

HOW DOES DRAMA AFFECT SOCIAL COMMUNICATION?

Drama therapy can help individuals on the spectrum learn to recognize important social cues, develop skills in communication, movement, pretend play, and social interaction

But how?

It is extremely important to create a positive environment for communication for children with significant disabilities. These environments show kids the positive outcomes that can come from communication. Within these environments, children with disabilities including Autism and all other disabilities that affect Adaptive Behavior often display improved communication, greater independence and deeper relationships. As a type of intervention that implements aspects of drama and theatre, drama therapy is an excellent way to promote the positive, interactive environment that has proven to be so vital for individuals with disabilities.

- Drama therapy involves the use of improvisation, role-play, mime, music and movement, storytelling, masks and rituals, puppetry, theatre games and scripted drama as a therapeutic vehicle.
- It is an effective type of therapy for ASD because it keeps the kids engaged by using surprises and originality.
- It integrates aspects of cognitive, emotional and social development into therapy activities.
- Researchers have found when an activity is fun and playful; a kid's brain will "slip out of gear" which can strengthen brain activity and the development of flexible thought patterns.
- Teaches **emotion recognition and expression, non-verbal behaviors and gestures, listening skills, eye contact, conversation skills, strategies to handle social situations, and critical social skills**
- Develops efficacy, compassion, and empathy

References:

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- Kempe, A. & Tissot, C. (2012). The use of drama to teach social skills in a special school setting for students with autism. *British Journal of Learning Support*, 27(3), 97-102. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9604.2012.01526.x
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Unified Theatre Workshop- Courage to Risk Conference- 2023

Steps for Starting Unified Theatre Program

1. Relationship with Special Education department- have an advocate
2. Together with SSN representative, propose to administration (DATA, benefits, cheap, etc)
3. Recruit coaches
4. Work with counseling to clear schedules
5. Set up community from day one- Make acceptance and diversity a part of program culture
6. Have ample amounts of patience- Zip, Zap, Zop could take 90 minutes in itself before any progress is made- that's okay, at least connection and communication are happening
7. Coach to disability is 1-1
8. No auditions- you cast the show based on what you observe within first couple weeks- remind coaches that production is for kids with disabilities- no room for anyone to be a star- we are all working together on this production
9. Begin class with 30 minutes of exercises/games/routines (which are good for all kids)- then rehearse
10. Numerous visual supports- (That's why children's plays are great- movies to watch, then discuss character development, easy springboard for objective, obstacle, tactic, given circumstances, CORE, etc.)
11. Weekly check-ins with coaches and paras
12. Publicize show as you would regular mainstage- get t-shirts, have kids make programs, design posters, etc
13. It's a team struggle- put as much of the creative process on the kids as possible- have them take ownership of show

Resources:

Warren, Bernie- *Drama Games: Drama and Group Activities for Leaders Working with People of All Ages and Abilities, Second Edition*. Captus Press, 1996

Numerous Games and exercises from this book- given to me directly by Phamaly Theatre

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Denver Center Theatre Company, St. Louis Repertory, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, and Virginia Shakespeare Company. He is on faculty at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts as a teaching artist and is currently involved with film and VO projects with Radical Artists Talent. He and Jen Moriarty have pioneered the curriculum and advocacy for Unified Theatre throughout the state. There are now 20 high schools in Colorado that have Unified Theatre programs.

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Jennifer Moriarty is a Co-Instructor for Unified Theatre. She received her B.A. in



Kinesiology from the University of Colorado at Boulder and her M.A. in Educational Leadership from the American College of Education. Ms. Moriarty has been a special educator for 18 years focusing on inclusion within special education. She has co-pioneered various Unified programs in Jefferson County including Physical Education, Theatre, and will begin a Unified Computer program in the fall. She is passionate about Unified programs as a means of true inclusion by providing opportunities for students of different abilities to work together and grow and learn functional life skills in the classroom.

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