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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Communicative Approaches in the Application of Performing Arts for Health Education: A Qualitative Study

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Interdiction:

Media serve as the most comprehensive instrument for pragmatic groups to implement strategies aimed at capturing attention, framing concepts, and shaping public opinion. Within this landscape, theater, as a "mode of communication," plays an efficacious role in conveying meaning and concepts due to its inherent nature. These concepts can encompass health and hygiene teachings. Educational theater, when integrated with health education, is effective in facilitating the transfer and exchange of information concerning the underlying social, economic, and environmental conditions that affect individuals, as well as individual risk factors, risky behaviors, and the utilization of effective healthcare systems. In the present study, theater is conceptualized "as a medium." The content of any health-promoting theatrical performance should be derived from a realistic assessment of the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of its intended audience. Furthermore, this content must be grounded in an analysis of the barriers that the audience

perceives as impediments to behavior change. Providing the audience with time for debate, inquiry, and role-playing enables them to explore the processes through which behavior can be modified. Recently, educational theater has garnered attention as an effective modality for health education, facilitating the development of social skills, performance skills, and opportunities for learning about health-related topics.

Method:

The present study was conducted using a qualitative methodology, specifically the thematic analysis technique. A primary consideration in employing this method is that thematic analysis extends beyond merely quantifying phrases or words within a text. Instead, it involves the identification of implicit, meaningful, and explicit ideas embedded within the data and is characterized by a degree of interpretation and researcher agency. This approach underscores the importance of participants' perceptions, feelings, and experiences as the central focus of the inquiry. The study population for this research comprised experts and specialists in the fields of development communication and educational theater, as this group possesses the most comprehensive knowledge pertinent to the research topic. Consequently, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 experts and specialists in these domains.

Findings:

Concerning the transmission of experience through educational theater, it can be posited that during various crises, the requisite knowledge to confront the situation can be imparted, and the necessary skills for resilience can be acquired. In such contexts, theater assumes a mediating role. Furthermore, offering hope during times of crisis constitutes another function of theater. Encouraging audience participation in crisis resolution is an additional function. This participation involves a shared contribution to resolving extant societal crises and fostering structural change within society through theater-based training. This could signify a heightened level of public engagement within communicative frameworks. In other words, it encompasses public involvement in production processes, as well as in the management and planning of communication systems. Ultimately, theater emerges as a tool for critique during periods of crisis. Theater is simultaneously a revolutionary and an educational instrument. Depending on the nature of the crisis, theater can be employed as a mechanism for critique, and such artistic critique can, in turn, lead to the rectification of the existing situation and the overcoming of the crisis.

On the other hand, supporting and strengthening the infrastructure for educational theater represents a key area repeatedly emphasized by respondents. The development of theater infrastructure necessitates policymaking within both rural and urban contexts and structures. A deficiency in necessary infrastructure creates significant concerns and challenges for theater artists, particularly those working in educational theater.

Regarding health messages, it is crucial to acknowledge that such messages must be acceptable within the cultural frameworks of the community, congruent with individual beliefs, and tailored to the preferences of community members. These beliefs must be well-founded, scientifically sound, and accurate. The presented message should not be ambiguous. An ambiguous message is incapable of effectively conveying meaning, as the recipient may derive an understanding different from what the sender intended. This issue is particularly salient when the message pertains to health and well-being. Given the critical and sensitive nature of the health domain, the message must possess a degree of clarity to prevent audience confusion regarding its meaning. The message

must be appropriate for the specific audience it addresses, taking into account factors such as whether the target audience comprises housewives, urban women, rural women, children, or members of a factory or other setting.

Moreover, in rural communities, theater, as a highly accessible medium with immediate and rapid impact, can serve as a guiding resource. Theater does not demand a high level of media literacy and can be largely trusted in this regard. It does not necessitate sophisticated media literacy to engage the audience, who can readily relate to it. It could be argued that one of the most effective tools for expanding the participatory scope of theater is educational theater itself. Another capacity of this theatrical form in rural areas is its ability to practically demonstrate healthy and expected behaviors, practicing them with the audience. This means that collaborative communication occurs on the stage itself, with audience members present being invited to participate in performing the behavior. In this manner, the behavior is conveyed to the audience in the most accessible way possible, and its repetition and reinforcement can be highly beneficial in transmitting healthy behaviors.

Conclusions:

Researchers and experts in the field of theater have, over the past few decades, emphasized its practical dimensions, thereby enabling its integration into educational domains and facilitating the proposition of theories and models to address shortcomings in education, particularly for children and adolescents. This form of theater assists individuals in discovering their capabilities. Through pedagogical theater, individuals gain insights and make discoveries, and education is realized through this process. This type of theater is intended for the general public. Theater for the general public, or popular theater, is not exclusive to any specific class or cultural group; its fundamental objective is education for change through the direct participation of the audience. People's theater is a democratic form of theater, directed towards the working class and progressive in its political orientation.

In the present study, the researchers aim to demonstrate the utility of this theatrical form as a medium for health and hygiene education. As previously mentioned, two central principles of educational theater are the focus on people and the establishment of communication among them. A key distinction between this theatrical form and conventional theater lies in the fact that educational theater is typically formed outside the purview of material or political interests, selecting target groups based on the concepts of education and training, and striving for their development and life satisfaction. By dissolving personal, social, and cultural boundaries, educational theater fosters "human connection." Indeed, by utilizing voice, body, and shared human emotions, it seeks to create a common language among people.

Based on this research, if theater is considered a medium, then "health communication" constitutes a category that merits serious attention from health and wellness officials and practitioners. In health communication, health and wellness education forms the central core. Such education should raise public awareness regarding the impact of economic, social, and human environments on health or illness, as well as inequalities in the distribution of health resources. Furthermore, health education should empower individuals to make informed decisions about their own health, that of their families, and the communities in which they reside, by enhancing their knowledge and skills.

Data Availability Statement

Data available on request from the authors.

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Ethical considerations

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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