

Theatre Terrific Society
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Drama Class Enrollment at Theatre Terrific

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Everyone is welcome!



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our report deals with the issue of under-enrollment by physically disabled people in Theatre Terrific Society's acting classes.

The research for this report involved empirical studies and a literature review. The empirical arm of our project involved a questionnaire administered over a three-day period at a Theatre Terrific production. In addition, we conducted class observations and informal interviews.

Even though the return rate for our questionnaire was relatively low, we were able to glean some important information that may shed some light onto theatre Terrific's current problems with under-enrollment. Perhaps the most important information we uncovered was the fact that almost all the respondents to the questionnaire answered that they found out about Theatre Terrific through word-of-mouth. This seems to suggest that Theatre Terrific is not availing itself to different marketing strategies. Likewise, interviews conducted with individuals seem to confirm that Theatre Terrific is an under-marketed organization; several people within the disability community that we interviewed either had a vague understanding of Theatre Terrific or had no awareness at all. Our research suggests that a lack of awareness by disabled people as well as the organizations that work with disabled people seems to be a significant factor determining under-enrollment.

As for our literature review, inclusion and barriers to participation were recurring themes. Disabled people, to a disproportionate degree, experience barriers to their full participation in life. These barriers include money, transportation, and environmental design. In our research into

the available literature, we discovered that physically disabled people are less likely to take part in a leisure activity. Reasons for such a lack of participation are many, but the “context” of the leisure environment itself has been cited as a significant barrier to participation; it has been theorized that disabled people feel the stigma of their disability to a greater degree within the “intimacy” of the creative leisure environment.

The popular conception of inclusion relates specifically to disabled people’s interaction with the non-disabled. For Theatre Terrific, inclusion is the interaction between the mentally disabled and the physically disabled – this may be a significant reason why enrollment is down among physically disabled people. It appears that Theatre Terrific’s policy of inclusion may in fact be an unintended barrier to participation.

Based on our research and findings we are making the following recommendations.

- Theatre Terrific should consider different marketing strategies. As it is, current and potential students have gained information regarding Theatre Terrific through word-of-mouth. Other cost-effective means of marketing are available.
- Theatre Terrific should reconsider its approach to inclusion. This is not to say that the current approach should be abandoned, but classes need to be designed with an awareness of the diversity of skill levels and abilities of the participating students.

INTRODUCTION

In this report, we present the results of our study of the Theatre Terrific Society's acting class enrollment levels. The levels have dropped off recently, and we were asked to discover the cause of the decrease and to offer one or more remedies.

Our work included a survey of literature (theoretical research). We were looking for information on the philosophy of inclusion and mainstreaming as it applies to physically and mentally disabled people. We did not find any material specifically related to acting, but we did find a great deal of information concerning integration of disabled people into leisure activities including arts programming and sport.

The simplest and most straightforward solution is for Theatre Terrific to increase marketing and advertising. Our survey of disabled people attending the Theatre Terrific play *Naked Oranges*, shows that a large majority of respondents found out about classes by word-of-mouth - the rest had no idea at all that classes were on offer.

We also found that at the acting class where we were observers, physically disabled people were not in attendance; rather, the classes that we observed were attended exclusively by mentally disabled people. Theatre Terrific's policy of inclusion may be partly to blame; it has been suggested from people within Theatre Terrific that the current lack of enrollment from physically disabled people is directly related to Theatre Terrific's version of inclusion.

It turns out this issue is more difficult (and delicate) to address. Nonetheless, we propose that Theatre Terrific reassess its policy of inclusion

Finally, we looked at the cost that students had to pay for classes. Our survey results show that current and potential students are concerned about the cost, but that for most of them the current fee of \$95 is not a barrier. We feel that the current fee structure should not be changed.

A more detailed overview of our methods, results, conclusions, and recommendations follows.

PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

Investigations into the available literature in the field of disability studies revealed several possible answers to the current situation of under-enrollment at Theatre Terrific. The issue of “barriers to participation” came up throughout our research and provides much of the backing for our literature review.

Additionally, and as already stated in the introduction, the issue of inclusion seems to be a contributing factor to under-enrollment; instead of creating an inclusive leisure environment, Theatre Terrific may have inadvertently created a barrier to participation for those with a physical handicap. Research into the area of barriers to participation suggests that physically disabled people are more sensitive to barriers to participation. Furthermore, these barriers can be both physical and socio-psychological. The “social context” of the leisure environment itself has been seen by some researchers as contributing to low participation by those with a physical disability. In this light, inclusion as practiced by Theatre Terrific must also be seen as a barrier to participation; simply stated, the social environment, specifically integrated classes, may be presenting an unintentional barrier to participation.

Obviously, we have uncovered a thorny issue. At the same time however, the issue of inclusion should be treated as one reason among several that can explain Theatre Terrific’s problem with under-enrollment from physically handicapped people. As it is, there are other contributing factors. Some of these factors include (not surprisingly) cost, transportation, availability of adequate facilities, need for personal assistance, lack of awareness of programming, and unaccommodating attitudes from the greater community.

Findings of the Literature Review

The single most important finding in the theoretical research was the definition and importance of the philosophy of inclusion (sometimes called mainstreaming). Inclusion, in essence, is the social movement to involve disabled people in mainstream society. This is conducted primarily in school settings. The most common scenario is to include disabled students in classes with non-disabled students.

In the literature review for this report, we were unable to find research that dealt specifically with inclusion within the disability community. Inclusion, as it is popularly conceived, deals with the integration of “disabled” people with “non-disabled” people -- usually within a school-age classroom setting. But studies about inclusion between the physically disabled and mentally disabled are lacking. Our theoretical research, therefore, is based on inclusion as it relates to the disabled (both physically and mentally) operating within a mainstream or non-disabled social context. This situation is inherently problematic, and findings based on such a research template should be viewed with a certain amount of suspicion. This is not to say that our theoretical findings are invalid, but the reader should be aware of the lack of available material on inclusion between the mentally and physically disabled.

Barriers to Participation

Disabled people to a disproportionate degree experience barriers to their full participation in mainstream life. Everyday concerns of disabled people are more often than not taken for granted by the non-disabled. In a study looking into creative leisure opportunities for the disabled conducted in the U.K. the author, Frances Reynolds, writes about the typical barriers

encountered by the disabled. “These barriers include social attitudes, transport and costs”(64). Reynolds found that very often programming was limited; indeed, programs involving drama were the least likely to be available.

One of the reasons for lack of enrollment in Theatre Terrific’s acting classes may be attributable to lack of interest on behalf of the groups they are targeting. In Reynolds’ study the “majority of [residential home] managers viewed the residents’ personal lack of interest as a major barrier to accessing creative leisure activities”(66). However, in *Young Disabled People and Sport*, “lack of motivation or desire to take part in sport did not explain the low participation of sport by young disabled people”(1). Even though this study deals specifically with sporting activity, it seems applicable to our area of research insofar as theatre is potentially physical and involves the body. Interestingly enough, the authors of *Young Disabled People and Sport* found an inverse relationship between “disability type” and a desire to take part in sporting activity:

Analysis by disability type showed that lack of motivation or lack of desire to participate in sport was conversely related to participation in sport. Those with a hearing disability were the least motivated towards sport and those with a mobility disability and those with a self-care related disability generally had the greatest desire to participate in sport. Furthermore, there was a negative association between the severity of disability and lack of motivation to participate in sport... Therefore, motivation cannot explain why those with a mobility or self-care related disability were less likely than those with a hearing disability to take part and enjoy sport, and suggests that other external barriers were playing a part...(3)

Rather, the most commonly cited barriers to participation in this study, in order of concern, were,

1. money
2. health concerns
3. suitability of facilities, including location
4. transportation
5. environmental design
6. peer support and personal assistance
7. time

Money has to be seen as a major factor in determining participation. This is not to say that money or adequate funding will guarantee interest on behalf of disabled people, but there is a direct correlation between disability and relatively low income levels. In *Disability in Canada* (2001) income for families who have a disabled member was 20 – 30 percent less than families without a disabled member.

Disability, either physical or mental, cannot be seen as a barrier to participation in and of itself. Of course the pre-requisite interest and motivation are necessary on behalf of the participant, but services and the access to them, monetarily or otherwise, are just as necessary.

Inclusion and Social Context

It has been mentioned already that under-enrollment for Theatre Terrific may be the result of their policy of inclusion. As previously mentioned, inclusion in the context of Theatre Terrific, is the mixing of physically disabled and mentally disabled people in one class. On the surface, Theatre Terrific's absolute inclusion may have been premature. At the same time however, some research suggests that disabled students in mainstream classroom settings receive less instruction and attention when they are taught separately from non-disabled students. In "Case Studies in

Co-Teaching in the Content Areas,” the authors write, “because of frequent gaps in academic and behavioral domains between general and special education students, the classes were frequently split; however, in these circumstances, students with disabilities did not receive high levels of direct skill instruction and interaction with teachers”(262). It must be noted however, that it is not clear to us how much Theatre Terrific’s version of inclusion can be related to the popular conception of inclusion as practiced in mainstream classroom settings or leisure environments. Theatre Terrific is operating in unique circumstances that may make a comparison difficult.

Mary Ann Devine problematizes the issue of creative leisure activities for the disabled by suggesting the “context” of leisure-arts programs may be providing some of the reasons for under-use. Devine writes, “some disability scholars have posited that it is not the limitations of the individual, but the context, that handicaps a person with a disability... In particular, some have speculated that disability is most likely to take on negative meanings in informal, more socially intimate contexts”(139). Some studies suggest that the social setting or context of creative leisure environments might actually prevent some disabled people from joining a leisure activity group. Devine writes, “people with disabilities, particularly those with visibly obvious impairments..., [tend] to avoid inclusive leisure service”(142). For Devine, lack of involvement in leisure activity for those with a physical disability is related to the perceived stigma associated with a physical handicap. This seems to raise the possibility that Theatre Terrific is automatically at a disadvantage in trying to attract physically disabled people to its classes; that is, Theatre Terrific is offering services to a both limited and seemingly apprehensive group.

But the findings in *Young Disabled People and Sport*, which uncovers a strong desire by young physically disabled people to take part in sporting activity, seems to directly contradict

Devine. Does this mean that sport is more accessible to physically disabled people than creative leisure activity? Or does the social context of creative leisure activity create an environment where the physically disabled are less likely to participate? Sport is perhaps the more common activity for anyone, regardless of ability, to take part in; indeed sport may be seen as the more mainstream and therefore more socially acceptable pursuit.

In Group-Oriented Community-Based Expressive Arts Programming for Individuals with Disabilities, Lynch and Chosa highlight the importance of arts programming in the “socialization and self-esteem” of those with a disability. At the same time the authors note that “in today’s rehabilitation service climate, there are ever-increasing pressures to provide efficient, quality services and to document positive outcomes.” In other words, money is a central issue, and in order for creative leisure programs to provide the services users seek, they require adequate funding. As it is, most leisure-arts programs for the disabled are regarded as frivolous by many.

Lynch and Chosa also include an analysis of a successful nationwide (U.S.) inclusive leisure-arts program called Very Special Arts:

The program is a non-profit, volunteer-based organization that provides opportunities for children and adults with disabilities to interact with peers without disabilities... The various programs takes into account that individuals vary in interests and levels of ability. Programs offer group as well as individualized experiences in activities such as dance, music, drama, and visual arts. These programs are designed to allow individuals to participate at their own level of ability, and work up to their potential through personal areas of interest.(2)

The model presented by Very Special Arts perhaps may provide a template on which Theatre Terrific could redesign some of its classes. However, much of the success of Very Special Arts seems to be contingent upon adequate funding.

RESEARCH METHODS AND FINDINGS

The methods of conducting our research are discussed below, followed by a summary of our findings. Briefly though, we administered a questionnaire to potential students at performances of the Theatre Terrific's play *Naked Oranges*, observed a Theatre Terrific acting class, and surveyed the fee structure of three local mainstream acting schools. We found that Theatre Terrific's acting class fees were lower than mainstream schools and that the respondents felt that the \$95 fee charged by Theatre Terrific is reasonable. However, awareness of Theatre Terrific and what it offers is low. We also found that although the Vancouver acting class is popular enough to be self sustaining, there were no physically disabled people in attendance when we observed the class on March 7, 2005.

Methods

Our empirical investigation covered four areas; acting class fee structure, awareness of the classes by current, former, and potential students, acting class attendance, and the fee structure of beginner-level mainstream acting classes. We administered a questionnaire to potential students at performances of the Theatre Terrific's play *Naked Oranges*, observed a Theatre Terrific acting class, and surveyed the fee structure of three local mainstream acting schools.

Survey Questionnaire

We created a questionnaire, and administered it at three separate performances of *Naked Oranges*. The survey was also distributed to several other potential and current students. Ten

completed questionnaires were returned to us. The questionnaire is in the Appendix, and the results are summarized in the findings section of this report.

Acting Class Observation

The class observed was the final class of the winter session. The observation took place on March 7, 2006 at Vancouver Japanese United Church on Victoria Drive. The purpose of the visit was to ascertain the number of students in attendance and to see the types of disabilities that they were living with. The results are in the findings section.

Fee Survey

We used the internet to assess the fee structures of acting classes offered by three schools in the Vancouver area. The schools selected were Vancouver Academy of Dramatic Arts, Schoolcreative Acting Studios, and First Step Actor's Workshop. The schools were selected based on their location in the Vancouver area and the presence of course fee information online. We studied the fees for beginner classes only. The results are in the findings section, and the list of schools and their contact information are below in Table 1.

Table 1: List of Local Mainstream Acting Schools

<i>School</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Web</i>
Vancouver Academy of Dramatic Arts	604-21 Water St., Vancouver	www.vadastudios.com
Schoolcreative Acting Studios	247 Abbott St., Vancouver	www.schoolcreative.com
First Step Actors' Workshop	1164 W. 3rd. St, North Vancouver	www.firststepactors.com

Findings and Discussion

Our findings are summarized and presented below. Briefly, we found that Theatre Terrific's acting class fees were lower than mainstream schools and that the respondents felt that the \$95 fee charged by Theatre Terrific is reasonable. However, awareness of Theatre Terrific is low. We also found that although the Vancouver acting class is popular enough to be self sustaining, there were no physically disabled people in attendance when we observed the class on March 7, 2005.

Acting Class Fee Structure

In informal interviews with management and volunteers, money was most often cited as being the major barrier to participation and the main reason for under-enrollment. However, the results of our questionnaire show that Theatre Terrific's fee structure for the acting classes is acceptable to the students, and lower than beginner level classes offered in mainstream institutions. From the questionnaire we found that almost all respondents felt that cost was a very important factor, but we also found that most could afford the \$95 fee. Mainstream beginner classes cost at least \$50 more than what Theatre Terrific charges. The importance of cost results from the questionnaire are summarized in Table 2, and the fee structure of a few mainstream acting schools are summarized in Table 3.

Table 2: Importance of Cost to Survey Respondents

<i>Very Important</i>	<i>Somewhat Important</i>	<i>Not Important</i>
8	2	0

Table 3: Mainstream Acting School Fee Structures

<i>School</i>	<i>Course</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Cost</i>
Vancouver Academy of Dramatic Arts	Introduction to Acting	8 3hr sessions (24hrs)	\$400

<i>School</i>	<i>Course</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Cost</i>
Schoolcreative Acting Studios	Various	4 3hr sessions (12hrs)	\$185
First Step Actors' Workshop	Discovery Program for Beginner and Experienced Actors	4 3hr sessions (12hrs)	\$160

Frances Reynolds writes, “Managers may not necessarily know about all the community facilities used by [their clients], and may have concentrated on financial and organizational barriers...(67). Money is certainly a consideration – but it is only one consideration among several.

Acting Class Awareness

Lack of awareness, on behalf of Theatre Terrific and those who may potentially use their services, seems to be considerable. In one informal interview, a caregiver cited a lack of promotional information in relation to Theatre Terrific. This person claimed that other facilities used by her clients, namely the Jericho Sailing Club -- which offers sailing lessons to the disabled and is only a short distance from Theatre Terrific’s main office – would be ideal places for Theatre Terrific to advertise. As it turns out, management at Theatre Terrific was unaware of the Jericho Sailing Club’s program.

The results of the questionnaire show that awareness through marketing and advertising of Theatre Terrific’s acting classes is low. The survey was administered at performances of the play *Naked Oranges*. Those in attendance would presumably have been aware of the classes, and this was true for 80% of the respondents. However, every one of those respondents found out about the acting classes by word-of-mouth. They did not encounter the classes through advertising, on

the web, or through some other kind of marketing. The survey also revealed that two of the respondents were completely unaware of the classes, even though they were at a play performed by an acting troupe specifically made up of disabled people.

The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: How respondents found out about Theatre Terrific's acting programs

<i>Not Aware</i>	<i>Brochure</i>	<i>Website</i>	<i>Newsletter</i>	<i>Advisor</i>	<i>Word-of-mouth</i>	<i>No Answer</i>
2	0	0	0	0	8	0

Other interviews revealed a surprising lack of awareness about Theatre Terrific itself. One of these interviews was conducted with a member of the B.C. Coalition of People with Disabilities who had come to a Theatre Terrific performance on the “recommendation” of a friend. As for Theatre Terrific, he had never heard of the organization. From these informal interviews a picture is emerging that shows Theatre Terrific not availing itself, or not being aware, of different organizations and facilities used by disabled people. At the same time, lack of awareness is occurring in the greater disability community as well.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our investigation showed that most students hear about Theatre Terrific's acting classes by word-of-mouth and not through some other type of advertising or marketing campaign. We found that the Theatre Terrific website has low visibility on the web. It seems then that Theatre Terrific's problems with under enrollment have much to do with advertising and marketing. Often other organizations that offer services to the disabled know nothing of Theatre Terrific. The B.C. Coalition of People with Disabilities is a case in point.

But our most major finding and the most delicate one to address was the lack of physically disabled people attending the classes offered by Theatre Terrific. It seems that the philosophy of inclusion has been extended to include integration of physically and mentally disabled people, leading to unintended consequences: the reluctance of physically disabled people to take part in acting classes.

Based on our research and findings we are making the following recommendations:

- Theatre Terrific should consider different marketing strategies. As it is, current and potential students have gained information regarding Theatre Terrific through word-of-mouth. Other cost-effective means of marketing are available.

- Theatre Terrific should reconsider their policy of inclusion. This is not to say that the policy of inclusion should be abandoned, but classes need to be designed with an awareness of the diversity of skill levels and abilities of the participating students.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography

Appendix B: Phone Interview Questions for Organizations

Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire