors – the target group in the audience

When using TO for “narrowing the gap” between the “oppressor” and the “oppressed” the goal is to create a context in which the groups can understand each other's position better. When working in “mixed groups” the goal is to “unite them” around a topic, a joint issue they face.



Provoking positive changes

When we work with our groups we tend to forget that the community sometimes just doesn't want to be activated.

Because of our own assumptions we then do not access our target group – we do not communicate with them in the right way. We need to ask our group, and to involve the opinions of the target group we want to communicate our message to, and to include their needs and opinions in planning the channel and form of our message.

Eg. Twisting the forum play – changing everybody EXCEPT the protagonist – twisting the logic for the purpose of understanding the position of the group of the protagonist with the goal of understanding each-other.

How do you provoke the change if you're doing applied drama with people with the condition which is unchangeable? What do we change then? Then we question our understanding of that unchangeable condition (eg. One group of people with psychiatric diagnoses had a comment during a workshop: "We shouldn't be able to do this – Because the doctors tells us that we can't").

Playing with the unchangeable reminds us that we might forget what our participants can do – it allows us to question the frame we are working in.

"Theatre is change" – if we're acting, we're changing us.

While we work, we need to suspend our disbelieves. We need to have in mind that all people have the ability to play and the ability to learn through playing.

In order to make changes, we need to play with the limits of ourselves (physically) but also with the barriers that define our place in the society. The play is the movability – it is our tool for change and it is our path to it. We "just" need to find the proper touch.

"Find the play in the unchangeable things" – the mere essence of applied theatre lies there.

Keep questioning, keep imagining, keep playing

We need to keep playing in order not to "forget" how to play. When we encounter the unchangeable things – then we can make a "miracle" and make a difference only through creative solutions – by finding the play.

After the processes with the groups, during the performances the actor provides the change of the perspective of the spectators. In the interaction with them, the actor plays with the audience, accepts their connection with the situations, characters, their experiences and then he questions it.

The use of the clown could be an easy way to demonstrate it – Using the simple situation and complicating it – asking the audience to pay attention to some elements, some details they don't usually do. The clown makes them see the world through his eyes – through the eyes of "play".

Dilemmas of facilitators – Who is responsible for achieving group changes?
Conclusions of the group: Sometimes we forget that we, as facilitators, are not the only ones responsible for the changes that the group process will bring to the group itself and the community. Facilitators need to be honest with themselves about why are they working with a particular group and what do they want to achieve. What is the “play” for the facilitator in the specific group? Being aware of that also works on keeping the motivation of the facilitator.



Evaluating change

We do evaluations all the time during our process with our groups. But the main issue for applied drama is how to translate that process into a formal measurable evaluation, with “catching” all that is happening on and after the workshops.
“Man can be seen as a person or as a thing” – “If I see somebody as an incapable person, he will stay an incapable person”.

Formal measurements have the tendencies to isolate certain aspects, and to perceive all participants purely as measurements on those aspects. We need a change of perspective, a holistic approach.

The process when using applied drama is a fluent one, with a lot of changes happening along the way. The facilitator must be sensitive to following the changes and leading the group in the best possible direction for the participants. Even though sometimes it takes the facilitator and the group to the “unknown”. The facilitator is in the position in which he needs to accept the change and looking to where it might go. Consequently, the participants follow accepting the changes and developing them further on.

Dilemmas of the facilitators – Problems with communicating with formal systems in charge of the evaluation processes.

Conclusions of the group: We need to use the principles of working with our target group when communicating with the systems – we need to create a room for understanding the process, understanding their and our position and putting the benefits of our participants first.

Evaluation of the seminar

For the purpose of the evaluation of the seminar, a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators were used.

Indicator:	Grade (1-5)
The seminar fulfilled my expectations	4.63
I made new usefull contacts during the seminar	4.45
I heard about interesting practical models	4.73
I made new ideas about my organisations programmes	4.54
Organisational part of the seminar	4.73
Tehnical part of the seminar - venue, work conditions	4.73

Some testimonials of the participants (original form):

Friendly, informative, relevant, challenging, energetic, thought provoking.
Very inspirational!

A really very stimulating experience. Many ideas and many activities that can give us the possibility to create many new projects.

You did a great job, thank you! In general I have to say that all the flow was in the end pretty practical so I have now some new ideas about future activities for our organization.

It was useful to hear some new perspectives and new ideas on how to approach kids and different topic. I got new ideas on how to, which I already implemented in my work.

Amazing, very well done!

Of my past experiences with such similar projects this was the most satisfying and useful for me!

The seminar was interesting and very dynamic. Rich of ideas and practical approaches from competent people about the subject.



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