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Critical Review:
Is theatre an effective intervention method for people living with a communication disorder?

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This critical review examines the current evidence regarding whether theatre is an effective intervention method for people living with a communication disorder. A search of the literature yielded eight relevant papers. Populations included adults living with aphasia, individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and children who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) due to some form of communication impairment. Research designs included one case illustration, two mixed method designs, three single group experimental designs, one nonrandomized clinical trial, and one randomized control trial. Overall, the evidence gathered from this review is mixed depending on the population in question. Therefore, the evidence is equivocal when applied to communication disorders as a whole and should be interpreted with caution. The one area for which the available evidence provides positive indications of therapeutic benefit with some consistency is in regards to intervention targeting social communication skills in children with ASD. More comprehensive research in this area is warranted given the compelling importance of the impact this type of work can have on participants, parents/caregivers and the community at large. Clinical implications and recommendations for future research are discussed.

Introduction

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- Paul David Wilson, Stroke Survivor with Aphasia and Theatre Group Participant

Dramatherapy has been defined by the North American Drama Therapy Association (NADTA) as the systematic and intentional use of drama and theatre techniques to achieve therapeutic goals. The NADTA describes this experiential model as providing participants with a number of benefits including the opportunity to tell their stories, problem-solve, set goals, express their feelings, improve relationships and improve interpersonal skills. The method has been increasingly implemented and used with a variety of populations across the lifespan in a multitude of settings including mental he