

Diversity, opportunities, and challenges of inclusive theatre

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Abstract

Many initiatives including theatre projects with disabled and non-disabled actors aim at increasing the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. We took theatre as the context to learn about these inclusive practices. We searched the scientific literature for case studies to investigate: 1) What can inclusive theatre performances look like?, 2) Which factors stimulate or hinder working inclusively within a theatre?, and 3) How are inclusive theatre performances looked upon? Overall, inclusive theatre can take various forms, however realising inclusive collaboration between actors with and without disability is not easy. Based on the findings, it appears that participants of inclusive theatre without disabilities need to be open to the different modes of expression of their colleagues with disabilities, and to value this expression and provide room for it. All participants with and without disabilities together need to develop new ways of working and co-creating, resulting in new skills and views. Inclusive theatre productions can make people think differently about ability and normality, while at the same time having aesthetic power, but it is still controversial to consider these productions as art instead of as social projects. It is important to realise that inclusive theatre implies changes for every participant, just as an inclusive society would.

Key words: inclusive theatre, arts, inclusion, intellectual disability, healthcare, cultural democracy.

Introduction

Inclusion is an important prerequisite for the quality of life of people, and it is strongly related to their opportunities to participate in society, citizenship, and personal networks (Simplican, Leader, Kosciulek, & Leahy, 2015). This means that inclusion is essential for all citizens – both those with and without disability. In 2006, the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established with the aim of creating an inclusive society where all people can participate without experiencing obstacles (UN, 2006). However, people with disability still report often that they experience exclusion from various fields including in work and social settings, and that they are treated differently and are stigmatized; this is especially

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the case in people with intellectual disabilities (e.g. Overmars-Marx, 2018; Bos, 2016). In general, people often respond to disability in emotional ways, for instance by being scared or having feelings of awkwardness. Emotions are imbricated with social values and frequently involved in preserving social bonds. An easy way to deal with these emotions is finding failings in others (Goodley, Liddiard, & Runswick-Kole, 2018; Charlton, 2010).

Many initiatives with the objective of increasing the inclusion of people with intellectual disability in society have not taken into account existing asymmetrical power relationships and therefore have often resulted in continuing exclusion (Meininger, 2013). Such policies often aim at facilitating access to the “spaces of the majority” (Hall, 2005, p. 113), such as economic, geographical, and cultural spaces (Meininger, 2013). However, inclusion is not about making something fit into something that already exists; rather, it is about shaping society as a product of a unified whole of individuals who have varying abilities and contexts (Wooster, 2009). This implies co-creation, which can be defined as “any act of collective creativity, i.e. creativity that is shared by two or more people” (Sanders & Stappers, 2008, p. 6). In order to co-create, another paradigm is needed to look at and think of otherness (Shakespeare, 2010). This paradigm should focus on equality and power in relationships and organisations.

Many past initiatives have sought to increase the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities by stimulating their participation in the arts. These arts initiatives often “provide an alternative way of understanding, practicing, and promoting ‘inclusion’” (Hall, 2010, p. 54), and opportunities for expression, performance, and connection with the public, which can stimulate interest and debate (Goodley & Moore, 2002). There is a long-standing traditional role of artistic practice in the therapeutic “treatment” of people with intellectual disability (Hall, 2010), such as in projects using theatre as a daily activity for artists with disabilities. These projects facilitate the access of actors with disability to conventional forms of theatre making. By doing so, they stimulate cultural democratisation, which can be defined as making conventional culture more accessible through outreach activities (Bailey, Miles, & Stark, 2004). However, other initiatives endeavour to create inclusive theatre performances in which actors with and without disabilities co-create and collaborate on an equal basis. These initiatives strive for cultural democracy, which can be defined as taking as a starting point the ensemble of actors – with and without disability – and connecting to their interests and talents (Bailey et al., 2004). In this way, all the actors are provided with a springboard from which they can all develop their own creativity, with their own modes of expression.

One such group is the Dutch Theatre Babel Rotterdam (Theaterbabelrotterdam.nl), which since 2015 has been making inclusive performances in which actors with and without (mainly intellectual) disabilities cooperate. This inclusive collaboration was prompted by the Participation Act, which came into force in the Netherlands in 2015 with the aim of having every citizen participate as much as possible in society, preferably through paid work. This Act encouraged people with disabilities to be employed as much as possible in regular enterprises and organisations (Borghouts-van de Pas & Freese, 2017), but this has not succeeded yet. Before 2015, many people with disabilities worked in sheltered workplaces provided by healthcare organisations, such as Pameijer in Rotterdam. Pameijer used to own several sheltered workplaces, including theatre Maatwerk (i.e., theatre “Made-to-measure”), where actors with intellectual disabilities could act as a daily activity. However, from 2015 onward, sheltered workplaces were not funded anymore, which put at risk the continuation of theatre Maatwerk. Therefore, Pameijer sought collaboration with theatre Babel, which since 1998 had been making professional theatre productions about social issues with actors without disability. This collaboration resulted in theatre Babel starting to encourage inclusivity by having actors with and without disabilities cooperate while continuing to strive for professional theatre productions. The actors with disability are supported by caregivers from Pameijer. These caregivers also participate on stage as actors during rehearsals and performances. Connections like these between arts and health care are also promoted by the Dutch national

government (Bussemaker, 2014). Such collaborations appear to be an innovative way to make advances in complex issues like inclusion (Baart, 2018; Goethals, 2016).

Theatre Babel Rotterdam is convinced about the value of inclusiveness for all participants. For instance, it offers actors with disabilities opportunities to develop their talents, and to work and meet people without disabilities (Dirksen, Kerkhof, & Van Arkel, 2016). For actors without disabilities and theatre makers it provides an artistic challenge (Nijkamp, Cardol, Röttger, & Slagboom, 2018). However, all participants experience bottlenecks in collaborating on an equal basis and in really co-creating a theatre piece. Therefore, they would like to increase their knowledge and skills. Furthermore, they notice that although they consider their theatre as professional, they are mostly seen as a social project because of the involvement of actors with disabilities (*ibid*).

Until this moment little research has been done into inclusive arts initiatives in the Netherlands, notwithstanding the fact that there are also several other Dutch performing arts groups in which artists with and without disability collaborate with the aim of realising artistic productions (e.g. Oonk, 2017). For this reason, there is also a request for more knowledge on this subject from the Dutch arts sector, where within the performing arts as well as other arts disciplines, the need for working more inclusively is acknowledged, as appears from the code on diversity and inclusion for the arts and cultural sector (Vrijer & Matena, 2019). This code has recently been composed by representatives from all cultural disciplines, with the aim of making the cultural sector equally accessible for everyone – as a maker, producer, or professional, but also as a member of the audience.

We believe that theatres offer good contexts for exploring the different faces of the concept of inclusion, as they provide opportunities to experiment with inclusive ways of working and to discover new paths towards inclusion. For this reason, we are interested to investigate how inclusive collaboration can be realised and stimulated within the theatre context. Therefore, we initiated a research project with the aim of experimenting with various forms of co-creation within multiple theatre contexts. In order to inspire this project and learn from previous experiences, we searched the international scientific literature for articles on inclusive theatre performances. As no review on inclusive theatre could be found, we decided to look for case studies into inclusive theatre performances. Rather than conducting a systematic review, our aim was to find a number of descriptions of examples of inclusive theatre that were as diverse as possible. Our research questions were as follows: 1) What can inclusive theatre performances look like?, 2) Which factors stimulate or hinder working inclusively within a theatre?, and 3) How are inclusive theatre performances looked upon? After a clarification of our method, this article continues with a description of the examples of inclusive theatre performances we found. Subsequently, factors that stimulate or hinder working inclusively within a theatre are elaborated on in terms of issues to learn from. Finally, it is analysed how various stakeholders, including the audience, look upon inclusive theatre productions, and especially whether they consider inclusive performances as art or as social projects.

Methods

Because no generally accepted definition of inclusive theatre exists, delimiting the concept was our first step. Our first criterion was that on-stage collaboration had to take place between actors with and without disability. For this research, all persons who acted on stage were considered to be actors, regardless of whether they had participated in arts education. For practical reasons, our search was restricted to initiatives involving actors with intellectual disabilities. The inclusion of these actors demands a unique kind of collaboration and prerequisites compared to practice within a regular theatre. Moreover, we were specifically interested in examples of inclusive theatre that aimed at producing artistic performances, contrary to initiatives that mainly provided daily activities for actors with disability. The question

whether inclusive theatre performances could be considered as arts turned out to be a controversial issue; therefore, we kept the concept of “artistic theatre performance” as open as possible. Our only two criteria were that a professional theatre maker was involved and that the performance was delivered to a paying audience. For this research, we defined a professional theatre maker as one who is educated in the field, although we realise that this definition is subject to discussion. However, as the focus of our research was not on this issue, we believe that using this definition did not hinder our analysis or blur our results.

The main search terms to find articles on inclusive theatre were various combinations of the following terms: inclusive theatre, theatre, arts, inclusion, intellectual disability, and learning disability. We included articles published in English between 2003–2018 involving case descriptions of theatres anywhere in the world. The exclusion criteria were: no on-stage collaboration between actors with and without disability, no actors with intellectual disabilities involved, no involvement of a professional theatre maker, and no performances delivered to a paying audience.

A superficial search on Google Scholar and Worldcat resulted in several articles. However, after scanning the abstracts for the inclusion and exclusion criteria, it appeared that articles with case descriptions on inclusive theatre that met these criteria were scarce. As our superficial search resulted in several articles from Taylor and Francis Online, our further search was restricted to this database; our aim not being to conduct a systematic review, but to find a number of diverse case descriptions in order to inspire our research project.

Results

The results for each of the three research questions are presented below.

What can inclusive theatre performances look like?

Six rich case descriptions of inclusive theatre productions in mainly European and Western countries were found, in addition to other more general articles on inclusive theatre and dance. Within each of these six cases, collaboration occurred between actors with and without intellectual disabilities. Furthermore, professional theatre makers were involved, and the productions were aimed at a paying audience. In this section, these examples of inclusive theatre performances are described and compared in light of the research questions.

Objectives and participants

Four of the six cases concern theatre organisations that structurally realised inclusive productions. One of these is the Greek art group En Dynamei (Diverse Potential), which consists of young people with and without disability (Lenakakis & Koltsida, 2017). The group was established in 2008 in order to contribute to equal access for its members and to create performances that not only provide food for critical thought but also aspire to be aesthetically moving.

A second case is theatre nonSTOP in Norway, which was founded by Saur and Johansen (2013), who wanted to provide actors with disabilities with a voice and a stage to their experiences and view of the world, as well as with opportunities to develop their own forms of expression. Theatre nonSTOP was established as a three-year project (from 2009–2012), financed by the local government and a university. During the project, 15 actors with intellectual disabilities were employed and worked with professional musicians, dancers, choreographers, and theatre makers. Moreover, during the project, five to nine first year social education students were involved as a part of their studies. After the end of the project, the municipality

took over the ownership of the theatre to guarantee its continuity.

The third case, also from Norway, concerns the theatre group Extraordinary Theatre (Gjaerum & Rasmussen, 2010). This theatre group was organised as a yearly project of ten weeks. Each year, there is a new cast of actors with various disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, and health care students. Extraordinary Theatre aims at presenting extraordinary family performances for a broad target group, in which the audience is confronted with their own prejudices against people who are differently-abled.

The fourth organisation that structurally makes inclusive productions is the Australian community theatre group City of Voices, which was founded in 1992 (Powell, 2010). As anyone can participate, the group is quite diverse; it includes elderly people and people with physical, mental, or intellectual disabilities. However, in order to be able to acquire more funds, Powell, who was the theatre maker-director of City of Voices, was advised to form partnerships with arts organisations. She had to prove that the theatre's performances were not only original and divergent but also valuable from a cultural and artistic point of view. Therefore, beginning in 2008 she collaborated with a number of performance studies students.

Besides examples of organisations that structurally make inclusive theatre productions, two cases were also found where a regular theatre cooperated with a theatre for actors with disabilities for one special performance. The first performance was *Toinen Katse* ("The Other Point of View") of the professional Finnish theatre group Siperia (Papunen, 2017). With *Toinen Katse*, Siperia aimed at making the audience reconsider their views on otherness and disability. For this performance, they cooperated with ten actors from Wärjäämö, an activity centre that enabled people with intellectual disabilities to be active in the field of culture and arts as a daily activity.

The second performance was *Pinocchio*. It concerned a first-time cooperation between the British York Theatre Royal and two theatre groups for actors with intellectual disabilities (Hargrave, 2009).

Involvement of actors with disability

In most of the cases, some form of co-creation took place during the process of developing the performance, with the theatre maker involving the actors with and without disabilities. The productions by City of Voices and the performance studies students were co-created from the start, with all actors being involved during the whole process. During the first year, the focus was on building a relationship between the students and the community theatre group by offering all participants opportunities to share their personal experiences. This resulted in a piece of theatre that challenged misconceptions and stereotypes about all kinds of people. In the next year, a new production was created with a new group of students (Powell, 2010).

En Dynamei's performances also came into being in co-creation. These performances were about social issues, such as the experiences of refugees or people with disabilities, such as in a performance including a scene about the birth of a child that was 'different' and a discussion between two friends about one of their children with a disability. The creation process of this performance took two years. Twenty-one actors participated from the start, nine of whom had varying disabilities, including intellectual disabilities. The first part consisted of identifying group interests and ideas, experimenting with theatrical practices, and writing the script. During the second part, performances were prepared and staged at other theatres and festivals. The final part concerned the preparation and staging of the performance at an annual artistic festival (Lenakakis & Koltsida, 2017).

Another example in which actors with disabilities were involved from the beginning are two of

the four productions that theatre nonSTOP staged. At the start, the actors with disabilities shared their stories and experiences, which were subsequently used in the plays. In one performance, the director worked with the actors' stories concerning their dreams and desires. The other play centered around the unpleasant experiences of one actor at a school for children with disabilities (Saur & Johansen, 2013).

Within *Toinen Katse*, the actors with disabilities also participated from the start. In order to immerse themselves into the theme of the performance, the actors without disabilities and the director-playwright from theatre Siperia invited the actors with intellectual disabilities to collaborate in the role of experts. Over the course of one week, they familiarised themselves with each other, and the members of Siperia collected information about experiences of otherness, after which they wrote or sketched the theatre scenes. Subsequently, four actors with disabilities were invited to join the actors from Siperia on stage. Although most of the scenes were ready-made for them, some more non-verbal scenes were only sketched in order to be further developed together (Papunen, 2017).

Furthermore, there were also performances in which the actors with disability were not involved in determining the content of the performance and in which all of the scenes were ready-made for them. This was applicable to the performance *Pinocchio* (Hargrave, 2009) and to the yearly performances of Extraordinary Theatre, one of which was *Mythical Narratives From the North*, based on Norwegian myths and legends (Gjaerum & Rasmussen, 2010). Furthermore, this also held for theatre nonSTOP's Christmas play, which was repeated every year.

Finally, concerning the fourth production of theatre nonSTOP, which was a dance performance based on the view that all people can dance and that all movements can become dance, co-creation did not primarily occur at the start; instead, a theatre maker designed the production. However, as all actors with disability had to subsequently adapt the movements to their own physical abilities, co-creation did take place during the rest of the development process (Saur & Johansen, 2013).

Hence, most of the theatre makers made an effort to involve actors with disability in the process of developing the performance. In these cases, some form of co-creation took place. However, the intensity and form of the involvement of the actors with disabilities varied.

Collaboration between actors with and without disability

Both *Toinen Katse* (Papunen, 2017) and *Pinocchio* (Hargrave, 2009) concerned collaborations between a regular professional theatre and one or two theatre groups for actors with intellectual disabilities. Although cooperating with a regular professional art partner was also important for City of Voices, Powell (2010) feared that professional arts organisations would not be interested in an inclusive community theatre group that includes people with disability and elderly people. At the same time, she had access to performance studies students because of her role as a lecturer at a university. For two years, Powell investigated whether it was possible to work inclusively, while at the same time making "good" art. She experienced that during the first year, all participants enjoyed the collaboration process as well as the outcome. In the second year, more students were involved, and unlike the first time when Powell had chosen students whom she believed to be able to be part of the collective and work empathetically, no selection occurred. This time, the collaboration turned out to be much more superficial, with most of the students feeling that "they had done 'a service' by working with 'these people' and [that] their creativity had been compromised" (Powell, 2010, p. 200). Notwithstanding these difficulties, Powell concluded that City of Voices took advantage of the collaboration with the performance studies students as it raised their aesthetic output. The collaboration was also deemed beneficial to the students. With the first group of students, it enabled them to develop an empathetic understanding of the self and the other, which is needed to be a good actor.

Hence, Powell concludes that “inclusive theatre is not just good for our health – it is good for our art” (Powell, 2010, p. 207).

On the other hand, both Extraordinary Theatre (Gjaerum & Rasmussen, 2010) and theatre nonSTOP (Saur & Johansen, 2013) made a deliberate choice not to involve (future) professional actors without disability, but instead healthcare and social education students, who participated as part of their education. About half of the cast of Extraordinary Theatre’s play *Mythical Narratives From the North* consisted of healthcare students who collaborated on stage with the actors with disability. Meanwhile, the social education students who participated in the performances of theatre nonSTOP not only cooperated with the actors with disability on stage but also supported them practically in the theatre as well as in their home environment. Saur and Johansen considered how theatre can be used to challenge traditional views on disability and arts, with the objective of realising a more equal access to the arts and to culture. Their motivation for involving social work students was that although the use of inexperienced students probably would not benefit the artistic product, they feared that the artistic ambitions of professional actors without disability would hinder the development of the unique expression of the actors with disability.

Within the four productions that theatre nonSTOP staged, it was sometimes the students who helped the actors with disability, while at other moments it was the other way around, especially within the Christmas play. As this play was repeated every year with only minor changes, the actors with disability were the experts who could tell the new students what to do. Meanwhile, during the rehearsals for the dance performance, the students assisted the actors with disability to adjust the directions to their physical abilities. Saur and Johansen (2013) concluded that as a result of the interdisciplinary collaboration between the arts and healthcare sector, the balance of power between the care staff and the actors who needed help was altered. Within the theatre, the students considered the actors with disability as their colleagues, with whom they worked on an equal basis – not as people for whom they had to care. Saur and Johansen warned, however, that this collaboration was a delicate balance, as the caregivers could easily take over the initiative. In order to prevent this from happening, they pleaded for professional artists to be in charge of the artistic production and help the caregivers release the potential of the actors in accordance with the artistic intentions of the director.

In summary, it appears to not be easy to realise co-creation between actors with and without disability. When professional actors without disability are involved, they could feel that their artistic development is hindered. On the other hand, when working with healthcare or social work students, or care professionals, these people may take over the initiative and start to take care of the actors with disability, instead of seeing them as collaboration partners. Nevertheless, the case studies do show some examples of inclusive theatre performances in which the actors with and without disabilities co-created and collaborated on an equal basis. In these examples the actors with disability belonged and contributed during the process, using their own forms of expression.

Hence these six cases differ strongly in many respects, notably concerning the objectives and participants of the theatre, the way of involving the actors with disabilities, and the way in which the actors with and without disabilities collaborated. This shows that inclusive theatre can take various forms.

Factors stimulating or hindering inclusive theatre

Alongside involving all actors during the process, the case descriptions show several other factors that appear advantageous to inclusion and to working on an equal basis in the theatre. Lenakakis and Koltsida (2017) investigated the impact of working at En Dynamei on the actors with disability. They noticed that although the performances contained spoken text, the

members with and without disability together developed a non-verbal means of communicating their intentions and feelings during the rehearsals and performances. In this way, members who had difficulty expressing themselves orally were encouraged to seek alternative ways of communicating through eye contact or physical contact. This had a positive effect on their mutual communication and facilitated co-creation and equality.

Another stimulating factor is the use of a post-dramatic, non-verbal theatre form, such as that which Extraordinary Theatre chose for its performance of *Mythical Narratives From the North*. The audience was guided through four separate rooms of the cultural centre, received in the foyer, taken out into the street to fulfil an assignment, and entered backstage through the garage. Subsequently, they were seated on the floor with the actors in a cave made of paper. While photo montages illustrating the four myths of the performance were shown on the walls of the cave, the audience participated in various activities. Gjaerum and Rasmussen (2010) analysed how audiences without disability experienced the actors' on-stage communication and the structure and artistic style of the performance. Both a mixed audience of adults and children and an audience entirely of children found the performance touching. Furthermore, only some adults tried to identify actors with disability on stage, whereas this did not captivate most of the children, as they were drawn into the mystical sphere of the performance.

Besides stimulating factors, some factors also appear to seriously hinder inclusion, such as the pressure to please a regular audience, which both regular theatres that collaborated with actors with disability experienced. Hargrave (2009) remarked that in an earlier version of the play *Pinocchio*, spoken text had mainly been replaced by non-verbal modes of expression, since not all the actors were verbally expressive. This adaptation of *Pinocchio* had been conceived as a piece of dance theatre, which assumed that the story was well-known to the audience. Images were often shown instead of leading the audience verbally through the narrative. However, the obligation the director felt to please the theatre's regular audience resulted in more spoken text being added. This was supposed to contribute to the audience's better understanding of the play and to offer the actors without disability more ways to express themselves and show their talents. Hargrave pointed out that in this particular case the addition of speech was a success, as the protagonist with disability turned out to be one of the most eloquent performers. Paradoxically, however, the spoken text also accentuated differences, as it highlighted the lack of speech of a number of actors with disability.

Meanwhile, Papunen (2017), who is one of the actors of Siperia, analysed the encounter between the audience and the ensemble, as well as encounters within the ensemble. She remarked that because of the pressure to produce a play that would please their regular audience in combination with two other hindering factors (namely, the use of a verbal method of creating the script and having to deal with a tight time schedule), theatre Siperia did not involve the actors with disability in the conception of the verbal sketches. However, in the non-verbal scenes, the actors with and without disability could experience equality on the stage when watching each other. Papunen observed that when she opened up to her colleague with intellectual disability, her way of acting became more interactive and other-focused. The act of looking at each other and being looked at became the central theme of the production.

Powell (2010) also mentioned the necessity for the actors without disability to really focus on their interaction with their colleagues with disability. Saur and Johansen (2013) pointed out that all participants without disability must accept that their colleagues with intellectual disability can show and develop their own modes of expression and that they need to collaborate with them in order to enable them to do so. This provides an artistic challenge for theatre makers and implies that the actors without disability change their way of acting, which can also benefit them as it enables them to become more empathetic and thus better actors (Powell, 2010). Hence, all participants of inclusive theatre need to together develop new ways of working and co-creating, resulting in new skills and views.

How are inclusive theatre performances looked upon?

All of the inclusive performances from the six case descriptions involved professional theatre makers and were intended to be played in front of a paying audience. The two productions in which a regular theatre collaborated with actors with disability aimed at the regular audiences of the theatres involved. As these audiences regarded these regular theatres and their performances as professional, these two inclusive performances were implicitly also considered as art.

Most of the other theatre groups also did their best in order for their performances to be considered as artistic. Saur and Johansen (2013) explicitly intended to found theatre nonSTOP as a professional theatre for actors with intellectual disability. For them, this implied that professional theatre makers, musicians, dancers, and choreographers without disability were involved, and that all actors with disability had to apply for jobs at the theatre. On average, the actors worked there two days a week.

Furthermore, both City of Voices and En Dymamei considered it to be important to perform at an arts festival that was looked upon as professional by the arts sector as well as by the audience. This was supposed to contribute to the perception that these theatres were making art (Powell, 2010) and aesthetically moving performances (Lenakakis & Koltsida, 2017). For City of Voices, this was especially important because funding was contingent on doing so.

From their research into the experiences of the audience, Gjaerum and Rasmussen (2010) concluded that disability is not an obstacle in the theatre but rather a distinctive feature that can be exploited in aesthetically positive ways. Their results affirm Hargrave's (2009) finding that a performance can be a "legitimate product of theatre" (p. 38), while at the same time having social effects on the actors and audience. Powell (2010) also stressed that inclusive theatre can have advantages not only for society but also for the arts.

However, inclusive theatre performances are generally not looked upon as art by the arts sector itself, and the advantage that working inclusively can have for artists is far from generally acknowledged by this sector (Powell, 2010). This is illustrated by the fact that upon Powell's initial demand for students to collaborate with her community theatre, she received education students instead of arts students. The underlying reason for this was the prejudicial opinion that the artistic development of artists would not benefit from such a collaboration. Furthermore, when Saur and Johansen (2013) applied for funds, the official cultural authority did not consider their theatre to be an arts company. Notwithstanding the fact that the actors with disability worked in a professional way, they were not considered artists but rather health service clients, because they had no formal education.

Hence, considering inclusive theatre performances as art instead of as social projects providing daily activities is still highly controversial in the world of arts and culture, and the current criteria used for regular artistic theatre productions prevent inclusive performances from being judged as art. An important obstacle is the stress that these criteria put on the actors having finished formal regular arts education, which to date is not accessible for most actors with intellectual disabilities. However, various authors have stressed both the artistic and social value of inclusive theatre productions – as well as of other art forms in which actors with disability participate – as they can make people think differently about ability and normality, while at the same time having aesthetic power. Inclusive performances can make the audience realise that people with and without disabilities – actors as well as others – together can make a valuable contribution to society and contribute to make them look upon diversity as a normal characteristic of humankind. In this way, inclusive performances can contribute to a vision of what an inclusive society could look like, although they probably could not change society

directly (Wooster, 2009). For this reason, these authors plead for the development of a supplementary or replacement set of criteria in order to judge inclusive theatre performances (Gjaerum & Rasmussen, 2010; Powell, 2010; Wooster, 2009). However, one could ask whether a separate set of criteria would not contribute for inclusive theatre to be still considered as exclusive. In any case, it is important that all inclusive theatre participants without disability are willing to reconsider their own view of what artistic theatre productions can be like (Saur & Johansen, 2013).

Conclusion and Discussion

In this article, case studies of inclusive theatre in which actors with and without intellectual disability collaborated were examined. Three questions were used to guide this analysis: 1) What can inclusive theatre performances look like?, 2) Which factors stimulate or hinder working inclusively within a theatre?, and 3) How are inclusive theatre performances looked upon? This study reveals that inclusive theatre performances can take various forms and that realising inclusion in a collaboration between actors with and without disability is not easy. Nevertheless, some examples were found in which actors with and without disabilities co-created and collaborated on an equal basis. In these examples the actors with disability belonged and contributed during the process, using their own forms of expression.

Alongside involving all actors during the process, other factors that can facilitate inclusion in the theatre include the use of non-verbal means of communication and post-dramatic, non-verbal theatre forms. On the contrary, inclusion can be seriously hindered by the pressure to please a regular audience, using a verbal method of creating the script, and having to deal with a tight time schedule. In order to stimulate inclusion within the theatre, all participants without disabilities need to be open to the different modes of expression of their colleagues with disabilities, which are often non-verbal, and they need to value this expression and provide room for it. This provides an artistic challenge for theatre makers and implies that the actors without disability change their way of acting, which can also benefit them, as it enables them to become more empathetic and thus better actors. All participants with and without disabilities need to together develop new ways of working and co-creating, resulting in new skills and views.

Considering inclusive theatre performances as art instead of as social projects is still controversial. Various authors have stressed the value of inclusive productions as not only can they make people think differently about ability and normality, but they also have aesthetic power. They plead for the development of a supplementary or replacement set of criteria in order to also be able to judge inclusive theatre performances (Gjaerum & Rasmussen, 2010; Powell, 2010; Wooster, 2009).

Hence, working inclusively means that all participants without disability need to work in such a way that all actors – with as well as without disability – can develop their talents and modes of expression. It is important that all actors question existing power structures and try to work on a truly equal basis (Shakespeare, 2010). However, Powell's (2010) experiences with her community theatre group collaborating with performance studies students illustrate that it is not self-evident that actors without disability are open to this, nor that they realise what is at stake.

This process of co-creation needs to be facilitated by theatre makers, as the active involvement of all actors during the whole process empowers these actors and stimulates co-ownership of the theatre production (Nierse & Abma, 2011). Co-creation can be facilitated for instance through the use of non-verbal theatre forms, non-verbal communication, or scheduling more time for experimenting during rehearsals. It is essential that theatre makers create a climate in

which all actors feel secure to be open to each other and to experiment with new forms of theatre in which they can express themselves in their own ways and have equal opportunities to develop and show their talents. Theatre makers need to connect to the interests and talents of all actors and enable them to participate during the whole process of theatre making, for instance by incorporating non-verbal methods of creating the script. In this way, cultural democracy is stimulated, as all actors are provided with a springboard from which they can develop their own creativity, with their own modes of expression (Bailey et al., 2004).

This facilitating role of the theatre maker, together with a clear vision on inclusion that is also spread and shared, is essential because co-creation between artists with and without disability is not likely to come of itself, just as collaboration between professional artists without disability and disadvantaged neighbourhood residents with creative talents will not occur when not explicitly sought, as was shown by the research of Nijkamp, Burgers, and Kuiper (2018). They found that notwithstanding significant effort being taken to connect the two groups in a project in Rotterdam, there was little real interaction and knowledge exchange initiated by the disadvantaged residents or the artists, which can be explained through differing interests and cultural experiences caused by socioeconomic differences (Bourdieu, 1984). It is likely that co-creation in the theatre between artists with and without intellectual disability will be even more difficult to establish, as people without disability often do not know how to deal with people with intellectual disability or feel uneasy about doing so (Bos, 2016).

Moreover, as Sauer and Johansen (2013) highlighted, inclusive theatre does not only imply changes for the arts sector participants without disability but also for the caregivers. The social work students who supported the actors with disability in their theatre and who also collaborated with them on stage as actors regarded them as their colleagues instead of as healthcare clients. This shows that when interdisciplinary collaboration between the arts and the health care sector occurs, the discourses of the two sectors are “fighting for hegemony” (p. 258). Divisions of roles and responsibilities that are common within the health care sector can change, especially when this collaboration occurs outside a traditional health care setting. The students started to focus on the talents and opportunities of their clients instead of on their disabilities. Hence participating in inclusive theatre enabled them to see the person behind the disability and to become professionals that in the future can work in partnership with their clients.

Finally, as Gjaerum and Rasmussen (2010) outlined, the objective of inclusive art is defined as meaningful communication with an audience. This means that there is one more partner who needs to experience the change: the audience. The audience is asked to put aside prejudices and common first thoughts about people with disability. Instead, they are invited to look at the performance, and at the world, in a frank and inclusive way, just like the child audience of *Mythical Narratives From the North*. Hence, as Wooster (2009) pointed out, inclusive theatre implies changes for every participant, just as an inclusive society would.

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