Included?

By

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school stories of inclusion (or lack thereof)
This text is meant to be flexible to accommodate diverse actors, budgets, cultures, theatre spaces and perspectives. There is also room, if a director wishes, to present this piece as forum theatre in the style of Augusto Boal as a means to generate solutions for creating inclusive classrooms. My recommended discussion question is how can we change the scene to create more inclusive schools for students with exceptional needs? I encourage directors, if your space allows, to use projection as a means to translate for non-verbal actors or for performers who speak other languages. I also encourage directors to use "mimetics" (imitation or mirroring) as a means for actors who struggle to remember blocking to be included into the text as is demonstrated in scene 4. It is my hope that this contemporary vignette play will helpful as a workshop piece to explore themes on inclusion. Please adapt the script to suit the individuals who will play the roles and use the text however necessary to honour the process of learning. I recommend that the players remain on the stage throughout the duration of the performance as a "Greek Chorus" observing the action.

If used as a performance, please consider who your audience is to best make them feel included in the space. A "relaxed" setting where lighting and sound choices are adjusted accordingly and breaks are considered in order to include those who many need space for stimulatory behaviour.

*Soundscape: performers create sound effects using their voices instead of digital files, typically with a dark stage.

*Movement Score: performers create a dance like or gestural movement choreography to reflect the internal struggles of the characters they are playing.
CASTING
(7 Either - Expandable to 16)

ONE: BUS DRIVER
TWO: INCLUSION
THREE: EXCLUSION
FOUR: BECCA, YELLOW SHIRT *written as female but can be changed
FIVE: ROBBIE, TEACHER *written as male but can be changed
SIX: LEAH, MOM *written as female but can be changed
SEVEN: SAM
From a dark stage a single spot light fades up to reveal one player. ONE looks out to the audience taking time to see the people seated in each seat. Slowly the fourth wall descends and ONE is aware of themselves alone on stage.

ONE
I...(beat) I...

ONE continues to speak in rhythm as others join in. The words meld together to create a song-like rhythm and tone. Spotlights fade up as each player is revealed.

TWO
Me

THREE
You

FOUR
Us

FIVE
Them

SIX
He

SEVEN
She

Each player layers their word on top of one another until the space is filled with a cacophony of sound. The sound builds and builds and continues as we hear...

ONE
Everywhere I turn people say "that’s not fair". "That’s just not fair". Then the response comes, usually from some wise adult saying, (in a snotty adult impression) "well, dear, life’s just not fair". What does that even mean? We’re supposed to accept that this is a reasonable answer for all the moments that are unfair. That life’s just tough? Deal with it? But how? How do we deal with it? Why do I even expect fairness in the first place. (beat) Now, I don’t expect it. I don’t expect anything.
One joins back into the chorus of sound only to be interrupted.

FOUR
(Yells) HEY! Quiet! (The song stops) Why can’t we all just belong?

The other players roll their eyes and exit leaving FOUR on stage alone.

Scene 2

She (Four/Becca) shrugs and pulls a backpack off of her back and begins unloading Valentine’s cards from bag sorting them into piles as she goes.

FOUR/BECCA
Jaden, Finn, Rosie, Vanessa, Abby, Albert (she pauses not knowing which pile to place Albert’s card into) ummmm...there I guess. Okay, Leah - oh Leah I hope she likes the extra heart sticker I put on it. Robbie...(she sighs and kisses the envelope).

Enter ROBBIE (Six). He struts to the stage.

ROBBIE
Hi Becca.

BECCA
Oh hi Robbie. (blushing and hiding the valentine)

ROBBIE
Ready for Valentine’s Day.

BECCA
Um, yes. I, ah, have everyone’s card.

ROBBIE
Yeah, hey, it’s so dumb that we have to give a card to everyone in the class. I don’t even know half the kids.

BECCA
Oh, um, yes. So dumb...

ROBBIE
That’s why I didn’t write any.

BECCA
(incredulously) You didn’t write any?!

ROBBIE
Nah. Valentine’s day is stupid and I’m not going to express my "love" to everybody. There are people in my class I just don’t "like" let alone "love".

(CONTINUED)
BECCA
Yeah...it’s stupid.

ROBBIE
(He picks up the cards and starts weeding through them)

    Hey! You wrote loads. Ha!

BECCA
Hey! Give those back.

ROBBIE
You’re giving one to Reece? The kid that leaves our class all the time and makes weird noises? That’s retarded.

BECCA
Um...we aren’t supposed to use that word. (Defeated - realizing her crush is not who she thought he was)

ROBBIE
Yeah, well, I don’t mean it in that way.

BECCA
Well, what way did you mean it?

ROBBIE
I, just, well...anyway, I’m boycotting Valentine’s Day. No cards from me to anyone.

BECCA
Okay. Well, I hope it’s okay with you but I wrote you one. Here.

    She hands the valentine to Robbie. He reluctantly takes the card.

ROBBIE
Thanks. That’s sweet but on principle I am going to have to decline.

    He rips up the card. Becca gasps.

BECCA
(clearing her throat) yeah , um, cool.

ROBBIE
See ya around.

    Robbie sniffs and exits as confidently as he entered. Becca is left to gather the pieces once she sees that he is gone. She pulls a new card from one of her piles for one of those students Robbie mentioned.

(CONTINUED)
Enter Leah.

LEAH
Hi Becca. Happy Valentines Day!

BECCA
Hey! Thanks.

LEAH
What’s wrong?

BECCA
Huh? Oh nothing. It’s nothing. Do you think Reece is weird?

LEAH
No. He’s just special. (pause). We are going to be late! Come on!

Becca looks at her cards once more in thought and exits.

Scene 3

Actors 2-7 enter creating a soundscape* of the end of the elementary school day. They are wearing all the same colour shirt (or tie-dyed shirts). We hear a school bell, excited chatter from students and running as they scamper to catch the bus. They are lining up to get on board. One is the bus driver, and the rest load on and create the bus - sitting two by two in no particular order or pairing. The students are unaware of any differences there might be - the image of inclusion.

BUS DRIVER
Alright kids! We are about to cross the train tracks? You ready to sing?

KIDS
Ya!

The students raise their hands and sing.

ALL
(In the style of Ottawan) Hands up, baby, hands up! Give me your heart, gimme, gimme your heart gimme, gimme. Hands up, baby, hands up! Give me your heart, gimme, gimme your heart gimme, gimme.

Students giggle and one by one exit the bus. Each time, the bus driver exclaiming:

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:

BUS DRIVER
See you tomorrow!

ALL
Some time later...

The scene begins to repeat except that it is morning pick ups. One by one, students are picked up on the bus. They talk animatedly. The students are all wearing three different colours of shirts and are mixed but the Red Shirt Students sit together at the front of the bus - the image of integration. The students have aged a year or two which can be evident in costume or physicality if possible. Once all the students are loaded.

BUS DRIVER
Alright kids! We are about to cross the train tracks? You ready to sing?

ALL
Ya!

ALL
(The students wearing RED shirts and one student wearing a YELLOW shirt are most enthusiastic and uninhibited in their singing)

Hands up, baby, hands up! Give me your heart, gimme, gimme your heart gimme, gimme. Hands up, baby, hands up! Give me your heart, gimme, gimme your heart gimme, gimme.

The other colours sing but look around while they sing...embarrassed and slightly pitying of the uninhibited singers.

The students arrive at school they scatter into the building - the students wearing RED shirts trailing behind.

BUS DRIVER
See you after school.

ALL
Some time later...

The scene begins to repeat again for afternoon pick up from school. We hear a school bell and early teenage chatter from students as they walk coolly to catch the bus. As the bus driver pulls up, the students organize themselves by shirt colour and get on the bus only with students

(CONTINUED)
wearing the same colour shirt - the image of segregation. After some driving time...

BUS DRIVER
Alright kids! We are about to cross the train tracks? You ready to sing?

All bus the students but those wearing RED shirts, groan. Because they are fewer in number they sing but with some inhibition. We see one student wearing a yellow shirt seem conflicted - should she sing?

STUDENTS WEARING RED SHIRTS
Hands up, baby, hands up! Give me your heart, gimme, gimme your heart gimme, gimme. Hands up, baby, hands up....

A collective sigh.

ALL
Some time later...

The scene begins to repeat once more for morning pick ups. One by one, students are picked up on the bus and choose to sit with others that are wearing the same colour saying very little as they are tired teenagers. The last student to be picked up is the student wearing a YELLOW shirt. On board the bus are only the students wearing the RED shirts. Before they can board the bus...

BUS DRIVER
I’m sorry. Were you not informed? You no longer are allowed to ride the bus with these students. They are sending a separate one for you with other kids that are more like you. I hope that works out better.

The bus drives off as the students begin to sing the "Hands Up" song. It trails off and the student wearing the YELLOW shirt is left on the sidewalk - alone on stage - the picture of exclusion. Lights out.

Scene 4

The other student wearing a RED shirt (Sam) enters in darkness and stands downstage of the student wearing the YELLOW shirt. Lights come up to reveal the student wearing the YELLOW shirt standing centre stage in shock. She joins Sam and both lay down on the stage and begin a unison or mimicked movement score reflecting the process of learning
to walk. They are the same until it is obvious that Sam isn’t catching on. A wheelchair is rolled on stage for Sam. The score continues until Sam tries to stand but isn’t able to. The student in the YELLOW Shirt helps SAM into her chair.

SAM

I’m tired.

The actor in a yellow shirt nods in acknowledgement and exits.

SAM

I’m tired of fighting to say what I really want to say. I speak but no one seems to understand what I am saying. I make so much sense to me! It’s like when you are under water screaming and no one can hear you. Have you ever tried doing that? Having a conversation under water? That’s what it’s like. You’re screaming and people are nodding like you’re being understood but they don’t get it. While I have your attention, do you want to understand what it’s like to be in this body? Don’t be afraid...it’s actually a lot like being in your body. I want the same things you do. To be accepted. Loved. To make people laugh. My body just doesn’t always cooperate with what I want, you know? I try to act cool and show that I love them but it comes out all wrong cause my body just won’t cooperate. It’s this chair. This chair symbolizes me. It is what people see. Don’t try to deny it. That’s what you saw the second I rolled on out here. You want to know the story behind the chair. I get it. Well - I’ll tell you. This is my time to set the record straight and stop being so tired all the time. You just have to be patient cause my time ain’t the same as your time.

Sam pauses as if ready to continue and interrupted by a voice off stage.

MOM (OS)

Sam! It’s time for your bath...

Sam, embarrassed, tries again to speak and is interrupted by someone coming on stage to wheel her off.

SAM

Wait...I’m not finished. Hello? Do you understand me? These people need to hear my story. They asked for, ugh,...hello? Are you even listening?!

Sam is wheeled off stage. Beat.
Scene 5

Mom enters looking for a classroom number. She knocks and enters to find Teacher sitting at a desk marking papers.

MOM
Er, hello, Mr. Anderson?

TEACHER
Yes (standing to greet his guest), hello Mrs. Hudson. Thank you for coming to see me in my classroom today.

MOM
Of course. What seems to be the trouble?

TEACHER
No trouble, really. I just wanted to speak with you about your son’s progress in the class.

MOM
Okay.

TEACHER
I’ve been observing his participation for some time now and I am not sure that my class is the right fit for Peter.

MOM
You teach grade seven don’t you? My son is in grade seven.

TEACHER
Yes I understand that but he just doesn’t quite seem able to participate in class activities like the other students can and I am concerned that we may be setting him up to be bullied by the other children.

MOM
Wait, I’m confused. Is Peter being bullied?

TEACHER
Not yet as far as I know, but because he isn’t able to participate as an academic student, his presence in the classroom is more of a distraction than anything else and I can see how my students could get quite frustrated with him and act out.

MOM
So he isn’t being bullied.

(CONTINUED)
TEACHER
Well, no, but I am just trying to think of your child’s safety.

MOM
I see. So you feel my son is a distraction to the other students.

TEACHER
Well, yes.

MOM
Okay. So, why isn’t Peter participating as an academic student?

TEACHER
I am sure that I am not the first to inform you, Mrs. Hudson, that Peter can’t and won’t be able to read.

MOM
Yes, I know that.

TEACHER
So that fact makes it quite difficult for him to engage in any of his math or language arts curriculum.

MOM
He does very well when he is read to and is asked to repeat things – perhaps other students could work with him on these things so they are growing their confidence and he is also learning. I would like for Peter to understand numbers and know how to communicate. In fact, I have worked very hard to teach him these things.

TEACHER
Mrs. Hudson, he can learn these things with an assistant alone. I don’t see why we should distract the other children from learning at their level.

Beat.

MOM
Mr. Anderson, do you see my children outside there on the playground? Peter has two sisters. You see them? Do they look distracted to you?

TEACHER
(Looking over towards her children and sighing). I have empathy Mrs. Hudson. My cousin is blind. Surely you understand how a classroom and what you do in your home is different.
MOM

I don’t actually.

TEACHER

I’m sorry but I don’t really think that Peter belongs in my classroom. Inclusion isn’t for everyone.

MOM

(In a sudden outburst) With all due respect, Ms. Anderson, it is for everyone. That is the very definition of the term. You work with Peter for 6 hours a day, 5 days week – so what is that – 30 hours a week? I do the other 138. Peter is not my only child and all of those kids (gesturing outside) are getting their needs met by each other and my my husband and I for all of that time. If it’s not inclusion, what the hell do you think I do all day then, huh?

Mom stands to exit suddenly seeing that Teacher isn’t going to budge. Without saying good-bye, she exits calling after her children to get in the car.

Teacher is left to go back to marking her pages.

Actors four and seven enter to take the desk off stage. Teacher remains unfocused. Actor Four takes the papers and looks through them.

FOUR

What does this (gesturing to the paper) matter anyway if we can’t learn to take care of each other?

"COME TOGETHER" IS SUNG OR PLAYED TO TRANSITION THE SCENE

Scene 6

Two characters enter and take their places. One stage left and the other stage right looking out at the audience. They reside in the brain of a little girl named Sadie. After a beat.

INCLUSION

Ugh - why won’t they include our girl?

EXCLUSION

It’s fine. She’s better off over here anyway. Away from the others.

INCLUSION

Or are the others staying away from us.

Pause
EXCLUSION
It’s fine. Really. Why does she need to be included anyway? It’s more comfortable here. Unchallenged. We can just coast on through...

Exclusion sitting down on the stage as if getting ready to take a nap.

INCLUSION
So, we are just going to stand by and let her be excluded? I’m gonna go speak to the Parietal Lobe.

EXCLUSION
Nah...just let things happen. Meeting new people scares us, remember? They are all the same types of people. Let them be together to talk about how they are the same.

INCLUSION
But she has things to share too! Our girl is smart, kind, courageous and can do really cool double jointed things with her hands that will be sure to entertain the crowd.

EXCLUSION
Too much effort to put ourselves out there just to be shut down.

Inclusion peers out to the audience.

INCLUSION
That girl looked over. I think she’s thinking of inviting Sadie over to play.

EXCLUSION
By the time we get there it will be too late.

INCLUSION
Not if we ask for help.

EXCLUSION
That’s so embarrassing. Remember the last time?

INCLUSION
Yes, but that was different.

EXCLUSION
Our girl ended up saying something inappropriate and we ended up having to sit with Ms. Green for an hour going over what’s appropriate and not appropriate.
INCLUSION
I remember. Doesn’t she know that we can’t help it sometimes? It’s like word vomit that erupts. Maybe if we could just hang out with these kids over here, we could learn what’s appropriate.

EXCLUSION
Ugh, you’re just so keen, aren’t ya? Ms. Green has been around for a long time – she knows what she’s doing.

INCLUSION
But she hasn’t taken the time to get to know Sadie.

EXCLUSION
It’s fine. So what if know one gets to know her here at school. She is with all the other kids that are different. She belongs there. We are all better off if we just stay with our kind of people all the time. Just admit that working together all the time is forced and we don’t like to do it. I would rather be exclusive. It’s more productive.

INCLUSION
Productive? Really? Maybe, if Sadie was allowed to take some time to actually understand some of these other groups you exclude us from, we might see that we have more in common than you think. Plus, how boring is it when it’s just the same people all the time with the views!

EXCLUSION
Ever heard that "Great Minds think alike".

INCLUSION
More like great minds don’t think alike because otherwise there would be no need for culture, art, politics or education.

EXCLUSION
Wait, what?

INCLUSION
Yes! Think about it – if we all thought exactly the same and had the exactly same brain and body then there would be no need to reflect on society and culture or no need for education or political leadership because there would be no conflict or misunderstanding. I don’t know about you but that sounds like a really boring life.

EXCLUSION
I don’t mean that we all have to be the same. I am just saying, keep the groups of people who think and act the (MORE)

(CONTINUED)
EXCLUSION (cont’d)
same together. It’s easier and let’s those kids over there who are good at school continue without disrupting.

INCLUSION
Maybe those kids who are being disrupted just need to know Sadie better so they understand why she’s being disruptive. There’s always a reason. She doesn’t just scream without something triggering her.

EXCLUSION
Yeah, well, I don’t think it will make any difference.

INCLUSION
I am doing to tell her to move towards those kids and say hi. What’s she got to lose!

EXCLUSION
What? No! Don’t do it Sadie!

*Both parts of the brain work to get their way.*

INCLUSION
You can do it Sadie! Say hi...

EXCLUSION
Don’t do it! They might laugh at you or worse push you down. come on - stay where you are. It’s safe here.

INCLUSION
She’s going over.

EXCLUSION
No...she can’t...she just can’t.

INCLUSION
Come on!

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION
Ah! I just want to belong!

*They stop fighting to get their way and stop to look at one another. Beat.*

*Inclusion looks out through Sadie’s eyes.*

INCLUSION
They said hello back.

*Lights change as Inclusion and Exclusion look toward each other.*
All of the students bustle onto the stage into a tight clump. As they enter they chant their pronouns in a slow rhythm that quickly speeds up. As they clump actors are pushed out of the clump and then pulled back in or pushing their way back in.

ONE
I
TWO
Me
THREE
You
FOUR
Us
FIVE
Them
SIX
He
SEVEN
She

This repeats until a crescendo when the students push actor one out of the clump they have created.

ONE
Fairness is about everyone’s needs getting met. We all just want the same thing don’t we?

One looks at the clump.

ONE
Sometimes I wish I didn’t need you but I do. We all need each other to be better. To be better at being fair. So let’s just admit it and get on with it already.

The clump looks around at each other for a beat and decide. They one-by-one extend their hands to one. One accepts the offer and joins the clump who exit gently chanting.

ALL
Us. Us. Us. Us. Us. Us...
The End

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