Theater and drama education as a teaching tool for students with learning disabilities

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ABSTRACT:

As traditional educational methods continue to fall short in addressing the needs of students with learning disabilities, this study explores the transformative potential of theater and drama education as an innovative teaching tool. Learning disabilities encompass a range of cognitive, emotional, and social challenges, including dyslexia, dyscalculia, and attention deficits, which significantly impact academic performance and social integration. While conventional teaching approaches often struggle to meet these diverse needs, theater education emerges as a promising alternative, offering a multisensory and experiential learning environment grounded in Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences.

Through a systematic review of academic literature from 2013-2023, this research investigates three primary dimensions: (1) theater's role in fostering multiple intelligences development, (2) its emotional and social impact, and (3) its contribution to academic achievement. The analysis reveals that theater education enhances specific academic skills, including reading comprehension, mathematical understanding, and verbal expression, while simultaneously supporting broader cognitive, emotional, and social development. Theater's unique ability to create "safe spaces" enables students to overcome socio-emotional challenges, develop self-confidence, and build meaningful peer relationships.

The findings demonstrate that theater education significantly improves academic performance in literacy and mathematics through active learning, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary connections. Students engaged in theatrical activities show enhanced empathy, collaboration skills, and self-expression abilities. However, the study identifies critical gaps in empirical research, particularly regarding quantitative measures of theater's impact on specific learning disabilities and the lack of standardized assessment tools for evaluating outcomes.

This research contributes to educational theory and practice by providing evidence for theater's effectiveness as an inclusive educational tool. It concludes with specific recommendations for developing evidence-based theatrical interventions, creating standardized assessment methods, and designing professional development programs for educators. These findings support the integration of theater into educational frameworks for students with learning disabilities, potentially transforming how we approach inclusive education in the 21st century.

Keywords: Theater Education, Learning Disabilities, Experiential Learning, Multiple Intelligences, Safe Learning Spaces

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education for students with learning disabilities has undergone significant transformation over the years, emphasizing the importance of innovative strategies to address the complex needs of this population. Learning disabilities, encompassing a wide spectrum of cognitive, emotional, and social challenges, such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and attention deficits, often act as barriers to academic success and social integration. Traditional pedagogical methods, while foundational, frequently fall short in adequately addressing these multifaceted needs, leading to a pressing need for alternative educational approaches that are both inclusive and effective.

Theater and drama education have emerged as compelling solutions in this context, offering dynamic, multisensory, and experiential learning environments. Grounded in Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, these methodologies leverage diverse cognitive domains—ranging from bodily-kinesthetic to interpersonal intelligences—thereby fostering a holistic developmental framework. Moreover, theater provides a "safe space" that allows students to express emotions and engage in social interactions without fear of judgment, addressing critical socio-emotional challenges inherent to learning disabilities.

This study delves into the transformative potential of theater as an educational tool for students with learning disabilities. Through an extensive review of the existing literature, the research explores three key dimensions: the role of theater in fostering multiple intelligences, its socio-emotional impact, and its contributions to academic achievement. By synthesizing theoretical insights and practical implications, this article aims to bridge the gap between pedagogical theory and its application, ultimately advocating for the integration of theater-based methodologies in inclusive educational frameworks.

The findings presented in this study not only underscore the value of theater education in addressing the unique challenges faced by students with learning disabilities but also highlight critical gaps in existing research and practice. By addressing these gaps, educators and policymakers can unlock the full potential of theater as a transformative force in special education, paving the way for improved academic outcomes and enhanced social integration for students with learning disabilities.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to examine, through an analysis of existing literature, the impact of theater on students with learning disabilities. The study focuses on three key aspects: the development of multiple intelligences, the emotional and social effects of theater-based learning, and the role of theater education in enhancing academic abilities. By conducting an in-depth review of the literature, the research aims to provide theoretical insights into the potential of theater as a unique educational tool tailored to the needs and capabilities of students with learning disabilities.

2.1 Research Questions

This study was guided by three primary research questions:

1. How does theater contribute to the development of multiple intelligences among students with learning disabilities?
2. How does theater-based learning affect students with learning disabilities emotionally and socially?

3. Does theater education help promote academic abilities in students with learning disabilities?

3.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on an analysis of existing literature. The methodology focuses on identifying, analyzing, and synthesizing findings from relevant academic studies and literature to address the selected research questions. This approach allows an in-depth exploration of the impact of theater and drama education on students with learning disabilities, focusing on unique aspects such as the development of multiple intelligences, the creation of safe spaces, and the integration of theater into interdisciplinary projects.

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection process involved a systematic search of academic sources in recognized databases such as JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The search included keywords such as: "Theater Education," "Learning Disabilities," "Multiple Intelligences," "Safe Spaces in Education," and "Interdisciplinary Learning." The selected studies were published within the last decade (2013-2023), alongside classical sources that established the theoretical foundations in the field.

3.2 Data Analysis

The analysis process included the following steps:

1. **Cataloging Information**: Mapping the collected data according to the three central research questions: developing multiple intelligences, creating a "safe space," and integrating theater into interdisciplinary projects.
2. **Identifying Central Themes**: **Identifying Central Themes:** Recognizing recurring patterns and themes, such as the contribution of theater to the development of multiple intelligences, the emotional and social effects of theater-based learning, and the role of theater in promoting academic abilities among students with learning disabilities.
3. **Synthesis**: Combining findings from all sources into a comprehensive response to the research questions, with attention to both practical and theoretical impacts.

3.3 Limitations of the Study

1. **Reliance on Existing Literature**: The lack of empirical research limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations.
2. **Potential Bias in Previous Studies**: Some of the selected sources may be influenced by the limitations of their original research.
3. **Focus on English-Language Sources**: Relevant studies published in other languages were not included.

3.4 Contribution of the Study

This methodology provides a deep theoretical foundation that can serve as a basis for future empirical research. Additionally, it clarifies the connection between theater and learning among students with learning disabilities, identifying practical methods to integrate theater into education.

4.   REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

4.1   Learning Disabilities

Understanding Learning Disabilities: A Professor's Perspective

When we discuss special education today, learning disabilities (LDs) represent our most encountered category of disabilities. As someone who has spent years researching and working in this field, I can tell you that it's a fascinating and dynamic area that continues to evolve as our understanding deepens through ongoing research (Fuchs & Banaszak, 2023).

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLDs).

At their core, these are brain-based conditions that affect how an individual processes and works with information. Think of the brain as an incredibly complex computer network - when certain neural pathways function differently, it can impact essential academic tasks like reading, writing, or solving mathematical problems (Frank, 2014). These aren't just temporary challenges; they're organic conditions that fundamentally affect how a person learns and processes information (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2024; Fuchs, 2024).

To put this in perspective, we're looking at a significant portion of our school population - between 5% and 15% of school-aged children experience these challenges (Grigorenko et al., 2020). What's particularly important to understand is that these aren't conditions that children simply "grow out of." Rather, they're lifelong conditions that manifest differently as individuals develop and age (Jones & Eberle, 2000). A child struggling with reading in elementary school might develop excellent coping strategies by high school but may still face unique challenges in college or the workplace.

The three main types of SLDs we commonly encounter is:

1. Dyslexia - affecting reading abilities
2. Dysgraphia - impacting writing skills
3. Dyscalculia - involving mathematical processing

Identifying these conditions requires more than just observing that a student is struggling. We now know that proper identification involves a comprehensive evaluation that looks at both cognitive and neuropsychological processes (Hale et al., 2010). This is a significant advancement from earlier approaches that simply looked at discrepancies between ability and achievement or waited to see if students responded to intervention.

Let's take reading abilities as an example. Research has shown that reading ability in the general population follows what we call a normal distribution - picture a bell curve (Shaywitz et al., 1995). Reading disabilities represent the lower end of this continuum, but this doesn't mean these

individuals can't achieve success. In fact, with proper support and understanding, many people with reading disabilities go on to accomplish remarkable things in their chosen fields.

Mathematics learning disabilities are particularly fascinating because they involve such complex cognitive processes. We're not just talking about difficulty with numbers - these challenges can involve language processing, fundamental counting knowledge, and broader problem-solving skills (Augustyniak et al., 2005). This complexity is why we can't take a one-size-fits-all approach to intervention.

This brings me to perhaps the most crucial point about working with learning disabilities: the importance of individualized intervention approaches (Kohli et al., 2018). Just as each person has their own unique fingerprint, everyone with a learning disability has their own specific pattern of strengths and challenges. Effective intervention strategies must be tailored to these individual needs.

Through evidence-based diagnostic procedures, we can now effectively differentiate between various types of learning disabilities (Berninger & May, 2011). This precision in diagnosis allows us to better understand everyone's specific challenges and develop more effective intervention strategies.

As we continue to advance our understanding of learning disabilities, one thing becomes increasingly clear: these aren't disabilities in the traditional sense of the word. Rather, they represent different ways of processing information. Many individuals with learning disabilities have gone on to make significant contributions in fields ranging from science and technology to arts and literature. The key lies in understanding these differences, providing appropriate support, and recognizing that different doesn't mean deficient.

For parents, educators, and individuals dealing with learning disabilities, understanding these fundamental concepts is crucial. It helps us move away from a deficit-based model toward one that recognizes and builds upon individual strengths while providing targeted support for areas of challenge.

In conclusion, while learning disabilities present real challenges, they're not insurmountable barriers. With proper understanding, support, and intervention, individuals with learning disabilities can achieve remarkable success. Our role as educators and researchers is to continue expanding our understanding and developing more effective ways to support these unique learners.

Types of Learning Disabilities: The most commonly observed specific learning disabilities affect reading, writing, and mathematics (Frank, 2014). These conditions are often associated with challenges in attention and concentration and, in some cases, behavioral difficulties. Dyslexia, the most well-known subtype of LD, is characterized by issues such as poor phonemic awareness, difficulties in phonological processing, word decoding, fluency, reading rate, and vocabulary comprehension. Additionally, dyslexia impact spelling, rhyming, and written expression. Dyscalculia pertains to mathematical challenges, including difficulties with basic arithmetic, number facts, and more abstract tasks such as measurement, time-telling, and money handling. Dysgraphia, on the other hand, involves writing difficulties that affect both the physical act of

writing and the organization of written ideas. Symptoms of dysgraphia may include awkward pencil grips, inconsistent letter spacing, and fatigue during writing tasks. Often, a gap exists between what individuals with dysgraphia can express verbally and what they can communicate in writing (Fuchs, 2024).

Specific learning disabilities (SLDs) are prevalent conditions affecting 5-15% of school-aged children, impacting reading, writing, and mathematics skills (Grigorenko et al., 2020). Contrary to popular belief, writing difficulties are the most common SLD, often co-occurring with reading and math disabilities (Mayes & Calhoun, 2007). SLDs are associated with executive function deficits, particularly working memory (Khan & Lal, 2023). Students with SLDs consistently underperform compared to typically achieving peers in various writing aspects, including quality, organization, and motivation (Graham et al., 2017). Mathematics learning difficulties involve deficits in memory, cognitive processes, and basic numerical abilities (Geary, 2004; Karagiannakis et al., 2014). SLDs are frequently comorbid with other conditions such as ADHD and conduct disorders (Conners & Schulte, 2002). These disabilities can significantly impact academic performance, self-esteem, and long-term social and vocational outcomes (Grigorenko et al., 2020). Early identification and interdisciplinary intervention approaches are crucial for minimizing the negative impacts of SLDs (Kohli et al., 2018).

Associated Deficits and Disorders: Individuals with LDs often experience additional deficits, including emotional and social challenges. Difficulties in processing information can lead to frustration, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal. The overlap between LD and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is significant, with as many as one-third of individuals with LD also having ADHD. ADHD is categorized as an organic disorder that manifests through inattention, hyperactivity, and distractibility. Unlike LD, ADHD is associated with neurochemical imbalances that can be managed through behavioral and pharmacological interventions. Despite the potential for effective management, the frequent classification of these conditions as requiring medical intervention has led to overdiagnosis and mislabeling, which can further complicate the experience of individuals with LD (Fuchs, 2024; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2024). Additionally, LDs frequently affect social interactions. Children with these conditions often face difficulties understanding social cues, leading to challenges in forming and maintaining peer relationships. Consequently, they are at a higher risk of social rejection and isolation (Fuchs, 2024; Lavoie, 2006).

Instructional Environments: Approaches to educating students with LDs vary significantly across educational systems worldwide. Increasingly, students with LDs are being taught in general education classrooms, a practice aligned with the "least restrictive environment" principle outlined in IDEA. This principle emphasizes that students with disabilities should be educated alongside their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible. Research indicates that inclusive classroom settings generally result in better outcomes for students with LDs. However, despite the rise in inclusion, the academic achievement of students with LDs still lags that of their peers. Assessments reveal significant achievement gaps in both reading and writing, placing students with LDs below basic proficiency levels (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2024).

Framework for Special Education: Frameworks for supporting students with special needs range from full separation in specialized environments to complete inclusion in general education classrooms (Reiter, Leyser, & Avissar, 2007). Tomlinson (2013) observed that governmental pressure to enhance overall academic performance often leads to the exclusion of low-performing LD students from mainstream education under the guise of "humanitarian grace" (Tomlinson, 2013). However, there are alternative approaches and support systems that can be implemented within general education frameworks. These methods prioritize inclusivity and offer practical solutions to meet the needs of students with special needs (Fuchs, 2024). This nuanced understanding of learning disabilities, their associated challenges, and instructional

frameworks highlights the importance of creating supportive and inclusive educational environments tailored to individual student needs.

4.2 Theater in Education

Previous research has demonstrated a positive link between integrating the arts into the literature curriculum and enhanced academic achievement. Additionally, studies have indicated that arts integration in other subjects, such as mathematics and science, also yields positive outcomes (Inoa, Weltsek, & Tabone, 2014, p. 2). Chekhov (1953, p. 59) asserts that "the realm of art is above all the realm of feelings," emphasizing the emotive power of artistic engagement. Similarly, Langer (1957) argues that art provides visual forms that express human emotions, highlighting its unique ability to communicate complex feelings. Castelberry (2002) further explains that the arts contribute to human development by facilitating personal and worldly exploration and expression (Castelberry, 2002, p. 3). McCasline (2005) supports this view, showing that even in traditional educational environments, integrating arts such as theatre, music, dance, creative writing, and visual arts into social studies and literature curricula has proven to be an effective instructional method. Eisner (2012) champions the inclusion of arts education, positing that it nurtures students' capacities for feeling and imagination. Heath's (1999) examination of various urban and rural arts education programs confirms the arts' consistent and significant role in fostering social learning.

The Transformative Power of Theatrical Performance: Miller-Sherman (2020) emphasizes that theatre, whether as a standalone subject or integrated into other academic disciplines, provides students with essential skills for real-world success. Theatre in Education initially targeted school-aged students but has since expanded to diverse groups, including museumgoers, incarcerated individuals, and professional athletes in training camps. Miller-Sherman argues that theatre education engages participants in critical thinking and social justice by challenging them through powerful theatrical experiences. Booth (1987) highlights the importance of play in facilitating children's spontaneous growth and learning. Drama pedagogy, according to Booth, allows students to not only analyze literature closely but also to experience and interpret the text through enactments, fostering meaningful connections to their personal lives and broader contexts. Wilhelm (2002, p. 9) describes these dramatic "enactments" as transformative experiences that enable students to ask questions, provide explanations, and ultimately perceive the world in new and memorable ways. Heathcote and Bolton (1995) propose the "Mantle of the Expert" approach, which incorporates students' theatre and drama experiences into literacy instruction, enhancing their engagement and understanding.

Advancing Educational Goals: The National Educational Longitudinal Study, which followed over 25,000 participants, found that students consistently involved in theatre activities, such as after-school programs and drama classes, displayed improved literacy, self-concept, academic motivation, and empathy (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999, p. 2). Drama education uniquely engages both the affective (feelings) and cognitive (thinking) domains of learning. Poulsen (1998) highlights how theatre education fosters active learning, critical thinking, imagination, collaboration, and social awareness, which contribute to its effectiveness in achieving educational goals (Booth & Haine, 1983, p. 20). By incorporating theatre into the curriculum, educators can create a dynamic and impactful learning environment that addresses multiple facets of student development.

Academic Achievements: Inoa, Weltsek, and Tabone (2014) examined the connection between theater arts interventions and academic performance in language arts and mathematics. Their findings revealed that students participating in the intervention consistently surpassed their peers in the control group in both subjects. Specifically, participants in the theater arts program demonstrated statistically significant advantages in several cases: sixth-grade math achievement, language arts and math performance among sixth-grade boys, and math performance among Hispanic sixth graders.

Social Skills: Depping (2018) highlights the central role of social connections in human life, emphasizing their importance in his study on the Dynamics of Social Play. Similarly, Deci and Ryan (2000) argue that forming meaningful, caring relationships and experiencing a sense of belonging are fundamental human needs essential for overall well-being.

Learning Social Skills Through Creative Action: Vitz (1983) and McCasline (2005) both assert that engaging in theater contributes to the development of social skills. McCasline (2005) describes theater as a medium for learning social skills through innovative and creative action. This improvisational, process-oriented approach to theater involves a play leader who guides participants in imagining, performing, and reflecting on human experiences. Miller-Sherman (2002) further illustrates the power of theater in equipping students with tools to regulate their emotions and enhance their thinking processes, both in challenging scenarios and in everyday social interactions.

Reaching Higher Levels of Thinking: Learning through storytelling allows students to engage deeply and attain advanced cognitive skills. Poulsen (1998, p. 53) asserts that "emotion is the language of theater," explaining that while theater employs words and addresses cognitive aspects, its strength lies in its ability to evoke emotions. Fox (2007) elaborates on the reflective nature of personal storytelling, likening it to a hall of mirrors. He explains that sharing life stories creates multidirectional connections: from the storyteller to their own identity, to listeners, to society, and from individual stories to broader historical narratives (Fox, 2007, p. 99). According to Fox (2007), storytelling provides a means to explore identity within personal, community, and cultural contexts. Castleberry (2002) also demonstrates how a high school theater curriculum can shape and influence students' character development.

4.3 Multiple Intelligences and Theater: A Synergistic Educational Approach

Theoretical Background of Multiple Intelligences: The theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI), introduced by Howard Gardner in 1983, revolutionized traditional perceptions of intelligence by moving beyond the singular IQ construct. Gardner proposed that intelligence is multi-dimensional, encompassing a broad spectrum of skills and abilities, each operating relatively independently. He identified eight primary intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic (Gardner, 1983; Shearer, 2018). This theory transformed educational paradigms by emphasizing the importance of recognizing and nurturing each student's unique strengths. Gardner argued for the inclusion of diverse teaching methods that activate various intelligences, moving beyond the conventional focus on linguistic and logical-mathematical skills ("Multiple Intelligences and Success in School Studies," 2016).

Connection to Neuroscience: Neuroscience provides empirical support for Gardner's MI theory. Studies demonstrate that each intelligence is linked to distinct neural networks, while also interacting with others. For example, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is associated with the motor cortex, and musical intelligence engages auditory regions and systems related to rhythm and memory (Shearer, 2020). The concept of "embodied cognition" further strengthens this connection, highlighting the interplay between physical activity, emotions, and cognitive processes. This approach, particularly relevant to MI-based education, demonstrates how activating multiple cognitive channels enhances understanding and retention ("Multiple Intelligences: Educational and Cognitive Development with a Guiding Focus," 2021).

Educational Applications of MI: Traditional education often prioritizes linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences, but MI theory encourages integrating diverse teaching methods to cater

to all intelligences. This fosters personalized learning tailored to individual student strengths and needs ("The Effect of Multiple Intelligences Theory-Based Education on Academic Achievement," 2020). For instance: 1. Experiential Learning: Role-playing, art, and movement develop bodily-kinesthetic and interpersonal intelligences. 2. Incorporating Music: Songs and rhythms enhance memory and comprehension for students with strong musical intelligence. 3. Exploring Nature: Outdoor activities foster naturalistic intelligence and deepen ecological and scientific understanding.

Meta-analyses reveal that MI-based teaching significantly improves academic achievement. Students taught through methods tailored to their intelligences demonstrate better performance across subjects and exhibit higher engagement levels ("Multiple Intelligences and Success in School Studies," 2016; "The Effect of Multiple Intelligences Theory-Based Education on Academic Achievement," 2020).

4.4 Theater and Multiple Intelligences

Theater uniquely supports the development of various intelligences outlined in Gardner's theory, making it a powerful educational tool. Physical exercises in theater, such as movement and role-playing, enhance bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, while incorporating music and sound fosters musical intelligence by connecting abstract elements to concrete experiences. Collaborative theater activities strengthen interpersonal intelligence by improving communication skills and teamwork. Moreover, theater integrates well with other academic disciplines, such as literature and science, enriching the learning process and enabling students to apply different insights in creative and experiential ways.

5. RESULTS

The findings that emerged from an investigation and fusion of the existing literature brought up several categories:
1. The first category refers to the Contribution of Theater Studies to Academic Achievement, Language Skills, and Socio-Emotional Aspects.
2. The second category relates to the importance of theater as a tool for developing multiple intelligences
3. The third category refers to critical gaps between theoretical knowledge in the field and research intervention in the population of students with learning disabilities.

5.1 The Contribution of Theater Studies to Academic Achievement, Language Skills, and Socio-Emotional Aspects

Academic Aspects: 1. Theater has been identified as an effective tool for improving academic performance in subjects such as reading, writing, and mathematics, particularly among diverse student groups (Inoa, Weltsek, & Tabone, 2014). 2. It promotes active and interactive learning that integrates theoretical and practical understanding while enhancing critical thinking and academic motivation (Booth & Haine, 1983; Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999).

Language Skills: Theater encourages the development of vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension through creative contexts such as dialogues and role-playing (Wilhelm, 2002).

Socio-Emotional Aspects: Theater creates a "safe space" for learning and emotional expression, where students can confront fears and express themselves without judgment (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995). It's fosters empathy, collaboration, and understanding of different perspectives, while also enhancing interpersonal skills (McCasline, 2005; Poulsen, 1998).

5.2 The Importance of Theater as a Tool for Developing Multiple Intelligences

The Theory of Multiple Intelligences: Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1983) emphasizes that theater provides opportunities for developing diverse intelligences such as bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.

Applications of Theater for Developing Intelligences: 1. Bodily-Kinesthetic: Physical exercises in theater, such as role-playing and movement, develop physical control. 2. Bodily-Kinesthetic: Physical exercises in theater, such as role-playing and movement, develop physical control. 3. Musical: The integration of music and rhythm enhances memory and emotional processing. 4. Interpersonal and Intrapersonal: Teamwork and emotional exploration contribute to improved communication skills and self-awareness (Poulsen, 1998). 5. Interpersonal and Intrapersonal: Teamwork and emotional exploration contribute to improved communication skills and self-awareness (Poulsen, 1998). 6. Connection to Neuroscience: Neurological studies demonstrate that theater activates diverse neural networks, integrating cognitive, emotional, and physical processes (Shearer, 2018; 2020).

5.3 Gaps Between Theoretical Knowledge in Theater and Its Application to Students with Learning Disabilities

Lack of Applied Research: The existing literature emphasizes the positive effects of theater on students in general; however, there is insufficient evidence specifically addressing its impact on students with learning disabilities. Moreover, there is a notable lack of both quantitative and qualitative studies exploring how theater influences the development of academic, emotional, and social skills within this population.

Gaps in Educational Intervention: There is a disconnect between theoretical findings and practical implementation. For example, while theoretical studies highlight theater's potential for developing multidisciplinary skills, existing practical models are not sufficiently adapted for students with learning disabilities.

Call for Future Research: 1. More tailored intervention studies are needed to assess the effectiveness of theater for students with learning disabilities, considering the unique characteristics of this group. 2. It is recommended to develop pedagogical frameworks based on the theory of multiple intelligences and the concept of "safe spaces" that address the specific needs of students with learning disabilities.

6. DISCUSSION

The current article discusses the impact of theater education on students with learning disabilities, integrating the literature review with the research questions posed. Based on the literature, it can be argued that theater serves as a significant tool for developing personal and educational skills in this population, focusing on three main questions: the development of multiple intelligences, emotional and social effects, and the promotion of academic abilities.

Gardner's theory (1983), cited in the literature review, provides the theoretical framework for the first question: how does theater contribute to the development of multiple intelligences? According to Gardner, theater incorporates elements that activate various intelligences, such as bodily-kinesthetic through role-playing, musical through rhythm and music, and interpersonal through teamwork. Furthermore, the literature highlights that theater allows students to experience multisensory learning, nurturing not only their cognitive abilities but also their sense of self-efficacy (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; Shearer, 2018).

Regarding the second question, how theater-based learning affects students emotionally and socially, the literature emphasizes the role of theater in creating a safe space where students can confront fears and express emotions without judgment. Heathcote and Bolton (1995) underline the importance of this "safe space," which encourages students to collaborate and experiment freely. Other studies (McCasline, 2005) indicate that theater strengthens social bonds and fosters empathy by enabling students to experience others' perspectives. Thus, it cultivates interpersonal skills and enhances the sense of social belonging.

The third question, concerning the contribution of theater to improving academic achievements, is addressed in the literature review, which highlights studies such as those by Inoa, Weltsek, & Tabone (2014). These studies point to a positive correlation between participation in theater activities and improvements in reading, writing, and mathematics skills. Booth & Haine (1983) add that theater encourages active learning, deeper understanding, and academic motivation. The findings suggest that theater not only reinforces basic skills but also promotes critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

Despite the positive findings, there are notable gaps between theory and practice. The literature identifies a lack of empirical studies focusing directly on the population of students with learning disabilities, as well as a shortage of models tailored for using theater with this population (Shearer, 2020). These gaps highlight the need for dedicated research and measurable tools, as well as the training of teachers to use theater as a structured teaching method.

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that integrating theater into the education of students with learning disabilities holds significant potential but requires further research and appropriate implementation frameworks. Theater offers a holistic educational approach that combines cognitive, emotional, and social development, tailored to the unique needs of these students. In doing so, it may become a central tool in their successful integration into education systems and society.

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