

THEATER-THERAPEUTIC METHOD OF DEVELOPING SOCIAL SKILLS TO INMATES

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Abstract. *The present paper was born from the desire to make known the realities faced by the workers in the Romanian penitentiary system, but also inmates, who, whether we accept it or not, are part of the society in which we live. The methods of working with inmates have diversified, and some of them have shown over time that they are of real use and have immediate results in the development of social skills. One of the above methods is theater therapy. The training of a prisoner involved in this activity involves improving the listening ability, the ability to express, the ability to react spontaneously and confidently. Developing confidence, active listening, improving the capacity for innovation, collaboration, helps each participant in their relationships with the others. At the same time, participants in this form of therapy learn from improvisation techniques how to be more "present", how to make positive choices, how to decipher a situation with the help of body language, skills that greatly contribute to the personal development of the inmate, he succeeding thus to progress, to discover and to become more human, more empathetic closer to the social reality in which he will reach the moment of his release. The study was conducted in the Bucharest-Jilava Penitentiary on a sample of 30 detainees aged between 22 and 71 years, included in theater therapy. The technique used is the interview, semi-structured, applied face to face. We chose the questions from the interview guide to outline the efficiency of the therapy through the theater and to identify the changes in the social skills of the inmates, which are a determining factor in the process of social reintegration*

Key words: *theatre; social skills; therapy; inmates; penitentiary*

1. Introduction

The penitentiary is a social reality, and research has not been able to bypass this field. Penitentiary phenomenology requires global solutions to human problems in this field, problems that are in fact reflected in the reflection on the human condition.

The model of contemporary society includes deviant phenomena, implicitly delinquency and its consequences. The illusory hope that there can be a society without delinquency is over, and this only brings us closer to reality. The penitentiary means more than a "total institution" (Goffman, 2004:11), it means a complex universe with its own values, customs, culture and history. It is said that a "people is considered civilized or not, depending on how they behave with disadvantaged groups": minors, the elderly, people with disabilities, the unemployed, people deprived of their liberty, etc.

The person deprived of liberty is the one who violated the law and the norms of social coexistence and, temporarily, is in the custody of a penitentiary.

The penitentiary is an institution with well-defined norms and rules whose rigor must be respected both by those incarcerated (persons deprived of their liberty) and by employees (prison workers). The penitentiary provides a distinct social service, its main purpose being to serve the community by preventing new crimes (by incarceration) and reintegrating the person into society after serving the sentence (law 254/2013 art. 3 paragraph 1 and 2). It consists of all the material and "spiritual"

conditions in which the prison sentence is executed and which exerts persistent influences on the conscience, behavior and habits of the detainee. In this context, the team of penitentiary specialists addresses a disadvantaged and socially vulnerable category. Their work "often involves actions contrary to the client's will. He is not always able to recognize, by his own means, what is best for him. they seem appropriate" (Guggenbuhl-Craig, 2017:11). to ensure a good development of social skills, in an appropriate manner from the perspective of the expectations that contemporary Romanian society has. The specialist is facing a challenge - it must bring about change. It is stated that "trying to make someone change will only rarely lead to real change" (Fexeus, 2018:241). Although the actual change must be made by the inmate, the specialist draws attention to the problematic situation, motivates, provides the resources, courage, opportunity he needs to change and helps him understand why this is necessary.

Prison specialists carry out a wide range of activities and programs of education and psychosocial assistance. One of these activities is the theater.

The theater with detainees has several beneficial aspects, such as:

- allows the transmission of thoughts, emotions and feelings through the played character,
- involves accessing a space other than the everyday one,
- provides the detainee-actor with the experience of something he starts and completes (which leads to the idea that he can do positive things, fulfill responsibilities, etc.),
- positive feedback from the audience (it is applauded, valued), which leads to increased self-esteem,
- learning the discipline of the actor, the rigor of the rehearsals, the achievement of perfection in the interpretation of a role (the feeling of responsibility towards the other members of the band develops).

All these elements - the development of creative and expressive skills, the formation of communication skills, the development of language, the development of critical thinking - actually lead to the acquisition of prosocial skills.

"The possibility of therapeutic use of theater, art in general, allows overcoming the subjective tension of people undergoing therapy, an increase in their adaptability to the values and norms accepted in society" (UNITER, 1996:127). Art, regardless of the form of expression, has both an occupational and therapeutic component. The human being sought the most diverse forms of artistic expression. The desire to know and the need for expression are human characteristics. In the life of every person, and especially in prison, there are activities that contribute to maintaining mental health. In the penitentiary environment there are people who have artistic skills or who discover such skills and through the theater, they reach an absolutely necessary mental and mental balance in such a space.

The theater with detainees is a theater performed by amateurs, by people who do not have a specialized training, who sometimes even have a low level of education. It is all the more interesting as they manage to achieve perfection, with considerable effort, and the benefits. Thus, we could say that their orientation towards theater could be a first step towards recognizing some difficulties, some problems. In this sense, there are authors who state that "the existence of a problem is also the reason why someone goes to the meetings. of therapy in the form of psychodrama. Man learns to be aware of his personal problem, to understand and solve it. Both through theater and psychodrama, man educates his own emotions and develops spontaneity" (Grigore, 2010:71).

„Theater offers people under oppression the opportunity to gain a voice” (Boal, 1998: 195), to express, to try solutions, to discuss plans for change, to be trained for real actions. According to Boal, „theater is the rehearsal for revolution” (Boal 1979: 98). To paraphrase the above and put them in the current context, theater is a means for people to express and tell their experience, which is probably not heard often. Theater helps detainees make choices, discover alternatives, develop their imagination and adopt different identities, improve their self-esteem and confidence, recognize their strengths and positive potential, build and improve relationships with group members, their colleagues and their families, to gain motivation for the future (McNeil et.al. 2011: 80-101).

Thus, theater therapy involves a broad program of specific activities, which involve stimulating the expression of feelings by the beneficiary, which leads to the recognition of human potential in each person and the development of a culture of dignity and respect. methods of psychotherapy or as part of a complex resocialization program”(Ionescu, 1995:339).

2. Methodology

The present research aims to present a reality of the Romanian society-penitentiary, persons deprived of liberty and the evolution of the activity of specialists, who, faced with the new challenges of the present, adopt new working methods and techniques (therapeutic theater) meant to rehabilitate the psyche of convicts. to improve their spiritual universe, cognitive abilities and artistic creativity.

The directions of analysis of this study were established following the activity carried out as a social worker within the Bucharest Jilava Penitentiary.

As a researched population, we identified a number of 30 males in the custody of the mentioned penitentiary unit. Regarding the age of the people who made up the target group of the study, we covered a wide area: 22-71 years. The research took place in October and November 2019.

The sampling included:

- 15 detainees who completed theater therapy
- 15 detainees to be included in theater therapy.

Through my study, I set out to contribute to the efficiency of the intervention of the professionals involved, to the improvement of the specialist-beneficiary relationship and to the identification of the strengths and weaknesses regarding the theater therapy.

A number of 30 semi-structured interviews were applied to the detainees. The persons included in the study serve their sentences under the open (5 persons) and semi-open (25 persons) detention regimes.

The research method was a qualitative one based on passive and co-participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, on informal discussions at individual level. I chose this method because I considered it suitable for the issue studied.

As a research tool we used the semi-structured interview guide which included 17 questions.

The interviews of the subjects took place face to face, in the club of the section, after their eligibility has been previously verified (if they have completed or are to be included in the theater activity). We checked some of this information (eg: age, marital status, level of education, legal status, performance regime, participation in the theater) from the documents containing this information (education file, documents prepared during the theater activity) and from the computerized application (existing in the penitentiary system).

Their selection is made by the specialist who coordinates the therapy and takes into account: checking the artistic expression skills (reciting a poem, interpreting a text), the level of education (minimum 4 classes), fulfilling the conditions provided by the procedure regarding the conditions of participation in activities. interpenitentiary - for the situation when the theater performance will be held in the community (eg not to have the quality of defendant, not to have undisciplined disciplinary sanctions, not to have mental illnesses, not to be required to appear before the individualization / release commission on supporting the representation, etc.).

The interview time ranged from 20 minutes to 45 minutes. The answers were written in the presence of the participants in the study, as audio recording in the penitentiary system is not allowed.

The group consists of a number of 30 subjects, because they were involved in the activity during the study. The results obtained by the participation of a small number of participants do not allow the generalization for the entire penitentiary system in Romania, but it can be the basis of a larger study that will be the subject of a doctoral thesis. This study will include a larger number of subjects and will cover a longer period allocated to research, which will allow the elaboration of substantiated conclusions for theater therapy, at the level of the Bucharest-Jilava Penitentiary.

All persons included in this research have previously signed a freely expressed informed consent. The study complied with the ethical norms of scientific research, always respecting the principles of anonymity and confidentiality, the subjects being able to withdraw at any time of the study.

2.1. The general objectives of this study were:

1. the analysis of the effectiveness of the theater as a therapeutic method, of the way in which it offers possibilities of development on several levels (of creative and expressive skills, formation of communication skills, language development, development of critical thinking), so that private individuals freedom to reintegrate into society more easily;

2. identifying the perception of persons deprived of their liberty, specialists, family members and the community regarding the effects of theater therapy

2.2. Specific objectives of this study were:

1. identification of the awareness of persons deprived of liberty regarding the development of theater therapy in the penitentiary

2. highlighting the positive role of the theater, as part of the social rehabilitation process

3. identifying the degree of involvement of persons deprived of liberty in theater activities

4. identifying the motivation of the participation of persons deprived of liberty in such activities

In September 2019, I requested in writing the director of the Bucharest-Jilava Penitentiary permission to carry out the investigation. After receiving the approval, I proceeded to study the documents made during the theater activity from September-October 2019 and the list of those to be included. in this type of activity in November 2019. We identified a number of 15 people who completed the theater activity and a number of 15 people who were to go through the activity. The recommendation to complete this activity is provided in the Individualized Plan for educational and therapeutic intervention in the File of education and psychosocial assistance of the detainee according to ANP Decision no. 541/ 13.10.2010. These recommendations are

made by the educator following the initial and progress assessments made on the occasion of the commission to individualize the execution of the sentence to which the detainee is presented or whenever necessary during the sentence. Depending on the identified needs, it is established its inclusion in programs and activities. We reunited both groups of selected detainees and had an initial discussion with them, informing them about my investigation and asking their permission to include them. The research activity in the penitentiary was completed on 05.11. 2019.

3. Analysis and interpretation of results

The interviews of both categories of participants have both common questions (14) and some slightly different ones (3), appropriate to the two situations in which they find themselves: before and after inclusion in the theater activity.

The interview with the detainees aimed to capture the perception of the detainees regarding: the way of informing about the activity, the motivation of participation, strengths and weaknesses of the activity, its usefulness, how to participate in theater activities in the period before arrest (as an actor or spectator).

The study aimed to verify the following **hypotheses**:

1. if persons deprived of their liberty participate in theater therapy, they will be interested only in obtaining immediate benefits (credits and rewards),
2. the more information about theater, the more often they will participate in such activities,
3. if persons deprived of liberty participate in theater therapy, they will develop their social skills.

Also, the connection between the committed deed, the behavior during the detention and its change as a result of the theater therapy was followed, thus achieving a more realistic drawing of the behavioral change.

We proceeded to centralize the data regarding the answers provided by the detainees and the following conclusions resulted:

For those who completed theater therapy, the predominant characteristics are: their ages range from 25-71 years, lack of commitment in the couple's relationship (8 unmarried, 2 cohabitation, 2 divorced, 3 married), the number of repeat offenders (7 out of 15), level of schooling (7 high school studies, 5 high school studies, 3 higher education), the amount of imprisonment (between 2 and 20 years) the crime with the highest share-drug trafficking.

For those to be included in theater therapy, the predominant characteristics are: their ages range from 22-47 years, lack of commitment in the couple relationship (8 unmarried, 5 cohabitation, 2 married), the number of repeat offenders (7 out of 15), level of schooling (4 gymnasium studies, 10 high school studies, 1 vocational school), the amount of imprisonment (between 2 and 7 years) the crime with the highest share-drug trafficking

As a way of informing about the existence of theater therapy in the penitentiary, 29 respondents stated that the staff of the unit was the one who made this possible.

To the question "Before being imprisoned, did you participate in a theater activity? If so, in what capacity?" The answers (according to table no. 1) highlighted the low level of involvement of detainees in theater activities, in the period before detention:

Table no.1

Inmates who completed theater therapy		Inmates to be included in theater therapy	
Answers	Number of respondents	Answers	Number of respondents
spectator	1	spectator	2
actor	1	actor	4
I did not participate	13	I did not participate	9

To the question "Do you generally like to participate in the programs / activities offered by the penitentiary? Argue" the answers (from table no. 2) highlighted the individual progress of the participants, the adoption of a social behavior and the development of skills necessary for socialization:

Table no.2

Inmates who completed theater therapy	Inmates to be included in theater therapy
Answers: - it helps me get over my bad mood (sadness, upset) - I forget I'm in detention - time passes differently, - we learn new things - helps us with the release commission - to have an occupation - We have a better time - the atmosphere is very good - recreates me and gives me a feeling of well-being - I feel freer - the activities are educational -it gives us the opportunity to meet new people - helps us to reintegrate - drive away monotony - helps us to get out of prison - improves socialization - stimulates creativity -helps in contact with prison workers - they are constructive	Answers: -helps me discover other skills - I feel special - I feel like I can be anyone I want - I feel free - I feel active - it is an experience from which I learn what we get rid of the daily routine - we learn to smile - personal development. - they are educational - they are prosocial - for leisure

To the question "What are the reasons why you chose to participate in theater therapy?" The answers (see table no. 3) reinforce the validity of the third hypothesis regarding the development of social skills:

Table no.3

Inmates who completed theater therapy	Inmates to be included in theater therapy
Answers: -I noticed that it is very pleasant and interesting -it helps me not to be ashamed anymore - time passes differently -out of curiosity -for action, exchange of experiences	Answers: -I want to see what it's like in another character's skin - it's something new -will help me with the parole commission -the chance to get closer to my colleagues -development of the artistic side

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -we learn to respect those around us -I heard you get involved in theater with your whole being -to have an occupation -to overcome emotions -for the team atmosphere -to learn something new -social development -to discover myself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -emotional involvement - you can get out of the penitentiary -I like theater -is a recreational activity -out of the daily routine -free speech - to discover new skills -the desire to do something worthy of appreciation -it's a special experience -because I've never been on a stage
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To the question "What expectations do you have / have you had from theater therapy?" The answers (see table no. 4) were likely to refute hypothesis no. 1, as no participant referred to the benefits (credit / reward). which they can obtain as a result of completing this activity.

Table no.4

Inmates who completed theater therapy	Inmates to be included in theater therapy
Answers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - makes me forget I'm in detention -I found out new things - they are educational -helps you discover your artistic side -develop imagination and creativity 	Answers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to be a team -let everything go well -let's go out with our foreheads up -to develop the artistic side - to do more theater activities in the future - to win first place in a theater competition - very big - to discover new skills - to be successful -a new experience - I have no expectations (one person) -to the public appreciate us

To the question "Do you think the theater has helped / will help you? If so, in what way?" The answers (see table no. 5) are likely to highlight an awareness of the progress they have made in terms of social skills, of self-knowledge.

Table no.5

Inmates who completed theater therapy	Inmates to be included in theater therapy
Answers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -it helps me to be creative and inventive -to be more talkative -from all points of view -I felt free -I felt a liberation of the soul -I'm more optimistic -he taught me what I didn't know -knowledge of others -did not know how to argue (one person) -I learned new things about myself 	Answers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -helped me to discover another way of life -helps me to develop my artistic side -helps me to discover new states and feelings -helps me communicate better - It will help me in the future - disconnects me from life in prison - It helps me get to know myself - It helps me discover my limits -helps to increase self-esteem -it helps me become more responsible - It will help me develop as a person

Because my work as a specialist with people deprived of their liberty has allowed me to notice that they have a well-developed sense of observation, I have tested their ability to capture the changes their colleagues have made. was made by those who were to be included in the theater therapy. To the question "What changes did you notice in the colleagues who participated in the theater therapy?", they answered: "they formed a team", "they have a different attitude ", " They are more disciplined ", " they played the role well ", " they are happier ", " they are more relaxed ", " they have passion ", " they have behavior changes ", " they are more sociable ", " they are more confident in their own strengths ", " they are more responsible ", " they have shown that they have talent ".

4. The limits of research

One of the limitations of the research was the fact that it was not possible to record / film the interviews (the legislation does not allow it). Completing the information from the interview guide usually took place immediately after its completion (in some cases I managed to write it down on the spot). We also filled in a list with what we observed during the interview (facial expressions, gestures, body position, tone of voice, etc.).

Another limitation was the pressure exerted by the research during the work schedule. One condition was also that I had to respect the schedule of daily activities in the detention section (lunch break, morning call, evening call, visiting schedule, library, walking, sports, etc.).

The sincerity of the detainees' answers is somewhat questionable. Although I asked them for honest opinions on the questions in the interview, the desire to have a good image in front of me could have altered this aspect.

Another limitation would be the development of this research in a single unit within the penitentiary system. The relevance would be maximum if this study could be extended to all penitentiary units. This would require consistent financial and time resources. The only ones authorized to concretize the finality of this approach are the specialists from the National Administration of Penitentiaries, as they have the role of coordinating and controlling the activities of education and psychosocial assistance.

5. Conclusions

This research is meant to bring to light the impact that the theater has on changing people deprived of their liberty, in disciplining them and in developing their communication skills. It is also a mirror of the work carried out by the penitentiary specialists, a possibility to quantify the results obtained by them and by the beneficiaries of those included in the theater activity.

Theater therapy techniques have been shown to be effective in relieving a wide range of physical and psychological symptoms experienced in children and adolescents. In studies in children, Gross & Haynes (1998: 163-179) found that theater therapy can be used to produce relaxation of the body. This aspect reduces anxiety, strengthens the client-therapist relationship, increases memory recovery, helps clients organize narratives (Gross & Haynes, 1998: 163-179; Malchiodi, 2001: 21-27). Art therapy has been used to help children cope with loss (Finn and Pearson, 2003: 155-165), divorce, family, physical trauma, illness, loneliness (Hanney and Kozłowska, 2002: 37-65) autism, developmental problems, learning, disabilities and abuse. Theater therapy has been used successfully with adults in family, individual and group therapy addressing a wide range of issues (Kwiatowska, 2001: 27-39).

The positive effects of using theater therapy with inmates have been reported by many physicians (Cronin, 1994: 102-120; Eisdell, 2005: 1-19; Wilson, 2000: 239-248).

Theater enhances clients' coping skills and facilitates recurrence reduction (Pomeroy et al. 1998: 71-76)

Expressive use of the arts can prevent and solve problems, enrich the lives of participants, contribute to the process of change, and help improve self-esteem and self-understanding (Pressman, 2005: 465-470; Ulman, 1992: 89-100).

According to Gussak (2006: 188-198), art therapy encourages the simplified expression of difficult concepts, allows detainees and others to reveal emotions visually, when they do not feel able to express themselves verbally.

In our country, a research focused on the aspect of theater as therapy was carried out with the support of the General Directorate of Penitentiaries (current ANP), UNITER and in collaboration with the Romanian Group for the Defense of Human Rights at the end of the program "Theater as Rehabilitation" in 1996. We proceeded to test its therapeutic effects, following the motivation of participation, thematic preferences and the degree of perception of an induced subject. The motivation for participation and the thematic preferences were followed on a group of 218 randomly chosen subjects. Acea cercetare poate fi considerată un act de pionierat în ceea ce privește teatrul în penitenciar. Unul din obiectivele pe care autorii cercetării și-l propuseseră, a fost introducerea teatrului ca metodă de terapie în sistemul penitenciar românesc. Acest aspect s-a împlinit.

From 1996 until now, no research has been carried out to highlight the purpose of this therapeutic approach, ie the progress made by the beneficiaries and the evolution in social terms that they prove.

Given this aspect, the present research is meant to be a continuation of the effort of my predecessors, namely the detailed analysis of the changes produced by the theater in the life of the actor-detainee, of the way he comes to understand himself and others.

Through the interviewed subjects, I made contact with the reality in the field, both from my own perspective (I being a specialist who analyzes theater therapy inside it), but also from the perspective of those interviewed.

Two of the three proposed hypotheses (hypotheses 2 and 3) in the research project were confirmed after analyzing and interpreting the results, so that they can be the premise of a larger study. I believe that this form of therapy is insufficiently known and explored in the penitentiary system.

This approach can be an important material for students passionate about the activity in the penitentiary field, for specialists who apply theater therapy, for system managers who are concerned with improving the activity and for specialists within the National Administration of Penitentiaries.

Considering the presented ones, I appreciate that in the context of the reform of the Romanian penitentiary system, based on the assimilation of the provisions of the international legislation in the field, the present paper aims to present a new perspective on the prison universe, its specificity.

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