
BRIDGING THE STAGE AND
THE CLASSROOM:
**THE EDUCATIONAL IMPACT
OF THE NATIONAL THEATRE
FESTIVAL**
(2022-2024)

DARIA ANCUȚA



I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest, Romania
dariancuta@yahoo.com

Abstract: The *National Theatre Festival (FNT)* in Bucharest has recently expanded its curatorial practices by integrating an educational module, reinforcing the festival's role as a platform for artistic learning and audience development. This article examines the newly developed *FNT Educational Module*, emphasizing the educational opportunities it has created for students, young audiences, and emerging theatre professionals. By analysing these last three festival editions – *Fragile Borders. Fluid Histories* (2022), *Laboratories of Sensitivity* (2023), and *Dramaturgies of the Possible* (2024) – this paper explores how *FNT* functions as a pedagogical space, fostering interdisciplinary exchanges and facilitating access to contemporary theatrical practices. The essay highlights the deep connections between theatre festivals and education, showing how such initiatives enhance cultural participation, encourage artistic exploration, and contribute to the sustainability of the performing arts. The *FNT Educational Module* demonstrates how theatre can be integrated into school curricula, inspire critical engagement, and cultivate new generations of theatre-goers and professionals. By embedding educational initiatives within festival frameworks, *FNT* plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between artistic production and learning, ensuring that theatre remains both accessible and relevant to young audiences.

Keywords: I.L. Caragiale National Theatre Festival (FNT), Educational Module, Curatorial Practices, Audience Development, Theatre in Education, Young Audiences.

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Introduction

In recent years, the relationship between theatre and education has gained increasing importance, with Romanian cultural institutions recognizing the need to cultivate younger audiences and integrate artistic experiences into educational frameworks. The *National Theatre Festival (FNT)* in Bucharest has actively responded to this need by establishing the *FNT Educational Module*, which, for the first time in the festival's history, introduced a structured approach to engaging schools, universities, and young spectators. This initiative reflects a broader commitment to audience development, arts education, and the sustainability of theatre as a cultural and pedagogical tool.

The implementation of the *FNT Educational Module* in the festival's 2022, 2023, and 2024 editions underscores a profound recognition of theatre's role in education. As one of the festival's curators, Mihaela Michailov, notes:

I first wanted to showcase a diversity of artistic and aesthetic discourses, as well as a certain commitment from creators – a commitment to specific directions, artistic thinking, and ultimately a direct and urgent

relationship with present reality. A festival is not merely a collection of selected performances; rather, it thrives through a multitude of intersecting discourses and proposals. That is why I insisted on having multiple modules, including an educational module, and actually going into schools and high schools across Bucharest with performances. A festival is also an opportunity to gain new audiences and to strengthen the connection between theatre, schools, and universities. (Michailov, 2023)

This perspective highlights the festival's new expanded mission, which goes beyond merely showcasing performances to actively shaping cultural consumption patterns, particularly among young people. By embedding theatre within educational environments and vice versa, *FNT* creates meaningful interactions that foster critical thinking, artistic appreciation, and community engagement.

This paper aims to examine the *FNT Educational Module* (2022-2024), focusing on its impact and educational opportunities. Specifically, the objectives are to analyse how the *FNT Educational Module* contributes to audience development and the formation of theatre-literate spectators; to explore the role of schools and universities as key partners in integrating theatre into educational settings; to assess the effectiveness of different engagement models (bringing performances into schools vs. bringing students to theatres); lastly, to propose potential long-term strategies for sustaining and expanding theatre-education initiatives.

The hypothesis guiding this study is that the *FNT Educational Module* serves as an effective bridge between artistic practice and education, fostering long-term audience engagement, enhancing arts education, and reinforcing the role of theatre in contemporary learning environments. In order to explore these themes, this study employs a qualitative analysis, a comparative approach, and a review of secondary sources to examine the evolution of the *FNT Educational Module* from 2022 to 2024. Each method is designed to assess the effectiveness and impact of theatre in education and to explore how different engagement formats influence young audiences. The qualitative analysis will focus on the thematical relevance of the performances included in the *FNT Educational Module* and their relationship with their target audience – young people. The comparative approach will evaluate the different formats used to engage students across the three festival editions. Specifically, it will analyse the transition from performances being staged in schools (2022-2023) to the 2024 format, in which students were invited into theatre spaces. This assessment will highlight the advantages and limitations of each format, taking into account factors such as accessibility, student engagement, logistical feasibility, and the long-term impact on audience development.

By utilizing these research methods, the study will provide a comprehensive assessment of the *FNT Educational Module*. The core hypothesis of this research will be tested through an analysis of festival programming, curatorial arguments, and direct engagement models adopted across the three years. By addressing these research questions, this paper will contribute to a broader discourse on the intersection of theatre, education, and audience development, positioning the *FNT Educational Module* as a case study for similar initiatives in other cultural contexts.

CASE STUDY: FNT EDUCATIONAL MODULE 2022

The 2022 edition of the *National Theatre Festival*, curated by Mihaela Michailov, Călin Ciobotari and Oana Cristea Grigorescu, marked a pioneering moment in the festival's history, as it formally integrated an educational component into its programming for the first time. The curatorial statement reflects this transformative approach:

For the first time, the National Theatre Festival gives special attention to the presence of performing arts in schools and high schools, as well as the development of workshop formats and meetings dedicated to the university environment and young graduates of art schools. We consider that a national festival is also an extended platform for artistic education, a space for forming young audiences, for encounters with transformative potential, and a favorable context for strengthening the relationship between contemporary art and educational spaces. (FNT, 2022)

This vision materialized through four key programs: (1) Theatre Performances in Schools, (2) Theatre Schools in FNT, (3) Theatre Criticism Workshops, and (4) an Interdisciplinary Creative Lab. The integration of these elements signified a new paradigm in how festivals can serve as educational catalysts, fostering artistic literacy among young audiences and establishing a long-term relationship between theatre and education.

1. Theatre Performances in Schools – “Art Opens the School”

A significant aspect of the 2022 *FNT Educational Module* was the initiative to bring theatre directly into schools and high schools across Bucharest. This approach ensured that students could engage with live performances in their learning environment, making theatre more accessible and directly relevant to their everyday experiences. The festival collaborated with several theatre companies and independent associations, including MiniREACTOR Cluj-Napoca, Teatrul

GONG Sibiu, Teatrul Ion Creangă București, Teatrul de Animație Tândărică București, Teatrul de Păpuși Prichindel Alba Iulia, Asociația O2G, Asociația ARPAS, and Asociația Vis-a-Vis.

The selection of performances addressed a wide range of themes highly relevant to young audiences, including the relationship between self, school, and family, as well as identity formation, fitting in, and the impact of bullying. By engaging with these stories in a familiar educational environment, students formed a more immediate and personal connection to the narratives presented on stage.

Following each performance, post-show discussions were organized, allowing students and teachers to engage directly with the creative teams. As a moderator in some of these sessions, it was evident that this format encouraged meaningful exchanges. Students posed insightful questions about the artistic process, while the creative teams had the opportunity to receive firsthand reactions from their target audience. This reciprocal dialogue reinforced the importance of youth voices in the artistic process, providing valuable feedback for the artists and deepening the students' engagement with the performances.

The module also included a series of workshops conducted by artists from the field of performing arts, including Ana Crăciun-Lambriu, Cosmin Manolescu, George Cocos, and Elise Wilk, who worked with groups of children and teenagers throughout the festival.

2. Theatre Schools in FNT – A Platform for Emerging Artists

Beyond its focus on middle and high school students, the 2022 *FNT Educational Module* also created opportunities for university students, recognizing the challenges faced by theatre schools in the aftermath of the pandemic. The festival provided a platform for emerging artists to showcase their productions in a professional setting, bridging the gap between academic training and professional theatre practice.

A selection of eleven student productions from theatre universities across Romania was included in the festival, representing institutions from Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Constanța, Galați, Iași, Pitești, Târgu-Mureș, Sibiu, and Timișoara. By integrating these university productions into the festival program, *FNT* enabled students to present their work to both the general public and theatre professionals, offering them visibility and professional networking opportunities. This initiative supported the transition from academic theatre to professional practice, reinforcing the festival's commitment to fostering new generations of theatre practitioners.

3. Theatre Criticism Workshops – “Who Still Writes About Theatre?”

Another crucial component of the 2022 *FNT Educational Module* was its focus on theatre criticism, which sought to cultivate a new generation of theatre scholars and reviewers. Over the course of five days, students from Theatre Studies departments of Romanian theatre universities participated in specialized workshops and discussions with prominent theatre critics, including Marina Constantinescu, Marian Popescu, Miruna Runcan, Maria Zărnescu, Claudiu Groza, Cristina Rusiecki, and Oltița Cîntec.

These online sessions explored various approaches to theatre criticism, ranging from traditional review writing to contemporary, multimedia-based critique formats. One of the festival’s curators, Călin Ciobotari, emphasized the importance of this initiative, stating:

This project (the critics’ workshops plus university productions) is carried out through a partnership between FNT and Romanian Theatre Schools, initiated by the curators of this edition out of the conviction that a National Theatre Festival must also have a strong educational component. Such a festival must, therefore, cultivate what is currently in formation, encourage, and develop what ultimately represents part of the future of Romanian theatre. (FNT, 2022b)

Through this program, the festival not only nurtured emerging theatre critics but also reinforced the role of theatre discourse in shaping cultural conversations and artistic appreciation.



FNT 2022

IMAGINARIA – Improvisational Theater with Puppets and Objects (Workshop)

Coordinator: Ana Crăciun-Lambriu ©Photo: Florin Biolan

Photo Source: <https://fnt.ro/2022/imaginaria-teatru-de-improvizatie-cu-papusi-si-obiecte-atelier-11-noiembrie-foto-florin-biolan/>



FNT 2023

Games for Everyone – A Workshop of Games and Theatrical Exercises for Children and Young People with Hearing Impairments

Led by: Radu Apostol; Location: „Sfânta Maria” Special Vocational School for Students with Hearing Impairments

©Photo: Mihaela Marin

Photo source: <https://fnt.ro/2023/jocuri-pentru-toti-atelier-de-teatru-25-octombrie-foto-mihaela-marin/>

4. “Without Borders” – An Interdisciplinary Creative Lab

Alongside performances and theatre criticism, the 2022 *FNT Educational Module* introduced an interdisciplinary creative lab aimed at recent graduates of theatre and arts programs. The *Without Borders* laboratory, coordinated by director Radu Apostol and choreographer Florin Fieroiu, focused on collaborative methodologies and cross-disciplinary artistic practices.

Participants formed mixed creative teams, working across disciplines to develop projects that merged theatre, movement, visual arts, and performance-based research. This initiative encouraged artistic experimentation, allowing young artists to explore new modes of storytelling and interdisciplinary collaboration.

By integrating this lab into the festival, *FNT* reinforced its role as a space for professional development, preparing emerging artists for the evolving landscape of contemporary theatre and fostering a dynamic, research-driven approach to performance-making.

Conclusions on the 2022 Edition

The first year of the *FNT Educational Module* demonstrated the potential of a theatre festival to serve as an active educational platform. By bringing performances into schools and high schools, the festival ensured that students could experience theatre in an accessible, familiar environment. Simultaneously, the inclusion of university productions and theatre criticism workshops strengthened the connection between emerging artists and the professional theatre community. Successful outcomes of this edition included: expanded access to theatre for younger audiences through school-based performances; direct engagement between students, teachers, and artists through post-show discussions; increased visibility for university theatre productions within a major festival framework; support for emerging theatre critics and interdisciplinary artistic practices, fostering new voices in theatre scholarship and performance-making.

This holistic approach to education and audience development laid the foundation for further expansion and refinement in subsequent years. By integrating theatre into educational spaces and fostering young voices in performance and criticism, the *FNT Educational Module* set a precedent for how festivals can actively shape the next generation of theatre-goers and practitioners.

CASE STUDY: FNT EDUCATIONAL MODULE 2023

The 2023 edition of the *National Theatre Festival*, curated by Mihaela Michailov, Călin Ciobotari and Oana Cristea Grigorescu, continued the *FNT Educational Module*, but in a more restricted format compared to its inaugural year. While the 2022 edition included multiple engagement components, such as theatre workshops, university productions, and theatre criticism labs, the 2023 edition streamlined its focus to three main elements: (1) Theatre performances in schools, (2) Theatre workshops for students with disabilities, and (3) Capsule-Laboratory in Theatre Faculties. This reduction in scope can be attributed to several factors, including budget constraints, logistical challenges, and shifts in curatorial priorities. However, despite these limitations, the core mission of integrating theatre into educational spaces remained intact.

The curatorial statement for *FNT Educational Module 2023* outlined the key directions of the module:

Initiated in 2022, the FNT Educational Module continues this year. It will be structured around two components: theatre workshops dedicated to Bucharest schools and high schools attended by children and teenagers with different types of disabilities (Regina Elisabeta Special

Technological High School – an educational institution for students with visual impairments; Sfânta Maria Special Vocational School for Students with Hearing Impairments) and theatre performances. The performances will be staged in schools and high schools in Bucharest and will be addressed to children and teenagers aged between 6- and 18-year-olds. (FNT, 2023)

This focused approach suggested a shift in priorities, moving from a broad-spectrum educational model (2022) to a targeted intervention model (2023). The inclusion of students with disabilities in dedicated workshops highlighted an effort toward accessibility and inclusion, ensuring that theatre remained a tool for social engagement.

1. Theatre Performances in Schools – Expanding Accessibility

In line with the previous year's model, the 2023 edition maintained the strategy of bringing performances directly into schools, ensuring that students could experience live theatre in a familiar environment. This method continued to eliminate barriers related to transportation, scheduling, and financial accessibility, making it easier for students to engage with theatre as an educational tool.

The selection of performances was carefully curated to reflect diverse themes that resonated with students across different age groups, ranging from six to eighteen years old. Among the productions included in the festival were shows produced by Platforma culturală Frilensăr & Centrul educațional de arte performative CEVA Târgu Neamț, Teatrul Prichindel Alba Iulia, Teatrul Arte dell'Anima București, Teatrul Ion Creangă București, Teatrul Țândărică București, Teatrul Excelsior București, Reactor de creație și experiment Cluj, Centrul Cultural Clujean, Pogon (Zagreb), L'arboreto – Teatro Dimora (Mondaino), Teatrul pentru copii și tineret „Lucefărul” Iași, Asociația OV05 București.

Thematically, the 2023 selection built upon the foundation established in 2022, continuing to explore identity formation, peer relationships, and cultural narratives. Some productions addressed personal identity and self-definition during adolescence, as seen in *Măine nu ne mai sperie (așa tare)*, *N-am văzut nimic*, *Profil: +/- om mare*, and *Vulnerabil*. Others focused on social adaptation and interpersonal dynamics, as explored in *Stai jos sau cazi*. Mythological and historical narratives were also present, particularly in *Poveștile României – Constantin Brâncuși*, while *Muzicanții din Bremen* and *O lume de la zero* engaged younger audiences through stories centered on creativity and imagination.

As in the 2022 edition, post-show Q&A sessions played a crucial role in enhancing audience engagement. These discussions provided students with a structured space to reflect on performances, while also allowing them to interact directly with the creative teams. The value of these sessions became particularly evident in the way they encouraged students to ask insightful questions about artistic choices, themes, and production methods, and by also giving educators tools to integrate theatre into their teaching methodologies, fostering interdisciplinary learning beyond the performance itself.

2. Workshops for Students with Disabilities – A Step Toward Inclusive Theatre

One of the most notable developments in the 2023 edition was the introduction of theatre workshops for students with disabilities. This initiative focused on two special education institutions in Bucharest: Regina Elisabeta Special Technological High School (*for students with visual impairments*) and Sfânta Maria Special Vocational School (*for students with hearing impairments*). These workshops aimed to make theatre more inclusive by adapting creative exercises to the needs of students with sensory impairments, offering them alternative forms of artistic expression through movement, voice, and tactile-based improvisation. Ultimately, these workshops aimed to encourage collaborative storytelling in order to promote social integration and self-confidence.

3. Capsule-Laboratory in Theatre Faculties – A Research-Oriented Approach

While student theatre productions were absent from the official program in 2023, the festival introduced a Capsule-Laboratory initiative within Romanian theatre faculties:

By definition, theatre faculties are spaces for experimentation, research, and testing of rarely explored working methods. They are environments that cultivate a sensitivity specific to artistic inquiry. During the festival, theatre faculties across Romania will host encounters between established artists, graduates, and current students. Over two days, an authority in the performing arts and a graduate from that specific faculty will conduct an applied workshop with a unique methodology, dedicated to students. These capsule-laboratories thus become mini-research and exploration centers, offering students the opportunity to engage with new models of performative pedagogy. (FNT, 2023)

This initiative redefined the role of theatre faculties within the festival by prioritizing research-oriented engagement over public showcases. It allowed intergenerational collaboration, as students worked with both established professionals and recent graduates and, at the same time, exposure to alternative teaching methodologies, introducing students to experimental pedagogical models. While these workshops were **less** publicly visible than student productions in 2022, they deepened engagement with artistic processes, reinforcing *FNT*'s commitment to higher education in theatre.

Conclusions on the 2023 Edition

Despite its redefined format, the *FNT Educational Module 2023* maintained its core mission of bringing theatre to young audiences in schools. While it did not match the complexity of the 2022 edition, its focus on accessibility, inclusion, and direct artist-audience engagement ensured that theatre remained a key educational tool. The shift in structure raises important questions about the future direction of the module. Should the *FNT Educational Module* return to a broader educational framework? How can accessibility initiatives be expanded? Could interdisciplinary collaborations be reintroduced in its format? These reflections will be critical in evaluating the 2024 edition and beyond.



FNT 2023

Performance: "Profile: +/- Grown-up (The Most Beautiful Part of Your Life, Sort of)"

Producer: EXCELSIOR Theater, Bucharest. ©Photo: Florin Biolan

Photo source: <https://fnt.ro/2023/profil-om-mare-cea-mai-frumoasa-parte-a-vietii-tale-gen-26-octombrie-foto-florin-biolan/>



FNT 2023

Laboratory Capsules in Theater Faculties in Romania at FNT -
Mariana Mișuț at the I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest
©Photo: Andrei Gîndac Photo source: <https://fnt.ro/2023/capsule-laborator-in-facultatile-de-teatru-din-romania-in-fnt-mariana-mibut-24-octombrie-foto-andrei-gindac/>



FNT 2024

Q&A with the Team of *Bujor*, directed by Leta Popescu and produced by the Fani Tardini
Dramatic Theater, Galați

©Photo: Maria Gîndac (Two Bugs)
Photo source: <https://fnt.ro/2024/discutia-de-dupa-bujor-24-octombrie-foto-maria-gindac-two-bugs/>

CASE STUDY: FNT EDUCATIONAL MODULE 2024

The 2024 edition of the *National Theatre Festival*, curated by Mihaela Michailov, Călin Ciobotari and Ionuț Sociu, marked a significant evolution in the *FNT Educational Module*, shifting the engagement model from bringing theatre into schools and high schools (as seen in 2022 and 2023) to bringing students into professional theatre spaces. This structural transformation redefined the relationship between young audiences and theatre, offering them direct exposure to professional theatre venues and reinforcing the festival's commitment to audience development.

The curatorial statement for ***FNT Educational Module 2024*** emphasized the festival's expanded conceptual approach:

Beyond the selection of performances, we aimed to propose an extended curatorial concept, centred on the *dramaturgies of possibility*, which would be visibly articulated across multiple intersecting levels. Thus, we continue the module of performances and workshops dedicated to young audiences, first introduced in *FNT 2022*, but this time emphasizing performances staged in theatres and workshops held in kindergartens, schools, high schools, and universities. (FNT, 2024)

This key curatorial shift meant that, for the first time, the *FNT Educational Module* performances were hosted in their original production venues, rather than being taken into schools. The change allowed young audiences to experience theatre in a professional setting, deepening their understanding of theatre as an artistic and institutional space.

Theatre Performances in Professional Venues – A New Engagement Model

Unlike the previous two years, in which performances were brought into school environments, the 2024 edition of the *FNT Educational Module* reversed this approach, inviting students into theatres. This shift in structure had several key implications. Firstly, students experienced theatre in a dedicated artistic space, which enhanced their understanding of theatre as a cultural institution. Secondly, schools collaborated with theatres, strengthening the connection between education and artistic institutions. Finally, young audiences engaged with the full theatre-going experience, including stage design, lighting, and venue atmosphere, elements that were often limited or altered in school performances.

Each performance was presented in collaboration with an educational institution, ensuring a structured connection between the play's themes and the students' learning environment.

More than 1000 children and teenagers participated in *FNT* performances and workshops in schools and high schools in Bucharest over the past two years. The 2024 edition brings young people to the theatres of Bucharest, to performances that focus on sensitive issues of their age, as well as on literary works they have to study during their school years. Each matinee performance in the educational *FNT* will be presented in collaboration with a Bucharest kindergarten, school, high school or university, and will be followed by a discussion with the young audiences and a condensed workshop on the following day, organised at the respective kindergarten/school/high school/university. (FNT, 2024b)

The list of performances and their educational partners included productions created by Teatrul „Ion Creangă” București (partner: a local school), Teatrul Dramatic „Fani Tardini” Galați (partner: a high school), Giuvlipen & Teatrul „Marin Sorescu” Craiova (partner: Master's Program in Equal Opportunities Policies, University of Bucharest), Teatrul Luceafărul Iași (partner: a kindergarten), Teatrul de Animație Tândărică, Bucharest (partner: a kindergarten), Teatrul GONG, Sibiu (partners: a Bucharest school & the Master's Program in Inclusive School Psychopedagogy, University of Bucharest), Opera Comică pentru Copii, Bucharest (partner: a school), Teatrul Excelsior, Bucharest (partner: Master's Program in Applied Ethics, University of Bucharest), Teatrul Odeon, Bucharest (partner: a high school), Teatrul de Artă, Bucharest (partner: a kindergarten). This institutional collaboration model reflected a growing effort to integrate theatre into formal education, making the 2024 edition a potential foundation for long-term partnerships between schools and theatres.

This edition also continued the festival's commitment to thematically relevant programming, with performances addressing themes such as identity and personal growth (*Bujor, Profil: +/- om mare, Sentimentul fragil al speranței*), reinterpretation of classical plays and tales (*Caliban și Vrăjitoarea, Frumoasa și bestia*), childhood and imagination (*Matilda, Zaharașka și Zăpada Uitată, Cu avionul printre stele, Amintiri din copilărie*), social, educational and philosophical issues (*Harta lui Elian, (R)Evoluție. Ghid de supraviețuire în secolul XXI*).

As in previous years, post-show discussions remained a key component of the *FNT Educational Module*. These sessions facilitated meaningful exchanges between students and theatre professionals. These interactive discussions reinforced the educational mission of *FNT*, ensuring that students were not merely passive spectators but active participants in the artistic process.

Conclusions on the 2024 Edition

The 2024 edition of the FNT Educational Module marked a significant structural shift, transitioning from a model in which performances were brought into schools to one where students were invited into professional theatre venues. This evolution deepened young audiences' engagement with theatre as an institution, offering them an immersive experience within dedicated performance spaces. This new model was strengthened by structured partnerships between theatres and educational institutions, ensuring a direct connection between performances and students' academic journeys. These collaborations not only reinforced the educational mission of the festival but also paved the way for potential long-term theatre-education programs beyond FNT's annual schedule. By aligning performances with school curricula and establishing relationships between artists and educators, the festival expanded its impact beyond a single event, hinting at the possibility of a more sustained engagement with young audiences.

However, this edition also raised important questions regarding the sustainability and future direction of the module. Moving performances into theatre venues strengthened institutional connections, but it also introduced challenges in maintaining accessibility for all students. Would it be possible to sustain this model year-round, ensuring that theatre remains a regular part of students' educational experiences rather than a once-a-year festival event? Furthermore, would a hybrid approach be more effective, combining both school-based performances for accessibility and theatre-based experiences for artistic immersion?

As the festival continues to refine its educational model, these considerations remain central to the evolution of the FNT Educational Module. What remains clear is that this initiative has established itself as an essential space for artistic and educational development, actively shaping the future relationship between theatre and its youngest audiences.

Conclusions – Summary of Findings and the Premises for the Continuity of the FNT Educational Module

The *FNT Educational Module*, across its 2022, 2023, and 2024 editions, has demonstrated the transformative potential of theatre in education, offering new models of engagement that integrate artistic practice into formal learning environments. Through a comparative analysis of these three years, several key patterns and developments emerge, each carrying significant implications for the role of theatre festivals in audience development and arts education.

One of the most consistent findings across all three editions is the importance of accessibility and institutional partnerships in shaping young

audiences' engagement with theatre. The 2022 and 2023 editions employed a decentralized model, bringing performances directly into schools, thereby reducing logistical barriers and ensuring that theatre reached students in familiar educational settings. This model proved particularly effective in engaging children and teenagers who might not otherwise have the opportunity to experience live performance. However, the 2024 edition marked a significant shift, transitioning to a model in which students were brought into professional theatre venues. This theatre-centric approach introduced young spectators to the full theatrical experience, exposing them to staging, scenography, and venue dynamics that were often absent from school-based performances.

Thematically, the *FNT Educational Module* has maintained a strong commitment to contemporary and relevant dramaturgy, curating performances that address adolescent identity, social belonging, personal transformation, and critical engagement with the world. This thematic continuity across all three years reinforces the pedagogical potential of theatre, positioning performance as a catalyst for reflection and dialogue within educational settings. Furthermore, the post-show Q&A sessions, consistently implemented across all editions, have served as key moments of critical engagement, allowing students to interact directly with theatre practitioners and fostering a culture of active spectatorship.

The fluctuations in structural design across the three editions also highlight the challenges and limitations of integrating theatre festivals into educational frameworks. The 2022 edition featured a broad, multifaceted approach, incorporating not only performances and workshops but also university theatre productions and theatre criticism laboratories. In contrast, the 2023 edition streamlined its focus, concentrating primarily on performances and specialized workshops for students with disabilities. This reduction in scale may suggest funding constraints or logistical challenges, but it also reflects an effort to target specific educational needs. The 2024 edition, while expanding access to theatre spaces, removed certain interdisciplinary components, leading to questions about the sustainability of a fully integrated theatre-education model within a festival framework.

Based on the comparative analysis of the three editions, several premises emerge for the future development of *FNT Educational Module* and other theatre festivals seeking to integrate educational initiatives:

1. Hybrid Engagement Models: Integrating Both School-Based and Theatre-Based Performances

The 2022 and 2023 editions successfully engaged students by bringing theatre into schools, eliminating barriers related to transportation, scheduling, and financial accessibility. The 2024 edition, which invited students into theatre

venues, introduced young audiences to the professional theatrical experience, fostering a deeper appreciation of theatre as an art form. A future model could integrate both approaches, allowing certain performances to be staged in schools while also offering theatre-going experiences for selected student groups.

2. Year-Round Theatre-Education Initiatives

One of the key limitations of the *FNT Educational Module* is its seasonal nature, confined to the festival's duration. Establishing a year-round program could ensure consistent engagement with young audiences, allowing students to interact with theatre beyond the festival. This initiative could take the form of a permanent partnership between *FNT* and educational institutions, providing workshops, performances, and artist-led discussions throughout the academic year.

3. Reintegrating University Theatre Productions and Interdisciplinary Initiatives

The 2022 edition provided a platform for theatre schools to showcase student productions, offering young actors a professional debut experience. The Capsule-Laboratory initiative in 2023 introduced research-based artistic practices, allowing students to explore alternative methodologies in theatre education. A future model could combine these two approaches, maintaining both public student showcases and research-focused laboratories, ensuring a balanced integration of performance and pedagogy.

4. Expanding Accessibility for Marginalized and Under-represented Audiences

The 2023 edition introduced specialized theatre workshops for students with disabilities, highlighting the need for accessible theatre practices. Future editions could expand these initiatives, creating customized theatre experiences for neurodivergent audiences, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and rural communities. Accessibility initiatives could also involve inclusive dramaturgy, ensuring that stories and narratives resonate with diverse youth populations.

5. Developing Structured Pedagogical Materials for Schools

While the post-show Q&A sessions have been valuable, there is an opportunity to further integrate theatre into the classroom. Developing structured pedagogical materials (lesson plans, discussion guides, interdisciplinary connections) could help teachers incorporate theatre into broader educational curricula. These resources could be designed in collaboration with educators,

ensuring that theatre experiences align with national education standards and learning objectives.

The ***FNT Educational Module***, across its three editions (2022-2024), has provided a compelling case study of how theatre festivals can function as educational ecosystems, fostering new generations of theatre-goers and practitioners. The evolving relationship between festivals and education underscores the transformative role of theatre in youth development, offering a space for critical inquiry, artistic exploration, and collective experience.

One of the most critical findings of this study is the importance of adaptability in theatre-education models. As evidenced by the three editions analysed, the relationship between theatre festivals and schools is not static; it must continuously evolve to respond to institutional challenges, audience needs, and financial considerations. Furthermore, the integration of interdisciplinary components, research-oriented pedagogies, and accessibility initiatives highlights the potential for theatre festivals to go beyond entertainment, positioning them as cultural incubators for artistic and educational innovation. If future editions of *FNT* and other festivals can successfully institutionalize these educational components, theatre may become a more permanent fixture in formal learning environments, reshaping the way young people engage with performance and storytelling.

Ultimately, the success of the *FNT Educational Module* suggests that theatre festivals have a unique and underutilized role in shaping the cultural literacy of future generations. By continuing to experiment with new models of engagement, accessibility, and artistic pedagogy, festivals like *FNT* can play a pivotal role in ensuring that theatre remains a vital and accessible art form for years to come.

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Daria Ancuța is a graduate of the *Theatre Studies* BA program at the I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest, and is currently pursuing a MA degree in *Theatre and Performance Studies* at the same university. She works at the intersection of dramatic writing, theatre criticism, and cultural journalism, collaborating with leading performing arts magazines such as *Teatrul Azi*, *Scena.ro*, and *Springback Magazine*. She is also the editor-in-chief of *Dissolved Magazine*, a platform dedicated to cultivating the voices of emerging cultural journalists. Her plays have been presented in Romanian theatres, major festivals, including the National Theatre Festival, Ecosistem Festival, and Student Theatre Nights, as well as in staged readings at Teatrul Excelsior, Hearth Association, and Teatrul Studentesc Podul. In 2024, she participated in two international dance criticism residencies – *Resolution Review* (UK) and *Springback Academy* (Germany), where she collaborated with journalists from *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*. She curates festival selections, hosts podcasts and panel discussions, and has led playwriting workshops within the *Theatre Studies* Department at UNATC. She is also a nominations juror for the 2025 UNITER Awards, Romania’s most prestigious theatre accolades.