

# Forum Theater and its incidence as an Intervention Strategy in the Juvenile Criminal Justice System of Colombia. A Systematic Review

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## Abstract

This article presents a systematic review of literature aimed at exploring the use of forum theater as a tool for pedagogical intervention in the juvenile penal system. The methodology used is qualitative and descriptive, analyzing 50 articles published between 2018 and 2023. For the search, databases such as Scopus, ProQuest, Ebsco, Dialnet, and Doaj were selected. The investigations were classified into four dimensions: art and therapy, pedagogical strategies, restorative practice, and social reintegration.

The results reveal that the forum theater has a positive impact on the restoration of social ties and rehabilitation. It highlights its potential for expression, emotional healing, construction of alternative identities, and promotion of more just and more empathetic relationships in society. In the field of pedagogical strategies, forum theater and other theatrical techniques were found to be effective for social transformation, the empowerment of participants, and the improvement of democratic coexistence in various educational contexts. In conclusion, the inclusion of the forum theater in the juvenile penal system is shown as a powerful tool for social transformation, the resocialization of young people, and the promotion of a more positive democratic coexistence in different areas.

**Keywords:** Forum theater; Juvenile Penal System; Juvenile delinquency; Restorative practices.

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# El Teatro Foro y su incidencia como estrategia de intervención en el Sistema Penal Juvenil de Colombia.

## Una revisión sistemática

### Resumen

Este artículo presenta una revisión sistemática de literatura cuyo objetivo fue explorar el uso del teatro foro como herramienta de intervención pedagógica en el sistema penal juvenil. La metodología empleada es cualitativa y descriptiva, analizando 50 artículos publicados entre 2018 y 2023. Para la búsqueda, se seleccionaron bases de datos como Scopus, ProQuest, Ebsco, Dialnet y Doaj. Las investigaciones fueron clasificadas en cuatro dimensiones: arte y terapia, estrategias pedagógicas, práctica restaurativa y reintegración social. Los resultados revelan que el teatro foro tiene un impacto positivo en la restauración de vínculos sociales y la rehabilitación. Se destaca su potencial para la expresión, sanación emocional, construcción de identidades alternativas y promoción de relaciones más justas y empáticas en la sociedad. En el ámbito de las estrategias pedagógicas, se encontró que el teatro foro y otras técnicas teatrales resultan eficaces para la transformación social, el empoderamiento de los participantes y la mejora de la convivencia democrática en diversos contextos educativos. En conclusión, la inclusión del teatro foro en el sistema penal juvenil se muestra como una poderosa herramienta para la transformación social, la resocialización de los jóvenes y el fomento de una convivencia democrática más positiva en distintos ámbitos.

**Palabras clave:** Teatro foro; Sistema Penal Juvenil; Delincuencia juvenil; Prácticas restaurativas.

**Summary:** 1. Introduction, 2. Methodology, 3. Findings, 3.1 Art and therapy, 3.2 Pedagogical strategies, 3.3 Restorative practice, 3.4 Social reintegration, 4. Conclusions, 5. Bibliographical references.

## 1. Introduction

In the juvenile justice system context, it is crucial to establish innovative approaches to promote rehabilitation and reintegration of young people in conflict with the law. In this regard, forum theatre, defined by Boal (2014b) as a technique of Theatre of the Oppressed where an actual oppressive situation is represented, halted at a critical point for the audience (“spect-actors”) to intervene by replacing actors and rehearsing solutions to transform that oppressive reality. It has emerged as a pedagogical intervention strategy that shows significant potential to address challenges present in this system (Frisia & Guzzetti, 2021). This systematic review explores and analyzes existing research on using forum theatre as a pedagogical intervention tool in the juvenile justice system. It seeks to critically examine the evidence and conclusions obtained from different studies to gain an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness and benefits of this strategy (Cortés-Torres, 2017).

This article presents the conclusions of the systematic literature review, highlighting the importance of artistic work through forum theatre. Approaches such as those of Speranza (2016) emphasize that the practice of Theatre among adolescents in conflict with the law allows for questioning the possibilities of constructing personal identity, both individually and collectively. Similarly, the theatrical representation of forum theatre problematizes adolescents' visions of themselves and contributes to modifying negative self-perceptions (Larrota *et al.*, 2016).

This research proposal emphasizes recognizing the potential of art, especially forum theatre and collaborative storytelling, as sources for intersubjective recognition of young people. This is done to influence agency processes and envision a more equitable and just society (Cortés-Torres, 2023; Greene, 2005; Rueda-Gualdrón, 2019).

Therefore, linking the possibility of recognizing Theatre as an alternative for forming discourses and practices that stand out in actions of the community fabric is fundamental. This creates in adolescents their reflections on otherness, responsibility for their actions, and forgiveness (Botero-Rivas, 2017; Melgar & Mejía, 2021). From the above, it can be affirmed that forum theatre, as a political expression, can reveal symbolic landscapes and interrogate subjects who are part of the process of staging, reconstructing social approaches from narration and history to generate recognition of themselves and others, visualizing possibilities that lead to development of internalized collective identities.

As a political expression, forum theatre transcends the merely artistic to become a powerful pedagogical and transformative tool. Through its participatory scenic practice, it allows “spect-actors” to appropriate the theatrical space and become protagonists of dramatic action, interrupting the representation at critical moments to propose alternatives and rehearse solutions to situations of oppression or conflict that emerge from their own experiences and community realities (Ribeiro-Amaro, 2022). This interaction enables the creation of discourses and practices



that make power dynamics visible and question them, fostering critical reflection on topics such as alterity, individual and collective responsibility, and the need for processes of reconciliation and forgiveness (Cortés-Torres, 2022). Staging local stories and narratives facilitates the symbolic reconstruction of social approaches from the daily lives of the participating subjects, allowing recognition of themselves and others and promoting the development of internalized collective identities that empower communities as agents of social change.

One of the theoretical notions of Theatre applied to a population deprived of liberty is related to Theatre of the oppressed or revolutionary political Theatre (Boal, 2014a). This type of theatrical method has been adopted in various investigations for work with adolescents as it identifies the figures of the oppressor, directly taking figures of association with youth and delinquency as an established discourse in the social imaginary, which, in terms of Mirza (2016) becomes the language of stigma as a situation that disable adolescents in their re-entry into society.

This type of Theatre seeks to break down social divisions by emphasizing socio-political objectives and practicing itself within a social group; it should be clarified that the political concept refers to the postures of the world that surrounds them, to the individual history of each adolescent, which proposes scenarios in which to place these worldviews (Speranza, 2016).

4 Rojas and Agudelo (2017) highlight, based on research experiences in the Latin American context, the impact of forum theatre as an experience that mobilizes functional learning in the face of the possibility of questioning constitutive subjectivities, addressing aspects from different theatrical techniques in the construction of sociocultural stigmas, and thus problematizing the realities in which young people move.

It is now recognizing the potential of art, especially forum theatre and collaborative storytelling, as sources for intersubjective recognition of young people. This is done to influence agency processes and to envision a more equitable and fair society (Rueda-Gualdrón, 2019). On the other hand, linking the possibility of recognizing Theatre as an alternative for forming discourses and practices that stand out in actions of the community fabric is fundamental. This creates in adolescents their reflections on otherness, responsibility for their actions, and forgiveness (Melgar & Mejía, 2021).

Finally, the relevance of using action-creation research as a methodological approach to arts research applied to contexts of deprivation of liberty is highlighted. It seeks to understand how the Theatre of the Oppressed and research proposals affect it. Therefore, emphasis is placed on this research on how action-creation research can enhance the development of forum theatre in centers for judicially involved adolescents (Cid-Reyes & Arreola-Ochoa, 2021).

## 2. Methodology

This article was developed using a qualitative methodology, specifically a systematic literature review with a descriptive approach. Therefore, the aim was to examine and analyze forum theatre practices applied in juvenile justice systems and identify trends in the theatrical and restorative field of the juvenile justice system between 2018 and 2023. The databases selected for this search include Scopus, ProQuest, Ebsco, Dialnet, and Doaj. Thanks to these databases, it was possible to access various academic and specialized sources in different disciplines, which provided us with an interdisciplinary perspective on the analyzed topic.

Rubio-Liniers' (1999) proposal highlights the relevance of systematic review in the educational field, as it overcomes the limitations of using only descriptors as thematic indicators. Now, Villegas (2003) considers that using Boolean operators plays a crucial role in consolidating a systematic review. When conducting an information search on the Internet, it is expected to encounter a problem of excessive volume of information, much of which is irrelevant. One way to address this problem is to request the search engine to find information that simultaneously contains all the keywords related to the topic of interest. These operators allow for a logical combination of keywords and synonyms, facilitating the search for relevant and precise information. The search process can be optimized by effectively using Boolean operators and more relevant results can be obtained for a systematic review.

Barends *et al.* (2017) emphasize that descriptors and search variables (PVO) were employed, which played a fundamental role in organizing information and establishing key eligibility criteria for search engines and indexed journals' specificity. These descriptors and search variables facilitated a rapid and precise assessment of the knowledge available in scientific literature, using a systematic methodology to search for and critically evaluate primary studies. This way, the PVO search strategy was used to limit certain aspects and obtain more agile results (see table 1).

**Table 1. PVO search variables.**

VARIABLE (P)	AND	VARIABLE (V)
Forum Theatre	X	Sistema penal juvenil
Forum Theatre	X	Práctica restaurativa
Forum Theatre	X	Transitional space
Forum Theatre	X	Restorative practice
Forum Theatre	X	Restorative justice
Forum Theatre	X	Youth justice
Applied Theater	X	Arts-based intervention

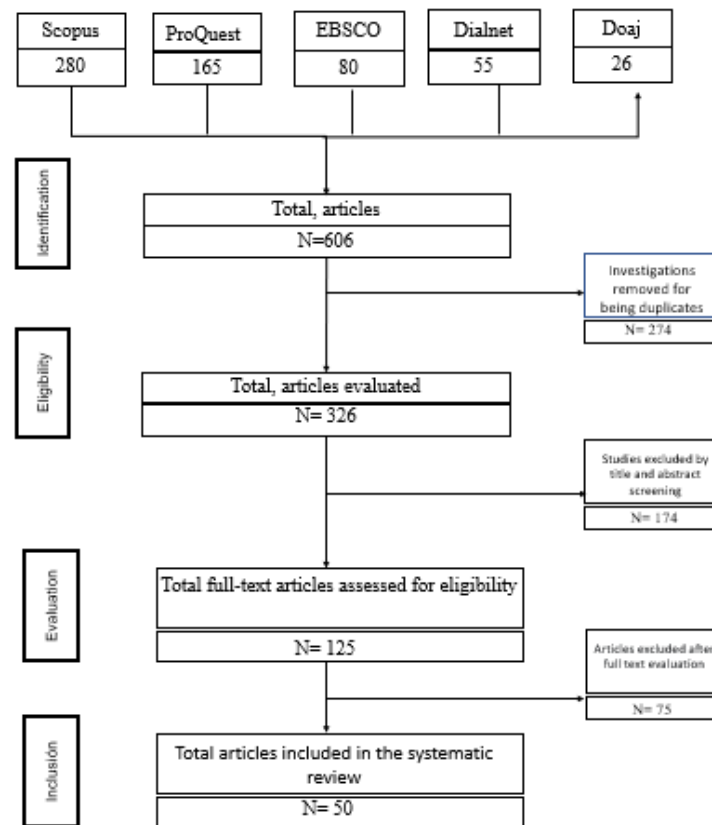
Source: own elaboration.



In the educational field, there has been an increasing demand to evaluate knowledge generation and dissemination processes. In this context, the evaluation of the results of scientific and research activity in this field becomes essential (Solano-López *et al.*, 2009). Regarding descriptors and search variables related to forum theatre and the juvenile justice system, a search was conducted to identify relevant articles. Initially, a total of 709 documents were found in the general search. From this stage, Boolean operators were applied, identifying 606 specific articles: 280 in the Scopus database, 165 in ProQuest, 80 in Ebsco, 55 in Dialnet, and 26 in Doaj.

Subsequently, the PRISMA diagram, a fundamental tool for consolidating a systematic review, was used to verify the composite verification criteria consisting of 27 items and follow a four-phase diagram. The PRISMA diagram provides a clear visualization of the stages that should be followed in a systematic review and is of great importance to ensure the rigor and transparency of the process (Moher *et al.*, 2014). An exhaustive search was conducted using descriptors and search variables related to forum theatre and the juvenile justice system. Seven hundred nine documents were identified in the general search, and Boolean operators were applied to reduce the number of articles to 606 across different databases. Thus, a search for articles in English, Spanish, and Portuguese was carried out (see figure 1).

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram.



Source: Adapted from Page *et al.* (2021).

On the one hand, the CEMBa guide was used to establish the eligibility process for both search engines and indexed journals. A CAT (Critically Appraised Topic) provides a rapid and concise assessment of existing (and unknown) knowledge in scientific literature about an intervention or practical problem using a systematic methodology focused on searching for and critically evaluating primary studies (Barends *et al.*, 2017). Regarding the tabulation process, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) program was used, which was essential in consolidating a systematic review and establishing the main eligibility guidelines (Rajalingham, 2015).

### 3. Findings

The research objectives were considered when carrying out the systematic review of 50 selected publications. The articles were classified into four dimensions: art and therapy, didactic strategies, restorative practices, and social reintegration. These dimensions represent different emerging themes from the analysis of the articles, allowing for a broad approach to the object of study. This review aims to answer the research question, exploring and analyzing existing research on using forum theatre as a pedagogical intervention tool in the juvenile justice system and aiming to critically examine evidence and conclusions obtained from various studies to gain an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness and benefits of this strategy. This systematic review of the four mentioned dimensions presents the main findings below.

#### 3.1 Art and Therapy

Regarding the sensitive and creative possibilities offered by art, the healing process is a category that will be studied in this research, with the aim of enabling the reconstruction of social fabric through the artistic work of Theatre. Various studies have shown that Theatre, as a therapeutic tool, significantly impacts the restoration of social bonds and rehabilitation of individuals in situations of deprivation of liberty. Authors such as Sarkis and Sanhueza (2020) and Melgar and Mejía (2021) have explored the benefits of theatrical performance in penitentiary and post-conflict contexts, demonstrating its effectiveness in terms of reflection by participants.

Following this line, one of the most relevant proposals within this search is that of Sarkis and Sanhueza (2020), who conducted an ethnographic study where they identified that artistic-theatrical workshops positively impacted inmates. These workshops allowed for breaking prison codes and generating changes in "criminogenic needs", such as creating alternative identities and belonging to a positive group. On the other hand, Melgar and Mejía (2021) pointed out how theatrical performance has contributed to dignifying victims' processes in the post-conflict period. Through performances, memories of barbarity have been rescued, embracing mental health through an "intergenerational bridge" and a "community identity". These processes have been cognitively and affectively activated, providing meaning to pain and resignifying suffering.

In this sense, research highlights the transformative power of art and, in particular, Theatre as a therapeutic tool in diverse contexts, including prisons and post-conflict situations. Authors such as Liger (2019) and Lima (2018) have emphasized the importance of creating a new aesthetic in Theatre that transcends dogmas and single thought. It is vital to enable participants' bodies to explore and generate ideas beyond restrictions imposed by the oppressive system without imposing an absolute truth. Similarly, it is emphasized that the experience of bodies must be lived from within, gathering inner intelligence and reaching somatic awareness.

Above, Obradors (2021) emphasizes that it is essential to emphasize the fusion and interdisciplinary collaboration between communication, art, and culture as a means to stimulate creativity and drive social innovation. Although the Technological Revolution has facilitated hybridization, artistic expressions before the digital era should be addressed for a comprehensive and enriching approach. Likewise, Viñals (2019) and Orozco *et al.* (2019) highlight how social crises have generated committed Theatre that reformulates social relationships and reflects themes relevant to society. It is therefore emphasized that working with artistic approaches, such as Theatre, can contribute to the construction of fairer spaces and to establishing relationships of trust and empathy with others, which drives processes of social and cultural transformation.

In this same context, Romero-Rojas (2020) presents the "Psycho-theatre Technique", which fuses psychology with theatrical approaches to enrich personal and group growth under a constructivist and positive vision. These practices allow for addressing personality patterns, facilitating the identification of thoughts, promoting unlearning, liberating creativity, and fostering personal autonomy. It is also worth highlighting the contribution of this research as they consider the importance of the place of memory and the violent past as an opportunity for transformation, called transition spaces, where subjects can experience moments of trust and empowerment through those aspects that violence affected in themselves and others. Similarly, it is affirmed that working with forum theatre as a mobilizer of the transition space is a term coined by the authors to mention the transformation of the painful experience.

In conclusion, research on art and therapy through Theatre has demonstrated its effectiveness in restoring social bonds and rehabilitating individuals in diverse contexts (Woodland, 2019). Theatre is presented as a powerful tool for expression, emotional healing, and the construction of alternative identities, thus fostering social reintegration and personal empowerment of participants. On the other hand, research highlights that in Latin America and Europe, various experiences have been evidenced that demonstrate how artistic approaches facilitate the exploration of more equitable environments where trust and relationships with others are fostered. Various approaches confirm that art, specifically Theatre, has a positive impact on healing, reconstruction of the social fabric, reflection, rehabilitation, and empowerment in different contexts. Artistic and theatrical practices have become a way to express, transform, and promote fairer and more empathetic relationships in society.



### 3.2 Pedagogical Strategies

The aforementioned research employs Theatre as a tool for connecting with therapy and restoring social bonds. All of the examined articles regarding this dimension emphasize three main aspects.

Firstly, the use of Forum Theatre as a methodology in initial teacher training. García-Gómez and De Vicente-Hernando (2020) highlight the importance of integrating theory, pedagogical practice, and teaching in emancipatory education. Forum Theatre is used to investigate and question relationships of domination in education, becoming a form of praxis for conflict resolution.

Secondly, the impacts of activist pedagogies on democratic and cooperative coexistence in vulnerable contexts are investigated. Holguín-Álvarez *et al.* (2020) use techniques from Theatre of the Oppressed and theatrical finger painting as didactic strategies to improve the conditions of school groups in vulnerable situations. They highlight the positive results of these pedagogies in fostering democratic coexistence and cooperative learning. Streck and Schenatto da Rosa (2019) analyze the relevance of Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed in popular education and Youth and Adult Education. They emphasize the importance of critical and dialogic pedagogy in transforming reality through educational processes. Their research focuses on the need for emancipatory and reflective education that fosters active student participation in learning and social transformation.

Furthermore, Dewitt and King's (2021) proposal analyze the relationship between Augusto Boal's theatrical practices and theories and the Philosophy for Children Movement (P4wC). They explore how Theatre of the Oppressed, specifically forum theatre, can empower children to participate in Communities of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) and address challenging situations. They highlight connections between Theatre and education for social empowerment.

Thirdly, they emphasize the importance of reflection-action in pedagogy and emancipatory philosophy; in this regard, Linds and Vettrano (2020) use Theatre as an artistic and educational tool to promote citizen participation and the formation of critical and participatory citizenship. Their research is based on Latin American pedagogy and seeks to foster critical and problem-posing education through art, games, and literature.

The research analyzed highlights the use of Theatre as a valuable tool for establishing links with therapy and restoring social bonds in various educational contexts. The importance of Forum Theatre as a methodological tool in initial teacher training is emphasized; this approach integrates theory and practice, research and teaching, and is presented as a form of emancipatory education that addresses relationships of domination in education, fostering conflict resolution.

Some proposals were also analyzed, such as that of Schirmer and Pichinin (2018), who examine methodologies used in the Law and Theatre discipline, specifically at the Faculty of Law of Santa María. Their approach focuses on developing students' competencies through comprehensive teaching-learning practice. They highlight the importance of transcending the classroom walls and using Theatre as an interdisciplinary tool for mediation and restoration. In this regard, a study by Sevrain-Goideau *et al.* (2020) explores Applied Theatre as a tool to stimulate discussion and reflection on challenging topics in health education. Their research focuses on using Applied Theatre with nursing, midwifery, and medical students and suggests that it can be a powerful tool for developing empathy. It is worth noting that the studies above frame Applied Theatre as a tool to stimulate discussion and reflection on challenging topics in health education.

On the other hand, the impacts of activist pedagogies on democratic coexistence and cooperative learning in vulnerable environments are highlighted, linking techniques such as the Theatre of the Oppressed and theatrical finger painting, which are used to improve conditions of school groups in vulnerable situations and promote the development of democratic coexistence and collaboration in learning. From the above, research in this category of analysis highlights the versatility and potential of Theatre as an educational and therapeutic tool in various contexts. The reviewed studies emphasize the importance of Forum Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed, and other theatrical techniques as effective strategies for social transformation, participant empowerment, and improvement of democratic coexistence.

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In conclusion, research highlights the use of Theatre to address challenging issues, promote critical reflection, foster citizen participation, develop skills and competencies, and improve democratic participation and cooperation. These are based on emancipatory pedagogical approaches, such as critical pedagogy and pedagogy of the oppressed, and explore the application of Theatre in diverse educational contexts.

### 3.3 Restorative Practice

The main objective of this analysis was to examine the principal investigative trends related to the category of restorative practice, specifically those that have utilized theater as a source to establish a link between judicial practice and educational processes. The following are the main results obtained from various studies:

In the Latin American context, the Mexican government has implemented actions to safeguard the human rights of adolescent youth, especially those in conflict with the law. Specialized qualification of all individuals involved in adolescent justice is crucial to ensure compliance with international law (Gómez-Barrera, 2020). Furthermore, according to Liger (2019), in Ecuadorian prisons, there is an evident lack of focus on the emotive aspects of art, and its utility is restricted to activities planned under the "zero idleness" axis. There is a need to



promote more transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary artistic programs to explore their restorative potential.

According to Cárdenas-Benítez and Mendoza-Sánchez (2023), based on the aforementioned, the importance of fostering emancipatory and autonomous thinking in education in Latin America and the Caribbean is emphasized to address the challenges present in the region. In this scenario, community-based artistic programs combined with restorative justice principles can effectively solve social problems. Equally relevant is the contribution of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed to proposals related to forum theater and deprivation of liberty, as it highlights the importance of liberating education that promotes reflection, action, and problematization of difficulties (De Lima-Barcelos, 2019).

Community artistic practices, such as forum theater, have enormous potential to become liberating or alienating educational experiences in contexts of deprivation of liberty. Following the principles of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, such proposals can promote emancipatory education that fosters critical reflection, problematization of oppressive realities, and transformative action among participants. However, there is also a risk that these practices may be instrumentalized and end up reinforcing alienating logic and reproducing the same dynamics of oppression they intend to question. As Bravo (2019) affirms in the case of the Villahermosa prison in Cali, Colombia, educational practices can have a liberating effect or perpetuate alienation, depending on their approach and application. It is, therefore, fundamental that forum theater proposals in these contexts are based on a genuinely dialogic, horizontal, and problematizing praxis that stems from the realities, needs, and interests of the communities involved. Only then can these artistic-pedagogical experiences contribute to constructing autonomous and emancipatory thinking in participants, becoming practical tools to address the social problems in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Similarly, research identified in other parts of the world has recognized the potential of forum theater implemented in educational, care, and custodial contexts, where a consequent improvement in participants' self-awareness and reflective capacity has been demonstrated. Authors such as Froggett *et al.* (2019), Frisia and Guzzetti (2021), and Hazou *et al.* (2021) consider it as a "third space" of transition that allows for creative representation and exploration of reality, which promotes the autonomy of young people in private and public spheres that is limited and patriarchal in society. Classification of themes as "transversal" rather than central contributes to minimizing gender issues.

It is therefore worth highlighting in the international arena the Gloucestershire Youth Forums, based on arts, which have been implemented to improve relationships between adolescents and police. Combined with restorative justice principles, these interventions can challenge entrenched viewpoints and improve future encounters (Payne *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, the applicability of Forum Theater, which emphasizes generating themes, can create awareness

among students about their reality of oppression. This teaching practice developed in research by Gomes-Lima and Dos Santos (2023) can contribute to developing new ways of solving problems and fostering a new worldview.

Conrad (2020) points out that applied theater, known as forum theater in other parts of the world, has proven to be an effective tool for the survival and revival of Indigenous youth in Canada. Research based on applied theatrical approaches can empower young people and offer support to face their challenges. In this vein, applied theater is a technique that uses the body as a canvas in performative activity. This has been used in Quebec and Scotland to create communities of practice through reflection, within which storytelling is essential to facilitate intersubjective dialogue between participants and the method of representing the world (Linds & Vettrano, 2018).

It can be affirmed, therefore, that in the Latin American context, there is a notable need to promote more transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary artistic programs in prison environments to explore the restorative potential of art. Emphasis is placed on the relevance of community-based artistic programs combined with restorative justice principles as practical solutions to social problems in Latin America and the Caribbean. The importance of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed for proposals related to forum theater and deprivation of liberty is thus highlighted, promoting liberating education that fosters reflection and problematization of difficulties. Regarding the prison environment, the importance of educational practices in promoting transformation and addressing life perspectives of adolescents deprived of liberty is emphasized rather than reinforcing a penitentiary system that seeks moral conversion.

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In conclusion, theater as a source for establishing a link with restorative practice has demonstrated its effectiveness in various contexts. These studies highlight the importance of fostering transdisciplinary approaches, restorative justice, and the promotion of reflection and authorship among participants. Liberating and emancipatory education is essential to facing social challenges and transforming oppressive realities in different international scenarios. Arts-based and theater programs offer a valuable space for reflection and empowerment of individuals, both in educational settings and contexts of deprivation of liberty. However, it is necessary to continue exploring and promoting these practices to achieve a more significant impact on society.

### 3.4 Social Reintegration

Social reintegration of young people deprived of liberty is a highly relevant issue today, and various studies have explored the use of theater as a source to establish a link with restorative practice. In this analysis, we will examine diverse investigations that address the problems of the juvenile penal system, focusing on the need to rethink criminal public policies and educational practices related to the artistic field to achieve effective resocialization of young people.



Authors Del Valle-Navarro (2022) and Rangel-Torrijo (2019) address problems of the penitentiary system and highlight the need to rethink criminal public policies to focus on effective resocialization. They consider that theater and other artistic strategies can play a significant role in the social readaptation of inmates and the protection of their human rights. These investigations center their reflection on the contribution of art to the processes of release from centers belonging to the juvenile penal system.

The study by Wu *et al.* (2023) focuses on volunteering in prisons, including theater as one form of participation. It highlights that prison volunteering can improve the psychological health of inmates and provide benefits for both prison systems and volunteers themselves. This volunteering class centers its attention on extramural practices and the benefits these can have in real contexts of release.

Authors Chiponi and Manchado (2018) delve into the role of communication in prison and its impact on detainees, primarily through theater and other communicational practices, within which they identify subjective, institutional, and political effects that can influence the social reintegration of young people deprived of liberty. On the other hand, García-Giráldez (2020) incorporates theories such as the theater of the oppressed, Foucault's idea of disciplinary exercise, and Arendt's human action to explore how community theater within prisons can be a practice of liberation and social criticism.

Based on the analysis of various investigations, the importance of theater as a tool to establish a link with restorative practice in the social reintegration of young people deprived of liberty is evidenced (Okoye, 2020). The use of artistic and communicational strategies within penitentiary centers can contribute to effective resocialization, thus guaranteeing the rights of inmates and improving the experience of volunteers. Likewise, the relevance of rethinking criminal public policies to promote a positive transformation in the penitentiary system and facilitate the successful reintegration of these young people into society is highlighted. The analysis of these investigations demonstrates the potential of theater and other artistic strategies as a powerful tool in the social reintegration of young people deprived of liberty. It is, therefore, essential to rethink juvenile criminal public policies to promote a more restorative perspective focused on effective resocialization, which will allow for a more practical approach to the problems of the juvenile penal system.

#### 4. Conclusions

Research highlights the importance of including artistic tools such as forum theater in centers of deprivation of liberty. Reviewing research backgrounds shows that this methodology allows for a more comprehensive education of adolescents, addressing ethical, social, historical, emotional, and other aspects that help to understand the importance of recognizing theater as a source for comprehending subjective aspects and intercultural content. Furthermore, this



methodology seeks to problematize social reality experienced by adolescents and enhances their critical and reflective thinking regarding causal actions, seeking elements of transformation in the reflection processes.

Systematic research on the use of forum theater as a pedagogical intervention tool in the juvenile penal system has demonstrated that theater, as a therapeutic and artistic tool, significantly impacts the restoration of social bonds and rehabilitation of individuals in situations of deprivation of liberty. Various studies highlight the benefits of forum theater in penitentiary and post-conflict contexts, showing how this practice has contributed to social reparation, dignification of victims, and transformation of painful experiences.

Forum theater has been used to establish a link with restorative practice in different contexts, including the penitentiary system. These investigations highlight the importance of fostering transdisciplinary approaches, restorative justice, and promoting reflection and authorship among participants. Arts-based and theater programs offer a valuable space for reflection and empowerment of individuals, both in educational settings and contexts of deprivation of liberty.

The theater has been recognized as a fundamental resource in the social reintegration of young people deprived of liberty. Various investigations indicate that theater and other artistic and communicational practices can play a significant role in the social readaptation of inmates, protecting their human rights and improving the experience of volunteers. Additionally, the importance of rethinking criminal public policies to promote a positive transformation in the penitentiary system and facilitate the successful reintegration of these young people into society is emphasized.

It is inevitable, therefore, to generate a convergence between forum theater and the methodological approach of action-creation research. The former involves the community and its problems and analyzing and contributing actions to develop a more democratic society. Likewise, action-creation research involves engagement with communities, validating knowledge produced from subjects, and fostering individual and collective reflection on specific social issues.

However, it is recognized that more than a methodological strategy is needed to achieve effective results in adolescents' participation. For the inclusion of all those involved in theatrical production to be successful, artistic facilitators must assume a high level of responsibility. They are the ones who must provoke adolescents to generate critical awareness and enable relationships based on democracy and social justice. It is essential that professionals working with adolescents demonstrate a solid commitment and need to be trained to address conflicts within the framework of democratic education and the transformation of power dynamics.

In conclusion, research analysis reveals various approaches and perspectives surrounding the category of art and therapy, especially those that employ theater as a tool to establish a link with social reintegration in penitentiary contexts. From the review of studies and reflections by various authors, some notable conclusions can be drawn, such as the relevance of theater in social reintegration, criticism of penitentiary policies, gender perspective in penitentiary context, theater as a practice of liberation, and the importance of education in prisons as a fundamental human right. These approaches demonstrate how art and therapy can be crucial in transforming and resocializing individuals in conflict with the law, opening possibilities for a creative and liberating life inside and outside the penitentiary context.

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## Author Contribution statement

José Eduardo Cortés-Torres: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, resource acquisition, research, methodology, writing (original draft), writing (review of the draft and revision/correction).

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## Conflicts of interest

The author unequivocally states that there is no conflict of interest in the writing or publishing of this article, reinforcing the integrity and impartiality of the research.

## Ethical statement

The author does not have any type of ethical implication to be stated in writing and publishing this article.

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