

Postcards from Oasis: Paradox and Inclusive Theatre in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the paradoxes of disability inclusion in theatre through four case studies from The Oasis League, an applied inclusive theatre project at Oasis Association, a group home for adults with intellectual disabilities in Cape Town, South Africa. Situated within participatory arts research and applied theatre pedagogy, the project brought together University of Cape Town theatre and Oasis residents in six weeks of devising workshops culminating in public performances. Each “postcard” case study captures a snapshot of inclusive practice—superhero soundscapes, tea-time battles, recycling adventures, and the “best worst day”—illustrating both the possibilities and contradictions of inclusion. The postcards dramatize tensions between access and participation, independence and interdependence, visibility and invisibility, and highlight the ways relationships, reciprocity, and collaboration become engines of transformation. While inclusive theatre challenges systemic ableism, paradoxes remain: inclusion risks

tokenism, simplification, or segregation, even as it seeks equity. These tensions, however, are not failures but generative forces that produce innovative strategies for access, artistry, and allyship. The article argues that inclusive theatre training must embrace paradox as method—equipping practitioners to adapt flexibly, center relationships, and build communities that are “perfectly imperfect, exclusively inclusive, and weirdly normal.”

Two weathered vans screech through the high-security gates of the Oasis Association Group Home for Adults with Disabilities as torrential rain pounds Cape Town. Doors fling open, and passengers—friends, students, bakers, performers, and workshop employees—spill into the downpour, clothes plastered to their skin, struggling toward the flickering foyer lights. Inside, soggy shoes squeak against the tile as the group transforms the lounge into a rehearsal space. The air is heavy with frustration. Robert groans about a late bus, canceled family visit, and soaking socks; Kim mutters about a fight and mistakes at work; Savanna slumps, burdened by exams and break-ins. Their collective sighs echo as tea and biscuits fail to restore the usual cheer. During check-in, the rain hammers harder as grievances spill out: pollution, abuse, hunger, crime, bad friends, robbery. Words, like the storm, gain force. The warm-up game “Save the World” feels less playful than desperate, laughter thin and brittle. Huddled around the schedule, they finally grasp at hope: perhaps a holiday, a postcard escape to brighter skies, could save the day.

EXCLUSIVELY INCLUSIVE: THE PARADOX OF INCLUSIONS

It was on this stormy afternoon that one participant named the session “the best worst day,” capturing a paradox central to inclusive theatre practice. The “best worst day”—an oxymoron—encapsulates how contradiction reveals deeper truths, offering the frame through which this article explores inclusion in applied theatre praxis. This article argues that paradoxes are not obstacles to inclusive theatre but the generative forces that shape and sustain it. By embracing

contradictions—between accessibility and authentic participation, independence and interdependence, visibility and invisibility—inclusive theatre practitioners develop practices that not only build community and empathy but also challenge the systemic ableism embedded in educational, cultural, and theatrical institutions. Through four case studies—“postcards from Oasis”—this article demonstrates how grappling with paradox fosters new approaches to access, collaboration, and allyship, underscoring the urgent need for inclusive training and opportunities that extend beyond disability-led frameworks to embrace neurodiverse and atypical artists.

Situated within applied and educational theatre, the Oasis project used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. PAR accepts research as praxis (Freire, 1993; Lather, 1991) that turns researchers and subjects “into coparticipants in a common moral project” (Denzin, 2003). It is characterized by shared ownership and a “transformative commitment to community action” (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 568), enacted through “participation and performance with, not for, community members” (Denzin, 2003). In this spirit, the project brought together an eclectic group of aspiring theatre-makers, actors, teachers, and community facilitators in partnership with creative residents of Oasis Association, a group home for adults with intellectual disabilities. Over six weeks of devising workshops, rehearsals, and touring performances, the project operated as a laboratory for exploring paradox—accessibility and participation, independence and interdependence, visibility and invisibility. Although the article is authored by the facilitator-researcher, the project itself was carried out through this PAR framework in which the Oasis participants functioned as co-researchers. They generated the themes under investigation, contributed lived experiences through storytelling and improvisation, and offered ongoing reflections that shaped each workshop cycle. Their insights informed both the practical exploration and the interpretive lens applied to the project’s outcomes. The facilitator-researcher’s role was distinguished by responsibilities for documentation, synthesis, and theoretical framing; she recorded observations, analyzed patterns, and connected the collective findings to relevant literature. Thus, the knowledge presented here emerges not as extracted data but as an inclusive co-constructed understanding developed through collaborative rehearsal, discussion, and reflection.

The ensemble of approximately twenty-six participants reflected

South Africa's complex intersections of race, economic status, disability, and opportunity. Roughly 58% of the group identified as white and 42% as people of color—a ratio that echoes persistent access inequalities in the country's education, arts, and disability sectors. Post-apartheid research continues to show that white South Africans are significantly more likely to access well-resourced schools, tertiary education pathways, and arts training opportunities, while Black, Coloured, and Indian South Africans disproportionately encounter structural barriers (Department of Basic Education, 2019; Soudien, 2012). Similar disparities exist in disability services, where access to residential care, therapeutic support, and inclusive arts programming remains unevenly distributed along racial and economic lines (McKenzie & McConkey, 2015; Capri et al., 2018).

Within this landscape, the Oasis project brought together two groups who typically have very different forms of access: university students with training opportunities and adults with intellectual disabilities whose access to arts education and public-facing creative work is often limited. For Oasis residents, the project offered artistic training, community engagement, and opportunities for public performance; for university theatre, it offered practice-based research, facilitation training, and critical exposure to disability inclusion. These intersecting imperatives forged a shared space in which inclusion was enacted through theatre-making.

Exclusively inclusive applies to the ensemble focus of the project in both devising workshops and performances. Inclusive Theatre, as distinguished from Disability Theatre, encompasses companies such as Hijinx (Wales), FTH:K (South Africa), Fusion Theatre (Australia), and The River (USA), which dismantle stigma by creating communities that embrace multiple marginalized identities (Farcas, 2018). These practices resist disability “inspiration porn” (Pulrang, 2019), a term popularized by activist Stella Young to describe the objectification of disabled people as feel-good symbols for the benefit of nondisabled audiences (Young, 2012; Young, 2014). Inspiration porn frames disabled performers not as artists but as motivational devices, obscuring their agency, skill, and creative authorship. Naming this phenomenon is essential for applied theatre practitioners, as even well-intentioned projects can unintentionally reproduce these dynamics if disability becomes something to admire rather than someone to collaborate with. Inclusive theatre counters this tendency by

foregrounding belonging, contribution, and shared authorship through ensemble work, robust support systems, and collective creation.

For some participants, learning to work as an ensemble was “a life-changing experience [...] It's easy to fall in the trap of being self-centered or to want to shine in a performance but here I learned to take a step back and understand that it is not about me” (A. Godlo, personal communication). Others noted that “this is the most selfless form of theatre [...] integral to theatre training. So much of theatre training is centered upon individualistic improvement and can become rather egotistical, so being forced to step out of the limelight is vital for the development of any actor [...] It was so important to be part of a drama process which created theatre for, and with, others” (A. Harrison, personal communication).

To ground this collaboration, the ensemble co-created a set of agreements balancing access, creativity, and care. These agreements—framed as principles for inclusive practice—offered both practical and ethical scaffolding for the devising process and remained touchstones throughout rehearsals and performances:

- **Presume competence.** Avoid assumptions about intelligence or ability.
- **Be flexible and adaptive.** Improvise solutions and adjust exercises rather than avoiding them.
- **Ask questions.** Seek clarity and preferences: “Can I work with you?” “What’s your favorite...?” “How are you feeling?” Respond to content, not delivery, using repetition, writing, or translation when needed.
- **Be aware of individual needs.** Plan in advance where possible; brief access requirements to support communication and participation.
- **Plan ahead.** Share scripts, worksheets, or schedules early so they can be translated, adapted, or processed. Structure rehearsal with clear timings and breaks.
- **Take risks.** Use disability as a creative possibility rather than an obstacle; embrace mistakes as part of the process.
- **Offer choices.** Provide alternatives and encourage self-advocacy.
- **Promote participation.** Actively involve everyone, checking in on energy and comfort, allowing breaks, and offering

unobtrusive support.

- **Be positive and supportive.** Reinforce successes with specific encouragement. Redirect behavior through agreements, not discipline.
- **Be proactive.** Break tasks into short steps, hold doors, clear obstacles, and rethink objectives to ensure access.
- **Communicate directly.** Speak to participants, not assistants, building rapport through eye contact, gesture, and respectful proximity.
- **Allow enough time.** Create space for interpretation, processing, and movement.
- **Respect personal space.** Always ask before touch or guiding, describing actions and environmental changes.
- **Attend to the environment.** Consider layout, lighting, sound, and climate. Warn of changes like blackouts or strobe effects, and ensure clear sightlines for interpreters, captions, or speakers.

These agreements functioned as a living contract, shaping the atmosphere of rehearsals and informing creative choices. They reinforced the project's central ethos: inclusion is not the responsibility of a facilitator alone but a shared commitment enacted by the entire ensemble. The ensemble approach leads to a team of *individual collaborators*: each participant contributing their personal talents, interests, personalities, and ideas. Rather than a lead or star, the focus is on the relationships and community, yet individuals are not “caught up in a group story” and can “still own their own stories” (Brodzinski, 2010, p. 113). As Tim Wheeler's notion of “dis-applied theatre” suggests (cited in Hargrave, 2015), inclusive practice should not be framed as corrective but as good theatre. Yet systemic ableism in universities and cultural institutions sustains exclusion. Following Mda's (1993) call for progressive pedagogy that names problems, reflects on their causes, and engages communities in collective solutions, inclusive theatre demonstrates how paradox can act as a catalyst for transformation. These postcards from Oasis reveal that paradox is not a barrier but the engine of inclusive theatre, modeling pathways for systemic change in educational and cultural contexts.

The performances and devising praxis are built by *flexible structures*. A repetitive specific structure (warm-up, main, reflection)

and clear learning objectives (established through group agreements) are constant. Within those constants, each category is flexible to what or how they are achieved. Tasks are modified, methods are adapted, and techniques are accommodated, depending on the needs of individuals, the group, or the general atmosphere of the day. Following the check-in and warm-up, the group then divides into pairs or teams. Despite some age differences, it is almost impossible to distinguish visitors from Oasis residents, facilitators from participants, friends from colleagues. Discussions, images, improvisation, and exercises inspire laughter and problem-solving as the small groups create and share performances: bad days and dance parties, hiking and recycling, DJ Ghostbuster's Michael Jackson tribute, and an epic teatime battle for biscuits. The devising process ultimately results in a multimodal inclusive theatre performance entitled *The Oasis League*: an eclectic mix of scenes that depict ordinary situations and everyday events with heroic twists. One participant explained the flexible structure as 'an abandonment of appropriateness and rather an engagement with the intuitive lived bodily experience [...] instructions given were left open for one's own interpretation, instead of being closed off with extremely specific directions which would ultimately end up excluding someone, one way or the other' (Jacobs, 2020). The performances themselves followed a *flexible structure* and became a *chaotic routine*. A reflection from a theatre-making-focused participant referenced how his group 'grew comfortable with unpredictability ... [and started] thinking beyond patterns' (Lockford & Pelias in Prendergast & Saxton, 2013, p. 19). He further explained,

Every rehearsal process was different, even the performances. [...] if there was a mistake, other performers would step in to perform a moment which was initially assigned to another performer in the segment when the performer had forgotten or gotten distracted. We responded in the moment in order to enhance the flexibility of our reaction to spontaneous occurrences, and understood that when choices are made, they were not the only choices available. (M. Molekoa, personal communication)

The 'improvisatory methodical approach, based on the individual actor's skills and expression, not on a pre-given script' (Saur and Johansen, 2013, p. 250) and used to modify performances, was

accentuated throughout devising and performances. The structure was constant, but its implementation and execution were open to interpretation and flexible to the needs of the group.

These postcards illustrate how theatre fosters community, empathy, and authentic relationships while simultaneously confronting contradictions between accessibility and participation, independence and interdependence, visibility and invisibility. These moments are not the best examples of inclusive performance. They are not the best stories from the Oasis collaboration or even the best resulting performances of the project. Nor are they indicative of the worst moments; these case studies omitted traumatic moments such as when participants were grieving, fell ill, or became aggressive or when participants misled, manipulated, and revealed ableist superiority after weeks of inclusive practice. These projects were not perfect but rather what Hargrave refers to as ‘a laboratory, imperfect yet aspirant, for the prescription of less prescribed social identities’ (2016, p. 227): they were *perfectly imperfect*. Grappling with these tensions produces new strategies for access, collaboration, and allyship, underscoring the need for continued inclusive training and opportunities—particularly for neurodivergent and cognitively disabled artists often excluded from professional theatre (Sealey, 2009; Whyman, 2006).



Figure 1: DJ Ghostbuster saves the World

POSTCARD 1: WE WILL SAVE IT!

An epic soundtrack begins as a league of superheroes enter (in slow motion), led by Justin (aka DJ Ghostbuster). He moonwalks across the stage with a near-perfect rendition of Michael Jackson choreography, accompanied by his partner Kat. The DJ–host pair is responsible for guiding the performance as ‘[p]re-recorded music is the main structuring process for the narrative and helps to keep a focus’ (Trowsdale & Hayhow, 2015, p. 1025). Each team uses music, but Justin and Kat accentuate the importance. Due to unexpected health concerns during the workshop process, instead of the anticipated larger team, Justin and Kat paired together and took charge of music, sound cues, and set decor. Kat, who ‘prefers to work within a group rather than lead it,’ used her interest in art to create posters and props with Justin and prompted sound cues on a visual script. They were responsible for music cues from an iPhone connected to a Bluetooth speaker. Justin taught Kat the entirety of choreography for *Bad*, recorded video and photos using the iPhone, and provided a plethora of Michael Jackson costume pieces. Together they led the opening

song 'We Will Save It,' a rendition of Queen's (1977) *We Will Rock You* with the words changed to reflect the themes of the performance. The modification of using the tune or background track of well-known songs was utilized by a few different participants. Kat and Justin also decided to adapt Michael Jackson's (1987) *Bad* by changing 'I'm' to 'It's' to fit the context of the story.

Using known melodies gave a framework to be creative and alleviated the stress of having to create or learn entirely new pieces while highlighting the voices and music preferences of participants. Music played an instigating role in much of the devising, rapport, and development of the project. Doolittle refers to 'recreating excerpts from pieces of favorite popular culture [...] with more personalized expressions' (2016, p. 244) as an effective modification in inclusive work, and this is seen with Justin and Kat throughout multiple case studies. It allowed Justin to showcase his Michael Jackson obsession and dance skills while contributing to the already established storyline. Kat and Justin's teamwork is a strong example of experiences of reciprocal 'peer-to-peer teaching as dramaturges and mentors [...] to develop capacities in performance, creation, direction, and critical observation' (Doolittle et al; 2016, p. 244).

The collaboration of these capabilities was not always successfully implemented. For example, at the beginning of the project, Justin had boasted repeatedly of his DJ skills and invited many nonresident participants to his bedroom to 'check out his equipment.' Due to ethical and professional standards, all guests to the Oasis home were discouraged from entering private areas. This upset Justin, and he repeatedly asked if he could retrieve his DJ equipment from his bedroom. Justin was inclined to embellish frequently in check-ins and reflections, which lead to an oversight in the magnitude of Justin's DJ prowess until dress rehearsals. Due to assumptions formed around Justin's collection of late-1990s memorabilia and his confessions that he was not allowed to bring his equipment to the workshop, it was assumed that his DJ equipment was perhaps a karaoke machine or small stereo system. The group agreed the iPhone and Bluetooth would be used for the two workshop performances, but Justin could set up his full DJ equipment for the closing performance with families invited to the group home. Justin negotiated heavily for the opportunity to DJ and host a dance party afterward. Upon setting up for the final performance, to the shock and amazement of the group, Justin

unloaded three road cases of professional DJ equipment: mixing tables, amps, speakers, microphones, and even some LED lights. Unfortunately, preconceived notions of Justin's ability and equipment were detrimental to the performances, for had it been recognized earlier, it would have been more fully incorporated into the performance.

Justin and Kat compensated for issues in communication and understanding by specifying the importance of specific tasks. Justin's enthusiasm for the project often waned due to concerns of 'not being cool' in front of his colleagues and staff members at the workshop. The opportunity to be a leader with responsibilities (such as the narration roles of DJ Ghostbuster, leading the group entrance and bows, or having input on choosing house music) allowed Justin to voice his concerns and participate; he was empowered by his role within the team. The relationship built with Kat emphasized accountability and provided an opportunity to help her with her input for the project. It also allowed him to support his peers at the group home, ultimately challenging his insecurities. Kat reflected that 'Justin was easily distracted and I found it challenging to pull his focus back. At one point, however, we started to bond and it was easier to focus on getting some work done ... we could come up with some ideas together as a duo team' (Berner, K. personal communication). Leadership allowed Justin to build empathy and rapport without forcing him to participate outside of his comfort zone, encouraging reflection on ways to counteract the potential negativity from his peers. Ending the project with a celebration dance party hosted by Justin celebrated his unique contributions and resulted in him having the opportunity to be the life of the party.



Figure 2: The Tea Ladies using structured improv to chat

POSTCARD 2: THE TEA LADIES AND THE BISCUITEERS

“Lean on me, when you’re not strong...” Bill Withers’ (1972) classic opens the scene as tea ladies in fascinators belt the song while the ensemble sets a table. Estelle refuses to fade with the music cue, finishing verses solo until her friend Francis calls her, in a posh accent, to join for tea and biscuits. Estelle finally complies, eagerly sharing her views on chocolate biscuits—her frequent fixation. Known for latching onto single topics, Estelle often disrupted rehearsals, but improvisation and side-coaching helped sustain her focus. Kempe (1996) emphasizes using questions to engage participants—“Do you want to sit down? Would you share your biscuits?”—and this strategy allowed Estelle’s contributions to be celebrated. Johnston (2012) describes such “rehearsed improvisation” as a collective approach where each member is respected for their unique input.

This team, originally two smaller groups, merged into one of eight. Within it, three identities emerged: the Tea Ladies, the Biscuit Eaters, and the Biscuiteers. The Tea Ladies, with spontaneous personalities, thrived in improvisation, lip-sync, and questioning. The Biscuit Eaters, inspired by spy films, worked independently, creating comic banter and a “mission impossible” style movement piece. To unite these groups, facilitators devised a structured chase scene that ended in tug-of-war

over a box of biscuits, modified with hidden cloth. Building the game into performance provided clear, motivating action and avoided distraction (Sealey et al., 2017; Cattanach, 1996; Kempe, 1996; McCurrach & Darnley, 1999). The Biscuiteers, a hero trio led by professional cheerleader Kutloano, contrasted with the improvisation of others, favoring “structured active participation” (Jackson & Vine, 2013, p. 5) through choreography and choral speech. Initially, Kutloano’s enthusiasm seemed patronizing, but reflection helped her adapt: “Once we did less talking and worked with our bodies more, energies went up. The plan changed a lot, but fit better” (K. Headbush, personal communication). Sharing her cheerleading skills while reciprocally learning from her partners created balance.

This team exemplified Doolittle’s (2016) notion that inclusion occurs both in improvisation and choreography, where peer-to-peer coaching “leveled the playing field” (p. 249). Unison sequences reinforced belonging across the cast, supported with taped floor lines, mirrored movement, and visual placards for clarity. Fieldnotes from early workshops emphasized: “Not everyone needs to be the focus, but everyone needs to be included”. The red team embodied this principle, balancing structure and flexibility to ensure meaningful participation.



Figure 3: Grease Lightning on the way to recycle

POSTCARD 3: RECYCLING AND HIKES

“Come on, get in the car, Nikki!” Anathi shouts, gesturing to Nikki’s empty spot in the scene. Between an improvised hike—mountains, streams, pollution—the arrival of superheroes, and a mad dash to the Oasis recycling center, Nikki freezes. For a moment, fear flashes across her face. Jerome throws an arm around her shoulders, Kylie cheers, “*Klim in die kar, Nikki! Jy kan dit doen. Vasbyt!*” and Brenden starts the engine. Nikki smiles and joins them, bouncing along to *Greased Lightning*. Nikki communicates volumes without words. A valued recycling worker, friend, and performer, she prefers nonverbal expression—smiles, gestures, proximity—though she speaks Afrikaans and English when needed. Teammates adapted tasks bilingually, offering support when her silence grew heavy. Before one performance, she sat blank-faced, a tear sliding down her cheek. Asked if she wanted to perform, she smiled and nodded firmly, embodying her characteristic quiet resolve.

This team thrived on music, games, improvisation, and above all, rapport. Their greatest strength was “forever supporting and hyping each other all the time” (M. Mkhize, personal communication).

Transitions relied not on choreography but conversation and encouragement: “Kim, can you move this table?” “Michael, great dance moves!” This created what Spolin (1963) calls “moving energy,” an ensemble attuned to one another and the moment. Missed lines or cues were never failures but, in Roulstone’s (2010) words, “the glories of imperfection” (p. 432). Support became both aesthetic and ethic, echoing Wooster’s (2009) emphasis on mutual contribution. Their scene disrupted the traditional heroic arc with episodic, revue-like structure committed to community (Sandahl & Auslander, 2008). A choral chant framed a physical theatre hike, culminating in a clean-up game where audience and ensemble raced to recycle. Jerome appeared as “Recycling Man,” his real-life job mirrored onstage, while brothers Brenden and Michael drove the group car while impersonating his idol, Danny Zuko.

The brothers were inseparable: enthusiastic, affectionate, and contagiously passionate about performance. Michael, the showman, dazzled with improvised *Grease* and Michael Jackson dance moves—“immersive and self-realizing dancing [that] not only transforms him, but also has potential to transform those who watch him” (Doolittle et al., 2016, p. 249). Brenden, quieter but no less vital, excelled in affirming others, pausing rehearsals to offer encouragement until everyone felt acknowledged. His joy in celebrating peers was itself a form of artistry. Together, the recycling team embodied Sandahl’s (2002) observation of disability community: the intention to include all to the fullest extent possible. A participant reflection captured this ethos: “[We] always tried to help each other... This allowed the entire process to be spontaneous and ever-changing... It made the performance fluid and fun rather than stagnant and rigid” (K. Berner, personal communication).



Figure 4: The Best Worst Day team debriefing

POSTCARD 4: THE BEST WORST DAY (BLUE TEAM)

Savannah, a meticulous note-taker and “Type-A” drama therapist, checked in early, stayed late, and offered constant reminders, rides, and support. She admitted she joined the Inclusive Theatre Company “under a misunderstanding of what the process actually was and I am immensely better for it” (S. Brueton, personal communication). Driven by a passion for helping others, she was also anxious about doing too much, too little, or inadvertently causing harm—fears that accumulated into a worry she was “letting the group down.” On the rainy day that began this paper, Savannah was overwhelmed with stress. She later reflected: “I didn’t want my personal experience to ruin the experience of the day for the rest of my group, but I tried my best to push through” (personal communication). Instead of pushing through, she was encouraged to share honestly, just as she had asked others to do. This shift moved her from advocate to ally. As Hadley (2020) argues, allyship is not simply advocacy but “a skilled practice, pursued over time, in partnership with disabled people” (pp. 184-185). When

Savannah dropped her façade and met the team as an equal, Kim and Robert supported her in return, creating reciprocal partnership. This embodied Hadley's concept of accompliceship: deploying skills in specific contexts to support disabled people on their own terms, without speaking for them or constraining their agency (2020, p. 185).

This team worked at their own rhythm, embracing Karafistan's (2004) principle that "whatever is brought into the working room... can potentially be utilized in the creative process" (p. 268). Some days meant choreography, others venting or impromptu dance parties. Their final scene staged semi-improvised monologues about "bad days," interrupted by Jesse and Tinkie—the dancing duo known for spreading joy through smiles, winks, and hugs. Both primarily communicated nonverbally, so they led the group in a choreographed, flexible routine to ABBA's *Dancing Queen*. Before the first performance, Tinkie was ill and Jesse, heartbroken, nearly withdrew. Yet she rallied, distributing tissues and dancing with renewed joy. By the final show, the duo returned together, amplifying the energy.

The scene embodied reciprocity: every member was included, equitably valued, and supported. What began as a collective lament transformed into movement pieces of superheroes and adventures, where frustrations dissolved into joy. The process was mutually beneficial: participants contributed talents, learned new skills, expressed passions, and deepened friendships. In Sandahl's (2002) words, it reflected the disability community's intention "to include all of the people to the fullest extent possible" (p. 26).

READING BETWEEN THE POSTCARDS: THE PARADOX OF INCLUSION

The paradoxes of inclusion demand ongoing negotiation rather than resolution. The case studies presented here are not a complete picture, but postcards—an inclusive, arts-based method of data presentation and dissemination that accommodates and modifies information into comprehensible, inviting bites. Developed collaboratively during one of the workshops, the postcard method echoes artistic conventions of applied theatre that align inclusive research with broader traditions of visual and narrative inquiry. To describe this praxis on a postcard would require oxymorons: perfectly imperfect, exclusively inclusive, weirdly normal, a flexible structure, a

chaotic routine. These contradictions, far from flaws, are the essence of inclusive work. Above all, the postcards demonstrate the centrality of relationships: forming, sustaining, and sharing them is the foundation of transformation.

An *exclusively inclusive* approach emphasizes reciprocity: participation is not just being present but contributing and supporting others at one's own pace. This reciprocity was especially visible in post-performance workshops, where Oasis performers immediately began facilitating, encouraging peers, and leading familiar activities. O'Toole (1992) observes that audience participation shapes performance meaning, and here it validated the skills and leadership of performers with disabilities. Sharing the stage and the workshop space with families, staff, and peers created genuine inclusivity: not inclusion by presence alone, but by equal status, mutual respect, and mutual benefit (Tomlinson, 1982; Brodzinski, 2010; Sandahl & Auslander, 2008).

Inclusive practice often becomes “weirdly normal.” The tools are not different—blocking, choreography, improvisation—but adapted and shared. Initially, many students expressed fear about saying the wrong thing or doubting that inclusive theatre was possible without prior experience (K. Kveli & M. Mkhize, personal communications). Early rehearsals often mirrored the facilitators' styles, limiting creativity. As each introduced their own strengths—Kutloano's precision choreography, Kylie's bilingual dialogues, Anathi's physical theatre, Frances's improvisation—performances transformed into authentic inclusive works. One reflection noted that when activities were simplified below the Oasis participants' level, energy dropped; when challenged, participants “rose to the challenge, which gave rise to really lovely theatre” (Harrison, A., personal communication). Inclusive training requires resisting the urge to lower expectations and instead creating frameworks that allow participants to meet and exceed them.

The performances combined real-world struggles with fantastical heroics, a form of *magical realism* where authentic stories mingled with imaginative solutions (Hargrave, 2010; Palmer & Hayhow, 2008). The presence of diverse abilities on stage challenges cultural metaphors of disability (Eckard & Myers, 2009) while enacting moments of “magical” inclusion—simple adjustments, shared accountability, and everyday creativity that transform accessibility from charity into common practice. As one participant reflected, “everyone could easily adapt to

be more inclusive” (S. Brueton, personal communication).

More than oxymorons, relationships are the true paradox of inclusion: self-contradictory yet transformative. Relationships formed within inclusive practice ripple outward, modeling how theatre can reshape society through adaptation, modification, and accommodation (Franks, 2014; Sandahl & Auslander, 2008). Several participants have carried this focus into their careers—pursuing dissertations, advocating inclusive casting, facilitating dance companies, or teaching in special-needs schools. Such outcomes show how inclusive praxis trains future practitioners to normalize inclusion in both conventional theatre and broader society. Yet inclusive theatre itself remains paradoxical. The label “inclusive” signals difference even while the goal is equity. As Hodgkin cautions, labeling risks marginalization (qtd. in Kempe, 1996), echoing Tomlinson’s (1982) paradox that disabled people must accept the label they wish to transcend in order to fight for rights. The Oasis project leaned instead toward ubuntu: “the profound sense that we are human only through the humanity of others” (Mandela, 2008 in Stengel, 2010). Inclusion here was not a category but a community, a network of relationships in which support and creativity were mutually sustaining.

Inclusion is never straightforward; it lives in the tension between ideals of full participation and persistent systemic barriers (Roulstone, 2010; Hadley, 2020). But these paradoxes are not obstacles—they are engines of innovation. Inclusive theatre trains facilitators to navigate contradiction, to embrace imperfection, to value reciprocity, and to center relationships. In Hayhow’s terms, this praxis becomes a “heightened form of everyday human activity,” where play, pretending, and performance create spaces to test, shape, and expand capabilities (Trowsdale & Hayhow, 2013). Like the stormy rehearsal that opened this article, inclusive practice often feels like the “best worst day”: messy, frustrating, imperfect—yet also profoundly generative. The postcards from Oasis remind us that inclusive theatre thrives not in resolving paradox but in living with it, transforming contradiction into connection, and rehearsal into a rehearsal for society itself.

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The Oasis Association, based in Cape Town, South Africa, is a community organisation offering residential care, supported work opportunities, and creative engagement for adults with intellectual disabilities. Its protected workshop and group homes provide safe, empowering spaces where residents can build skills, relationships, and independence.

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