

**CHILDREN'S THEATRE: IN SEARCH OF AN APPROACH TO
THEATRE BY CHILDREN, FOR CHILDREN.**

by

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I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own, original work which has never been submitted in any form at any other university for the purpose of obtaining a degree.

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ABSTRACT

Children`s Theatre, although appreciated by participants, has largely been marginalized, even by practitioners in theatre. It is still viewed as a lesser form of theatre and as a dumping ground for resources from adult theatre.

There are two main areas of focus as far as the field of drama for children is concerned. Both areas are based on the notion that play is an important and beneficial part of child development and that dramatic play is a natural development of free play. This study examines the similarities and differences between the two approaches. The one area concerns itself with creative or educational drama where the child participates in drama activities, usually within a classroom situation. The other area, which is, in fact, the main focus of this study, concerns itself with theatrical presentation for children, i.e. Children`s Theatre.

Children`s Theatre, with adults as the performers, is the most familiar form of Children`s Theatre and yet, the one form which directly influences most children, in particular through participation in the school play, is Children`s Theatre where children are the performers themselves, in other words, a form of participational theatre. This form of theatre has the potential for influencing children`s lives immensely and yet it is often left to persons with no expertise in the field to lead such projects. The opportunity for truly enriching the participants` lives is often lost through poor methodology.

Historically, the aims and values set for Children`s Theatre have also undergone development to the point where a synthesis has been reached where equal emphasis is to be placed on the quality of the end product as well as the process by which such end product has been reached.

A number of problems and issues specific to working in Children's Theatre are examined as they occur in different settings. These include problems concerning script, venue, the child audience and audience participation and problems dealing specifically with the process of directing a cast of children. Possible solutions to these problems are investigated.

An approach, based on the theories of practitioners in the field, as well as the results of a number of practical projects, will be formulated. The practical projects will be used to investigate certain viewpoints expressed by practitioners in the field. The approach formulated should not only encourage work of a high artistic standard but should also be based on sound educational principles. Central to this is the approach and style of the director who, in Children's Theatre, is far more than just a director of a theatrical presentation. The director in Children's Theatre is always teacher and director at once.

OPSOMMING

Kinderteater, alhoewel gewild onder deelnemers, is grootliks gemarginaliseer, selfs deur praktisyns in teater. Dit word steeds gesien as 'n mindere teatervorm en 'n stortingsterrein vir hulpbronne van volwasse teater.

Daar is twee hoof fokusareas wat drama vir kinders aanbetref. Beide areas is gebaseer op die idee dat spel 'n belangrike en voordelige aspek van kinderontwikkeling is en dramatiese spel 'n natuurlike ontwikkeling van vrye spel. Hierdie studie ondersoek die ooreenkomste en verskille tussen die twee areas. Die een area fokus op kreatiewe of opvoedkundige drama waar die kind deelneem aan drama aktiwiteite, gewoonlik binne 'n klaskamer opset. Die ander area, wat die fokusarea van hierdie studie is, is gemoeid met verhoogaanbiedings vir kinders, dus Kinderteater.

Kinderteater, waar volwassenes die spelers is, is die meer bekende vorm van Kinderteater en tog is Kinderteater waar kinders die optreders is, die vorm wat meer kinders beïnvloed, veral deur deelname aan die skoolproduksie. Hier is kinders self die optreders in 'n vorm van deelnemende teater. Hierdie vorm van Kinderteater het die potensiaal om kinders gewelding te beïnvloed en tog word dit dikwels oorgelaat aan persone sonder die nodige kennis op die gebied om sulke projekte te lei. Die geleentheid om kinders positief te verryk raak verlore as gevolg van swak metodologie.

Histories het die waardes en oogmerke rondom Kinderteater ontwikkeling ondergaan tot die punt waar 'n sintese bereik is waar klem gelê word op die kwaliteit van beide die finale produk en die proses waardeur die eindproduk bereik is.

’n Aantal probleme en kwessies wat eie is aan werk binne Kinderteater sal ondersoek word soos hulle voorkom binne verskeie opsette. Hierby word ingesluit probleme met teks, speelarea, die kindergehoor en gehoordeelname en probleme wat spesifiek handel oor die proses van regie vir kinders as spelers. Moontlike oplossings vir hierdie probleme sal ondersoek word.

’n Benadering gebaseer op die teorieë van praktisyns op die gebied sowel as die uitslae van ’n aantal praktiese projekte, sal geformuleer word. Die praktiese projekte sal gebruik word om die menings van praktisyns op die gebied te ondersoek. Die benadering moet werk van ’n hoogstaande artistieke gehalte bevorder en moet gebaseer wees op deurgrondse onderwysbeginsels. Sentraal tot so ’n benadering is die aanslag en styl van die regisseur wat in Kinderteater veel meer moet wees as bloot ’n regisseur van ’n verhoogopvoering. Die regisseur in Kinderteater is altyd beide onderwyser en regisseur.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Orientation

Don't put your daughter on the stage, Mrs Worthington,
Don't put your daughter on the stage,
The profession is overcrowded
And the struggle's pretty tough
And admitting the fact
She's burning to act,
That isn't quite enough.

(Coward 1965: 200)

So cautioned Noel Coward many years ago and this was taken to be a warning by many concerned parents and educators who believed that the appearance of a child on stage in front of an audience somehow spoiled a child's character for life and resulted in abominable show-offs flaunting themselves at the slightest provocation. Was this view substantiated and based on fact? Or can it be grouped together with childrearing theories such as "spare the rod and spoil the child" which is certainly not acceptable childraising practice today? Has this old-wives' cautionary admonishment that children should not appear on stage ever been tested and researched? Coward's view also implies that children taking part in stage productions only do so in preparation for a career in theatre. Is this the only possible outcome of children participating in plays? Are there not other possible benefits which all children could experience from participating in theatre? Many practitioners in the field of children's theatre have believed exactly this - that participation in theatre could have very beneficial effects and should be part of the educational process of the whole child.

Allen states:

Acting makes the process (from imitation to assimilation in the growing child) a particularly creative one since it is performed under the stress of a powerful creative drive, it is sometimes difficult to understand why its educational value cannot be quickly and readily understood. (1979: 133).

1.2 Problem

For many years Children`s Theatre has been given the short end of the stick as it has been burdened by many misconceptions.

Children`s Theatre is looked on with disdain by critics who do not review it, by actors and directors who view it only as a meal ticket in between jobs in the “real” theatre and by writers who cannot hope for professional productions or, for that matter, financial recompense. (Lifton 1974: 12).

MacCaslin (1978:1) believes that the low status of Children`s Theatre is reflected in the lack of funding for it. Children`s Theatre has, from the start, been praised and loved but hardly ever been given professional recognition or support. The reason behind this seems to be the notion that children participating in the arts are somehow not as important as adults doing the same.

Children are treated as second class citizens because they have little economic and no political power, and the art that is provided for them usually reflects their status: it is literally as well as culturally poverty-stricken. (Chapman in Robinson 1980: 137).

Chapman (Chapman in Robinson 1980: 138) believes that as a result of this, the arts tyrannize instead of humanize and participation in theatre becomes viewed as a rather insignificant activity.

For many, Art can come to mean a powerlessness, a code of ‘mucking about’...Drama may be a ‘soft option’, often patronizingly available to

remedial or non-academic children in the school's curriculum. (Chapman in Robinson 1980: 138).

In addition to Children's Theatre being marginalized and possibly, in some instances, because of this marginalization, lack of a sound methodology further undermines Children's Theatre. There might exist the possibility of practitioners believing that because Children's Theatre is of lesser importance they can get away with poor work processes. Theatre practitioners who start to work in Children's Theatre because they see it as a soft option compared to adult theatre and practitioners who totally lack understanding of the child and his needs, will in all probability also not be able to apply a methodology which will benefit the child involved in the process. In the same vein, even well-meaning practitioners with perhaps good understanding of children but with no knowledge of theatre and theatre processes might fail to turn the process into a truly enriching experience for the children involved because of a lack of a sound approach.

Practitioners in the field know that Children's Theatre require the utmost dedication from its practitioners.

Theatre for children is a separate art form with qualities that make it quite distinct from adult theatre. It is *not* simplified adult theatre; it has its own dynamics and its own rewards. Quality theatre for children is valuable in that it opens the door for children to a new world of excitement and imagination. (Wood 1997: 5).

It places very specific demands on those who participate in it. According to Levy (in Lifton 1974: 154), the mistake should not be made to think of Children's Theatre as adult theatre simplified and coarsened. Instead, it is a difficult and specialized art form which requires specific specialized training. A sound approach needs to be developed and applied by practitioners in the field.

1.3 Aims

Some issues are very specific to Children's Theatre. McCaslin (1978: 4) identifies the major problem areas as being centred around the issues of script, style of production, length of performance, children as actors and age grouping of the audience. In addition, the venue and the actual directing of children in a Children's play can also be viewed as crucial issues in this field. This study will examine the above aspects, with special reference to the issue of children participating as actors in Children's Theatre. In addition, an attempt will be made to formulate a satisfactory approach which can be applied when working with child actors so as to ensure that the process is enriching, stimulating and educationally sound.

1.4 Research methodology

Initially, existing sources will be researched and the views of practitioners in the field examined, especially to clarify certain key concepts. Then some of these concepts will be examined in practical projects so as to test their validity. The description and results of each of these projects are given in detail in the Appendixes. The practical projects all involved groups of children in a performance situation. Each project examines a different aspect of working with children in theatre. Based on this research, an approach will be formulated.

CHAPTER 2

THE FIELD OF STUDY AND RELATED FORMS

For the purposes of this study, the emphasis will fall on Children's Theatre, and specifically, Children's Theatre in which children are the actual performers.

This study will focus on children participating in the process as performers and will examine whether such participation could benefit such children.

The term 'children' will, in its usual sense, refer to young people below the age of fourteen. Children younger than five will, however, not be included.

Goldberg (1974: 03) believes that children of this age cannot yet respond to theatre. He states that the only form of theatre a child of this age can respond to is the adult playing along with him.

Theatre for young people above fourteen but under eighteen (commonly referred to as 'Youth Theatre') have not been included either as their needs are quite specific and distinct from younger children's needs and interests.

Obviously, the needs of younger children will also vary greatly depending on the age group and where this is pertinent it will be referred to.

There will also be an overlap at times between the different fields: Drama-in-Education (DIE), Theatre-in-Education (TIE) and Children's Theatre – this study will, in fact, attempt to analyze the overlap and point to the beneficial blending of the different approaches where necessary.

To clarify matters, the differences and similarities between the relevant fields will now be examined.

2.1. Drama-in-Education, Theatre-in-Education and Children's Theatre

2.1.1 The views of theorists in the field

Most theorists and practitioners involved in the field of drama for children, make a distinction between Children's Theatre, Drama-in-Education (DIE), and Theatre-in-Education (TIE). The fields are often seen as differing vastly as far as their aims, values and methodologies are concerned.

Louw (1965: 21-22) refers to Children's Theatre as *formal drama* and defines it as drama written for children usually by an adult and enacted by either children or adults or adults and children combined, for an audience of children. The normal staging elements are required i.e. costume, props, lighting and makeup and an (adult) director usually directs the actors.

Courtney (in McCaslin 1978: 24) differentiates between *creative drama*, *presentational theatre* and *participational theatre*. In *presentational theatre* the student is a percipient, he is perceiving an artwork presented to him by others; in *participational theatre*, the child is more obviously a creator as he participates in and helps to create the theatrical event. *Creative drama* again refers to children participating in drama activities within a classroom situation with no audience present.

Similarly, Way (1967: 2) differentiates between *theatre*, which he believed is primarily concerned with communication between actors and audience; and *drama*, which concerns itself with the participants, irrespective of the presence of an audience.

MacGregor (1977: 19) echoes this statement:

Theatre exists in performance – in communicating with the audience. Drama in education, on the other hand, need not and, in most cases, does not have performance as a goal.

MacGregor (1977: 19) also believes that participants in drama sessions are primarily aware of themselves, reacting with and for each other so that their sense of audience is introspective. If any audience ever views this process, it should be through what Goldberg (1974: 8) describes as “ a demonstration session” which is not concerned with performance, but only a viewing of the creative process.

MacGregor (1977: 6) states that to outsiders the term “ theatre” usually implies plays, writers, actors, directors, rehearsal and performance whilst “drama” usually involves a process of exploration and sharing of ideas rather than viewing “the products and presentation of professional skills.”

Goldberg (1974: 8) underlines this by referring to DIE as “creative dramatics” in which performance is not the goal. The focus is rather on the development of the child’s creative personality.

2.1.2 Defining the different fields

Children` Theatre

Also referred to as *formal theatre* by Louw (1965: 21-22) or *presentational*

theatre by Courtney (in McCaslin 1978: 24). It refers to the staging of plays for children with the performance being the ultimate goal. Children may or may not be the actual performers.

Drama-in-Education

Also referred to as *creative drama* by Courtney (in McCaslin 1978: 24), *drama* by Way (1967: 2) and MacGregor (1977: 6) and *creative dramatics* by Goldberg (1974: 8). DIE deals with children actively participating in certain drama activities. What is of importance is the process and not the outcome.

Theatre-in-Education

Involves the use of the theatrical event as part of the educational process. The aim of the production is didactic. Children may be part of the production in which case it becomes what Courtney (in McCaslin 1978: 24) terms *participational theatre*.

2.2 The aims of DIE, TIE and Children`s Theatre

The aims of the above three forms are in some instances similar especially in the general aim of being of benefit to the child. In other instances, such as the presence of an audience the aims differ vastly.

2.2.1 Drama-in-Education (DIE)

The aims of educational drama or DIE probably differ most from that of TIE and Children`s theatre.

Siks (1977: 9) refers to the ultimate purpose of drama in education as

to open children`s minds, stimulate their imagination and language abilities, and spark their enthusiasm for continued personal development and discovery. In other words, drama should help the child learn about himself or herself and the world around and grow accordingly.

Siks (1977: 11) also feels that the value of drama lies in its power to stir human emotions through its sensory qualities. Through the imaginative use of the senses children can be led to greater understanding of themselves and the world.

Educational drama usually attempts to enrich the life of the child participating in educational drama group activities. It is believed that the child benefits in all aspects of his/her personality:

physically, by developing motor skills through movement activities – not only what Allen (1979: 62) termed “functional movement”, which strengthens, relaxes and co-ordinates the body, but also “expressive movement” which allows a child to move freely and expressively with a sense of time and space;

mentally, by stimulating the child intellectually and focusing concentration;
creatively, by encouraging creative thought and expression;
socially, by participation in group activities;
emotionally, by learning self control and appropriate means of expression as he is put in touch with his own emotions;
verbally, by enhancing verbal communication skills.

In addition, Allen (1979: 66) believes that the development of speech is closely linked to the growth of the intelligence and general cognitive powers and drama provides an imaginative context for speech that enlarges the situation. Even *musically*, drama is of benefit to the child. Allen (1979: 60) states that music is very closely related to drama in two ways. Firstly, as drama is itself dependent on physical movement which is a rhythmical form of physical expression, it is closely related to the basic rhythmic qualities of music. Secondly, drama is also closely related to language which involves pitch, tempo and volume as its principal expressive ingredients and, as rhythm, pitch and volume are also the main ingredients of music, it follows that the relationship between music and drama is or should be a close one. Allen (1979: 63) also believes that drama (and dance) seem to sensitize all the other faculties possibly through the toning up of the muscles and circulation which alerts the mind and gives a kind of physical tone to the whole body. This quality it shares with other athletic activities. The difference lies in its additional expressive and affective qualities.

A number of influential practitioners shaped the theories governing Drama-in-Education. These theories, in turn, led to the formulation of certain aims within the field.

Peter Slade sees educational drama as an important part of the development and education of the whole child. According to him, dramatic play gives children the opportunity to test, prove and try out ideas. The teacher's role in this process is to provide learning situations which challenge children. He believed that only two qualities need to be fostered: absorption and sincerity. (Robinson 1980: 144).

Slade (1954: 37) emphasizes the importance of improvisation and dramatic play. He also believed that Child Drama develops language and therefore focused on the importance of discussions as children will learn more about human behaviour when talking about experiences.

Brian Way (1967: 10) believes that Drama-in-Education should help to enrich children's imaginations through direct experience. There should be a transcendence of mere knowledge, and an enrichment of the imagination through direct experience.

For example, the question might be 'What is a blind person?' The reply could be 'A blind person is a person who cannot see'. Alternatively, the reply could be 'Close your eyes and, keeping them closed all the time, try to find your way out of the room.'

Brian Way (1967: 11) compares the growth of the individual personality to a circle with many points on the circle each representing a facet of the personality. Each point is concerned with the potential of continuing development and needs to be returned to over and over again. The points he refers to include: concentration, the senses, imagination, the physical self, speech, emotion and intellect. According to him, drama provides opportunity for the development of many points on the circle.

Way is concerned with the education of the whole person and its individuality and therefore encouraged originality and the development of the creative and intuitive side of a child's personality. He believed that drama should be incorporated into all school subjects and become part of the methodology of all teachers whether they had been trained in drama or not.

When working with children, teachers should keep in mind, what he saw, as the basic facets of the personality.

Brian Way also believes in the value of improvisation which could allow each individual to use his/her own resources in a sensitive relationship to others. Once individual awareness has been established, he believes that a broader social awareness will be nurtured. This will lead to greater understanding of the self and others.

Gavin Bolton (1979: 2) also believes that educational drama should be incorporated into all subjects in the classroom. The whole class should be involved in a decisionmaking and a discovery process. The lesson should be centred around the pupils' needs, opinions and feelings whilst the teacher provides stimulus and control. The teacher is not solely responsible for all answers – the pupils have to discover answers for themselves. Bolton divided Educational drama into 4 types:

Type A: which referred to dramatic exercises

Type B: which referred to dramatic playmaking

Type C: which referred to theatrical experiences

Type D: which he called Drama for Understanding which advocated a dramatic teaching method which emphasizes the fact that true learning takes place when pupils undergo a change in understanding or when they reach a deeper level of understanding. Pupils are encouraged to understand what they observe and not be neutrally objective. Type D drama is derived from child's play – especially symbolic play (or make-believe play) where meaning is created by the symbolic use of actions and objects. One of the main concepts of Type D drama is Internal Action which refers to the subtext of actions. As the child experiences

internal action (the plot, setting of the story and symbolic use of object) inner meaning is created. The purpose of Type D drama is therefore the creation of meaning – it is thought-in-action. Bolton believes that there are two types of meaning – individual meaning and social (or impersonal) meaning.

Social meaning is developed as the child encounters different attitudes from different group members.

As far as this study is concerned, it is of interest that Bolton included , what he termed “ theatrical experiences” under Type C Drama. Unlike Slade, therefore, Bolton included theatrical performance as a valid activity for children.

Dorothy Heathcote (Johnson & O`Neill 1984: 38) uses drama to expand pupils` awareness – to help them look at reality through fantasy and see below the surface of actions to meaning. The teacher is no longer the “one-who-knows” – pupils are allowed to have most of the power of decision. They make decisions and dissect them. This becomes a two-way communication process which involves teacher and pupil in the role of discovery.

In order to facilitate this discovery, Heathcote uses imagined situation or role play. The group decides on the particulars of the group improvisation whilst the teacher questions, confronts and challenges their choices so as to achieve dramatic focus. Heathcote also frequently stopped midway through an improvisation so as to question the participants to provide direction and a greater degree of understanding.

She believes that drama, like all the arts, does not start off from the source but from carefully selected points from which it progresses to understanding. She believes that in real life, individuals seldom have time to reflect; in drama she deliberately makes time for it as she believes that true teaching should increase the reflective power in people.

She also believes that Educational drama should be used in almost any context i.e. it does not have to be limited to a “drama lesson”. For this to be effective, the teacher has to be trained to create a climate in which value judgements do not apply and where respect is shown to the individual’s ideas; where children’s ideas are employed and made to “work” positively; where a working situation of integrity is created which employs the adult world within the situation whilst still respecting the child’s world; where understanding is developed for the way drama functions in promoting the release of conflicting attitudes within a group; where the work is “forwarded” to teaching ends without destroying the children’s contribution; where planning and preparation is done whilst still retaining enough surprise-confrontation elements; where understanding is reached that drama is not stories retold but confrontation between individuals.

2.2.2 TIE and Children’s Theatre

Theatre-in-Education and Children’s theatre often overlap in their aims and methodologies. In fact, the two forms are very often grouped together. Goldberg (1974: 5) states that the term, in common usage, does not distinguish between children performing for other children and adults performing for children. Both these forms refer to some kind of public performance involving children in some way. In the case of TIE, the audience will always be children as the aim of a TIE production is to convey to children some form of educational message – the purpose, is therefore, mainly didactic. The performers are normally adults although children might be used as performers as well. This type of production is often staged within an educational environment e.g. an educational theatre group visiting a school with a production which highlights a certain aspect of the school syllabus.

Allen (1979: 7) states:

It is possibly quite easy to define T.I.E. or to describe what it is about. Less so children’s theatre. For the moment we begin to use such

unavoidable terms as 'theatre arts', the imagination, fantasy, we lose our sense of direction. So do I. But when I go to a performance by a T.I.E. team I see a very different kind of work from when I go to the Unicorn Theatre in London.

Some theorists, when referring to Children's Theatre, make no distinction between Theatre-in-Education productions and other forms of Children's theatre where the focus might be more on entertainment and less on education. Kenneth Graham (in Goldberg 1974: 14), for instance, sees this as one theatrical form with a five-fold aim – entertainment, psychological growth, educational exposure, aesthetic appreciation and the development of a future audience. Goldberg (1974: 14) consolidates these aims as aesthetics, pedagogy and psychology. The primary aesthetics value he saw as emotionally stimulating entertainment through participation in an act of creation.

As far as pedagogy is concerned, Goldberg (1974: 15) feels that

children's theatre can be a powerful force of far-reaching consequence. All learning is increased by motivation and the motivational situation of an enjoyable diversion has obvious advantages over the typical formal classroom. This does not mean that plays should become formal lectures, lest they lose their motivational advantage. The play – indeed all art, teaches indirectly – by exposing truth and ideas to the choice of the spectator. Any learning that goes on is then the learner's responsibility, not the teacher's. Pedagogical theorists will agree that such self-chosen learning is faster and more thorough than the externally inflicted sort.

The psychological benefits, Goldberg (1974: 16) feels, can be found in the fact that children learn through theatre that problems can be solved. In addition, it can help children develop a positive self-concept and learn that others might differ from him/herself.

From the above it can be seen that both Goldberg and Graham group theatre for children with an educational purpose and theatre for children with an entertainment purpose together.

A Children's theatre production purely for entertainment might, indeed, also have an educational message – and normally does have some uplifting, positive message - but its prime aim is, more often than not, the entertainment of the audience. The audience in this case, would probably also mainly consist of children although adults are often present as well. Children's theatre productions are either not done in a school environment at all so that the audience becomes even more of a family audience who have undertaken the outing as a family affair or it is done as a school venture (the annual school play) where again the audience will consist of families. If the children are the main performers in such a production (as is normally the case in school productions), there would probably be even more adults in the audience in the form of family members of the performers.

For the purpose of this study, a distinction will be made between Children's Theatre as a production staged by adults for children and a production in which children are the performers. The latter is what Goldberg (1974: 5) refers to as "recreational drama". This would be the type of production where Goldberg feels that the development and experience of the performers are as, or even more important, than the aesthetic enjoyment of the audience.

As can be seen from the above, the aims of TIE are quite straightforward and obvious. The same applies to Children`s Theatre when it refers to a form of theatre performed by mainly adults to an audience of children. However, when it comes to Children`s Theatre in which children are the performers (Goldberg`s “recreational theatre”), the issues become more complicated. Is the play being done for entertainment or instruction? Who is the audience and, even more importantly for this study, who are the performers? If the performers are children, why are they doing the play? To entertain or instruct themselves or the audience? Who is now the audience? Their parents or other children? In fact, should they even be on the stage at all? In the next chapters an attempt will be made to try and answer some of these questions.

2.3 Similarities between DIE and TIE

DIE and TIE (including Children's theatre) often overlap in their aims and methods. Wagner (in Morgan and Saxton 1989: 1-2) in referring to the work of Dorothy Heathcote, states:

The difference between theatre (performance) and classroom drama is that in theatre everything is contrived so that the audience gets the kicks. In the classroom the participants get the kicks. However, the roots are the same: the elements of theatre craft.

MacGregor(1977: 6) questions whether there should be a distinction at all. She states that while some teachers emphasize the difference others see no difference at all.

Gavin Bolton (in Robinson 1980: 72) says:

When I talk about my work in schools I call it drama. What I mean by the word has altered for me over the years. By drama do I still mean *not* theatre?..The content of the drama lesson is interdisciplinary...(children) may have their understanding of themselves in relation to the world they live in reinforced, clarified or modified and, secondly, they may gain skills in social interaction which include the ability to communicate their understandings and feelings. But does this experience of drama imply *not* experiencing theatre? The answer is NO and YES. I put NO first for only if we accept a distinction between the two which can never be ignored can we usefully pursue the common ground. It is not easy to find the words to describe the experiencing of drama. The quality is perhaps best suggested by saying the process is a mixture of 'it is happening to me now' and 'I am making it happen now'. There are at least three features here. (1) a spontaneity (2) a 'nowness' that is tied to the future and, most importantly (3) ME in the experience...Now if we move into theatre, the actors are in a very different order of experiencing, a difference that is crucial. The degree to which the actors can say 'it is

happening to me now' and 'I am making it happen' is significantly reduced or overshadowed by an orientation towards interpretation, repeatability, projection and sharing with an audience.

Bolton (1979: 39), when referring to the four different Types of Drama which he had described, emphasizes the need for the use of all four types – dramatic exercises which incorporate games and technical skills, dramatic playmaking, theatrical experience as well as drama for understanding. He feels that the exclusive use of any one form will invite deterioration of the educational experience.

Crucial to the child's experience, is the teacher's responsibility to help the child to find significance in their work. According to Bolton (in Robinson 1980: 72), dramatic play will remain superficial unless the teacher helps the child to live through the experience with a sharpened consciousness. It is in this process that Bolton finds a synthesis between DIE and TIE as he believes that the teacher of drama uses the very elements of theatre which are normally used by the playwright.

Bolton (in Robinson 1980: 73) is of the opinion that the teacher should help to focus meaning for the children just as the playwright focuses meaning for the audience. In addition, like a playwright, the teacher should build tension, highlight meaning by means of contrast in sound, light and movement and choose symbolic actions and objects that will operate at many levels of meaning to help the children find symbols in their work. The mode of the children's experience must continue as 'I am making it happen; it is happening to me'.

2.3.1 Children`s Play

An important similarity which exists between DIE and TIE is the fact that both schools of thought strongly believe in the value of children`s play.

Slade (1954: 42) advocates the importance of play as the child`s way of thinking, proving, relaxing, working, remembering, daring, testing, creating and absorbing. Slade is, of course, not alone in emphasizing the importance of children` play. Barrault (in Hodgson 1972: 22) believes that children`s play is an activity preparing them for life and as such not without purpose.

Froebel (in Hodgson 1972:46) states:

Play, then, is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in the child`s soul. It is the purest and most spiritual product of the child, and at the same time it is a type and copy of human life at all stages and in all relations. For to one who has insight into human nature, the trend of the whole future life of the child is revealed in his(sic) freely chosen play.

Freud (in Hodgson 1972: 49-50) believes that children repeat in their play everything that has made a great impression on them in actual life so as to make themselves masters of the situation. Even unpleasant experiences are not excluded from this process.

Lowenfeld (in Hodgson 1972: 53) formulates four functions of play:

He sees it as fulfilling a social function as the child uses it to make contact with his environment; he believes it forms a link between the child`s consciousness and emotional experience much as conversation, philosophy and religion does in the adult; he believes it externalizes the child`s emotional life

as art does in the life of an adult and, finally, it serves as relaxation and amusement. Play, therefore, according to him, is to a child work, thought, art and relaxation and cannot be pressed into any single formula. It expresses a child's relation to himself and his environment, and, without adequate opportunity to play, normal and satisfactory emotional development is not possible.

Swartzell (1990: xvii) believes that children's play passes through different stages. Initially children are fascinated by objects with human characteristics, then they progress to responses to rhythm and verbal patterns and finally, to more "theatrical" stages of play as love for masks, dressing up as someone else and games become manifest. It is during this phase of pretending that children learn most through imitation. Play, then, is not only beneficial, but in fact, essential for normal human development.

Lowenfeld (in Hodgson 1972: 46) believes that

any individual in whose early life these necessary opportunities for adequate play have been lacking will inevitably go on seeking them in the stuff of adult life. Though he must do this he will be unaware of what he is seeking. Emotional satisfaction, which the mind has missed at the period to which they properly belong, do not present themselves later in the same form. The forces of destruction, aggression, and hostile emotion, which form so powerful an element for good or evil in human character, can display themselves fully in the play of childhood and become through this expression integrated into the controlled and conscious personality. Forces unrealized in childhood remain as an inner drive forever seeking outlet.

Slade (1958:35) cautions

Lack of Play may mean a permanent lost part of ourselves. It is this unknown, uncreated part of ourselves, this missing link, which may be a cause of difficulty and uncertainty in later years. Backward children often respond to further opportunities for Play, for this and other

reasons. They build or rebuild Self by Play. Doing when they can what should have been done before.

What is interesting is the fact that children spontaneously tend to regulate their own free play. Allen (1979: 42) is fascinated by the fact that children readily establish rules for their own games. At times these rules are only implied yet there seems to be a natural acceptance of the fact that rules are necessary to make the winning harder. There is therefore, in children a natural inclination towards the acceptance of rules and constraints. Allen (1979: 44) states:

Children are not the destructive libertarians that progressive educationalists have sometimes encouraged them to be and formal teachers are convinced they are. The natural anxiety and motivation of a child, any of us, is to employ the capacities with which we have been born to master the environment, not to kick over and these natural capacities involve the transformation of chaotic and uncomprehended experiences into forms of expression that satisfy the child's own internal schema.

Allen (1979: 42) also believes that, through play, the child is creating his own fantasy world in outward form. As he becomes more experienced at this, he becomes more able to handle symbolic forms. He moves from playing to the play, from creativity as a growing process to the act of creation. According to Allen (1979: 43), early creative activities can be viewed as self expression; however, this does not mean that they should be chaotic and undirected. He states:

The role of the teacher is to help them find clarity of expression in all their creative activities. This is a stage beyond self-expression and it is a natural stage. Inarticulateness in any activity is not natural to anyone.

The child should be guided and given opportunities to project play into external shape and form as, according to Allen (1979: 43), it is not in the nature of a normal child to be persistently destructive or to enjoy uncreative activities; not because children are goodies in the Victorian sense, but because they want to come to terms with the world. Their play is not chaotic self-expression but a very remarkable manifestation of the need to form relationships between outer and inner reality.

2.3.2 Dramatic Play

Dramatic play is an extension of spontaneous play and a projection of free play into external shape and form.

Dramatic play aims at specific outcomes. Some theorists, such as Ward (1957: 3), believe that it provides opportunity for emotional outlet and constructive channelling of emotions. At the same time, Ward (1957: 6) sees it as helping children to grow in social understanding and co-operation. This is valuable as, according to Lowenfeld (in Hodgson 1972: 52), a child does not combine naturally with its peers before the age of 4 or 6 years. After that age, however, the delight in social play increases up to the age of approximately 12 or 14 years. Through creative dramatics, social communication skills can be honed.

Dramatic play flows naturally out of social play. In dramatic play the child is involved in

activities which do not necessarily require him to be anyone other than himself. These activities are designed to place the student in a make-believe situation in which he can explore his(sic) reaction and actions in a spontaneous way. This strategy is non-threatening to both teacher and students because it is so open. The student can react using his(sic)

own experience and is free from the constraint of worrying about how to put someone else's words into his(sic) own mouth. (Morgan and Saxton 1989: 118).

Heathcote (in Hodgson 1972: 159) is interested in the role of the teacher in the play situation. She believes that the teacher should feed the children stories and ideas and create a permissive atmosphere in which involved play can flourish. For Heathcote, this type of atmosphere would involve the children being given the opportunity to experiment and explore without fear of judgement. The teacher should create learning situations which challenge the energies, intelligence and efforts of the child so as to enable the personality to mature.

The aim of dramatic play is to create this kind of safe environment in which children can explore physically, emotionally, creatively, socially without being exposed to the gaze of an audience.

It is in the latter – the exposure to an audience – where DIE and Children's Theatre conflict most.

2.4 Conflict between DIE and Children's Theatre

Slade (1954 : 49) states:

An audience on the ground is a dangerous thing – it tempts the child to show off, Absorption is shallower and Play deteriorates. The joy of Dramatic Play is that it is the creation of the moment. The energy and imagination can be interrupted, and then the “moment” is gone forever. Audience is often the enemy of the “moment”.

Children's Theatre lost popularity with the emergence of Peter Slade's educational drama theories in the 1950's. Slade preferred, what Leach (1970: 2) calls:

personal, private drama...which demands complete absorption, often without any audience...directly involved with personal development and spatial and physical self-expression.

Robinson (1980: 146) believes that Slade's work

pushed drama into the mainstream of progressive education and strengthened its ideological framework with the concepts of child psychology and liberal philosophy. But in making these connections he helped to break off others and opened divisions which later writers were obliged to support or deny...the value of drama activities for the growing child was becoming less and less of a matter of dispute. What was disputed and has been ever since is how these activities connect with theatre.

Robinson (1980: 1) believes that many drama teachers, who mainly focused on the encouragement of self-expression in children, have doubted the validity of

theatre studies in their work. This has contributed to the widening abyss between educational drama and the various aspects of the professional theatre. Many practitioners felt that Children's Theatre, in fact, did more harm than good and that work produced in this manner often lacked depth. MacGregor (1977: 30), for instance, states:

There is a danger in encouraging children to produce an end-product. It may inhibit the natural development of the work and often forces children to cut short exploration and prematurely find forms of expression which can result in work of superficial nature.

They feel that when children perform there is a negative shift in emphasis as children start to focus on an external audience instead of communicating through the group.

Some practitioners, although not vehemently against children performing, tend to view it in the same manner as Kartak (in McCaslin 1978: 137):

Theatre by children is nevertheless a luxury for the few rather than a necessity for the many. Beyond this, such theatre tends to be of greater benefit to the performer than the audience and such theatre tends to be less than the best... if an organization has as its goal the production of highly artistic theatre, it is far preferable to use adult actors....that is so simply because there are few children sufficiently trained or intuitive enough to provide the caliber of performance one must demand in order to achieve art.

Way (1967: 67) feels that concentration in children is easily destroyed by outside factors – the major one of these being an audience. Children should therefore be protected from an audience until they are ready for it – if this happens it does not matter – the dramatic experience is what counts, not the theatrical presentation of it.

Slade (1954: 12), in fact, only acknowledges Children's Theatre as

moments of logical play with some resemblance to theatre, amounting to an overwhelming experience, which stand out from time to time during Child Drama .

For Slade (1954: 183), the supreme moment of real Children`s Theatre occurs when children, in improvisational play, become completely absorbed in their spontaneous portrayal of a certain situation. He believes that children create theatre in their own way, own form, own kind. It is original art of high creative quality.

2.4.1 Children`s Theatre

The educational drama movement, led by Peter Slade whose approach was characterized by a belief in the value of the spontaneous dramatic play of young children (Fleming 1994: 24), conflicted to varying degrees with the Children`s Theatre movement.

According to Fleming (1994: 24) Brian Way`s approach had the same theoretical origins as Slade`s but Way placed more emphasis on individual practical exercises whilst Bolton and Heathcote focused on content and the quality of the experience of the pupils and the role of the teacher in elevating the quality of the drama and defining specific educational objectives.

Certain practitioners, on the other hand, raised objections to educational drama.

Many of the criticism of drama in education have been voiced at various stages throughout its history but they have been articulated in a far more forceful way in recent years by Hornbrook...Hornbrook`s main criticism was that educational drama had “lost its roots with dramatic art ”.
(Fleming 1994: 25).

Robinson (1980: 152) is of the opinion that the ideas of self-expression, creativity, individuality and self-discovery in the drama process have tended to obscure the most important functions and characteristics of drama in schools and have, in the process, lost contact with its theatrical connections. Robinson (1980: 141) states:

Instead of helping children to express themselves and think clearly, some forms of 'creative self-expression' may have been having just the opposite effect. Children's own work in the arts needs to be related to an understanding of realized art forms; or, in this case, their own expressive work through drama should include watching and taking part in theatre activities and understanding written plays. This is not because the torch of the old master is good for you, aesthetically speaking, but because the main value of drama, as I see it, is a form of social education and educational drama and theatre share some of the same social functions.

Robinson (1980: 154) criticizes the notion that as long as something is expressed freely it is good and that children left largely to their own devices will somehow arrive at some magical moment:

This is really the most damaging implication of the unqualified doctrine of self-expression and creativity: the idea that children arrive at self-realization by some kind of expressive homing instinct with the teacher only occasionally correcting their course by the guiding shake of the tambourine.

Allen (1979: 70) feels that whilst creativity is free-flowing, open-ended and transformational, artistic discipline is a constraint. Yet within this paradox, Allen believes, lies the ultimate reward of artistic creation. Artistic discipline has to force creative material into shape so as to create a sense of freedom and exaltation. Allen (1979: 70) believes that the denigration of performance and shunning of technique stems from two sources. Firstly, a misconception that forms and structures should not be applied when children are experimenting and

secondly, a misunderstanding of democratic values which in educational terms becomes a sloppy egalitarianism which is manifested in the reluctance to encourage brighter children at the expense of the not-so-bright. Unlike Slade (1954: 49), who saw an audience as the enemy of the “moment” and an invitation for the child to show-off, Allen (1979: 115) feels that performing for an audience was a natural development of dramatic activity for children as children have a natural wish to “show” something. He feels that this is part of a child’s natural development as communicating becomes a part of assimilation for the child. Whilst sharing the experience, the child is, in fact, mastering it.

There comes a time when young people are ready to experience a full act of communication (with an audience).
(Allen 1979: 118)

Gerke (1996: x -xi) states:

Children, allowed to play freely, will most often choose to dramatize their fantasies – to playact. Children playact because it’s fun and I say it’s fun because it’s psychologically, emotionally and kinesthetically good for them...Working with children in play production is good for their development. It allows them to be physically active and learn kinesthetically. Plays create safe situations where children can act out adventure, danger, combat and even death. They experience fantasy, imagery, symbolism and movement speaks to the psyche, invoking primal instincts, playing out archetypal types and satisfying unconsciousness needs to resolve problems...Producing plays with children helps them to learn to focus their attention,¹ one of the most important tasks of child development...Play production is also a natural device for positive “ mirroring”, reflecting back to children support from which they can build a good self- image...Play production help develop...“ fate control”, that is, the belief that individuals have control over the events in their lives. In the realm of the arts there is no “right and wrong” as established by an external authority. Drama and other arts activities can help children realize their own, internal powers of imagination and personal truth and a sense of control over their lives if the adults working with them allow them to freely express their ideas and share ownership of the play production.

¹ See APPENDIX 1 which describes a project at a Special Needs School where a children’s production was used to try and focus children with learning disabilities, especially ADD and ADHD.

2.5 The Relationship between Children's Theatre and Educational Drama

Some practitioners question the conflict between the above two areas and favour instead a synthesis of the two approaches.

Dorothy Heathcote (in Robinson 1980:164) says:

A barrier has grown up and people have taken sides. These two teams are the advocates of the so-called informal dramatics whose creed is that children shall use their own language always, versus those who consider the so-called formal production best...there is no reason why these two teams should necessarily be opposed.

Heathcote (in Robinson 1980:3), herself, sees no great dichotomy between theatre and drama-in-education. She rather compares the role of the drama teacher to that of the playwright and director as described by Brecht.

Heathcote (in Robinson 1980:11) states:

I can find no basic conflict between those teachers who prefer to make and show plays to others and those who prefer to base their work on games. Between these two are many subtle shades of activity. The learning which comes about is not really to do with the activities themselves. It is to do with the quality of the experience for the group and the relevance of the activities to the underlying purposes of the teacher.

Heathcote (in Robinson 1980:12) refers to the "four faces of dramatic activity".

These are:

1. Making plays for audiences.
2. Knowing the craft, history and place of the theatre in our lives.
3. Learning through making plays.
4. Using the conventions of 'as if it were' to motivate study.

As far as making plays are concerned, Heathcote (in Robinson 1980: 11) says:

This can be a meaningful experience for children...making plays seems to have gone out of fashion in education possibly because people did not learn to do it well with children who were not necessarily committed. When we ask this of children, we must treat them as the artists they can become.

For too long in schools we have refused to let children function as artists. We make them learn *about* it.

Heathcote (in Robinson 1980: 12) believes that through making plays the conventions of theatre can be used to limit the world to certain agreed boundaries which will in fact free children as it removes certain chance elements. For Heathcote (in Robinson 1980: 12), a new centre to drama as a learning medium may be found as theatrical conventions are employed so as to find a way out of the drama-theatre conflict.

Ward (1957: 12) states that creative theatre and creative dramatics are two different aspects of child drama with no conflict in ideology between them; they rather complement each other. This view is also upheld by Morgan and Saxton (1989: 1) who state:

Drama and theatre are not mutually exclusive. If drama is about meaning, it is the art form of theatre which encompasses and contains that meaning. If theatre is about expression, then it is the dramatic exploration of the meaning which fuels the expression .

Lynn MacGregor (1977: 19) also sees the similarities between educational drama and theatre, specifically in the areas of projecting into roles and characters and in the use of space, time and objects of expression. When

studying the methodology of practitioners in both fields she was struck by the similarities in approach and intention – in both there was a common concern for the development of the child as an individual and an overall concern for the child as member of a group.

MacGregor (1977: 10) finds that fundamental to the aims of educational drama is that it requires of children to project into imagined or assumed roles or situations. This process of projection is called 'acting-out'. This "acting-out" element is the essence of children in performance as well. It therefore stands to reason that whatever is achieved in educational drama will also be achieved by Children's Theatre. According to MacGregor (1977: 11) the benefits of "acting-out" can be found in the opportunity it gives children to explore an idea as it involves making an imaginative leap from their actual situation or roles - not supposed ones. "Acting -out" is, according to her, usually improvised but not necessarily so. It does however, require immediacy of response.

Heathcote (in Hodgson 1972: 158) says:

But somehow the creative urge in drama cannot be completed without an audience to participate in what is at once its birth and its destruction. So, it is easily seen that the emphasis will be placed upon this final situation and this is rightly so.

Heathcote (in Hodgson 1972: 159) adds that as the child grows and his/her ability to verbalize becomes stronger there may be less need for the playing out and more need for a challenge towards the verbalization and real planning of the situation and, at a later date still, these children need a further challenge: possibly to become interpreters of someone else's writing.

Robinson (1989: 4) believes that the dichotomy between educational drama and theatre has been opened up because of a mistaken over-emphasis, by educationalists, on self-expression and individuality and that this has blurred some of the most important functions of the arts in school. He believes that it is part of the drama teacher's responsibility to help children understand and participate in theatre activities. The emphasis on individuality and self-expression as a way of developing individuality may be having just the opposite effect as children become isolated, self-absorbed and finally, incapable of expressing their insights to themselves and others.

Robinson (1980: 5) raises a number of questions concerning the basic aims of arts education:

If the point of arts education is to encourage self-expression and creativity, as many have claimed it does, does this mean that teaching children to understand and appreciate realized art forms...is less important than it was formerly thought to be in schools? Are self-expression and creativity really the point of arts education? Does all this creative activity...have a purpose or is it just 'a good thing'? Should children be encouraged to perform in schools? Many of these issues hinge on the apparently rival claims for appreciation – that is, what others do - and participation - that is, doing it yourself.

A further issue that is of note here is the debate around the issues of theatre as an art form and drama as a methodology. Is arts education focused on appreciation of the art form or is it concerned with the methodology?

Wright (in Robinson 1980: 88) states that the relationship between theatre and drama teaching is peculiar and interesting. Children who are taught painting produce paintings, music classes produce music. But although it may be part of the work of the drama class to produce plays, this is neither necessary nor the usual objective. Should this be the case?

Wright (in Robinson 1980: 104) investigated whether the practices of theatre can be helpful to drama teachers. In the sixties, drama teachers largely abandoned theatre in a reaction against the uncomprehending recitation of texts and received notions of what theatrical performances are and can be. Wright (in Robinson 1980: 104), however, concludes that form should not be done away with in drama work and he warns against a deluded reliance on subjective experience. He feels that in theatre, form is used as a way of isolating arguments and presenting them for scrutiny - the same should happen in the drama lesson. Fleming (1997: 2) feels that there has been an erosion of the distinction between “experiencing” and “spectating” by recognizing that participants in drama are always spectators; there is an ongoing reflective element in drama. This element is what leads to the process becoming an art form. Participation in dramatic play will remain on the level of methodology unless there is active reflection. The use of theatrical elements such as characterization, dialogue, dramatic structure and character analysis will aid reflection.

Practitioners now accept the fact that the development of understanding in drama arises through participation in the art form. There is now less reliance on psychology and theories of child play for theoretical underpinning for classroom practice and a greater readiness to embrace drama theoreticians such as Esslin, Elam, Pfister, Szondi and theatre practitioners such as Brecht and Boal. There has been a gradual shift from a theoretical focus on the subjective, personal growth of the individual through creative processes of self-expression to a recognition of the social nature of drama and the importance of the development of understanding in objective, cultural context. Fleming (1997: 3), however, does feel that some of the issues are still unresolved. These mainly focus on the question of whether it is appropriate to focus on the teaching of drama skills. In the past, educational drama practitioners resisted the teaching of skills as they disapproved of the implied emphasis on decontextualised theatre skills with

insufficient emphasis on content. In this regard, Fleming (1997: 3) believes that the developing ability in drama need not and should not entail a focus on narrowly defined skills devoid of recognition of the importance of content and context.

Greater synthesis has emerged between the two opposing groups in recent years.

Despite the initial misunderstandings and hostility between drama teachers and theatres, while first principles on either side were being worked out, there now exists as never before a climate of potential co-operation .

(Chapman in Robinson 1980: 108.)

A synthesis between the two approaches would perhaps, ultimately, lead to a most enriching experience for children involved in Children's Theatre. Fleming (1997: 1-3) pleads for a synthesis between the two opposing views concerning drama teaching. He feels that a consensus seemed to be emerging as a result of a recognition that opposition to theatre, which was characteristic of the approach of some advocates of drama-in-education, was, in fact, a rejection of one particular, traditional conception of theatre and theatre practice where the focus was almost exclusively on the outward manifestation of performance (the old schools of elocution).

The overall tendency seems to be an approximation of the two forms and the realization that both can benefit from the basic characteristics of the other. Children's theatre should incorporate the in-depth study of context and content and depth of personal exploration and involvement which is to be found in educational drama whilst educational drama, in turn, can benefit from the more structured nature of Children's theatre.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW : The use of the child actor and the emergence of theatre for children

The child performer has been in evidence for many centuries but not until the 20th century was any attempt made to formulate a satisfactory methodology for working with children or for understanding their specific needs.

Even so, Children's Theatre had some earlier, illustrious supporters. Mark Twain (in Swartzell 1990: xiii) said:

Children's Theatre is one of the very, very great inventions of the 20th century...children's theatre's vast educational value is now but dimly perceived and but vaguely understood ... (it) will someday presently come to be recognized.

Stanislavsky (in Swartzell 1990: xiv), when asked about the difference between adult and children's theatre replied that there was none although theatre for young people should be of a higher standard.

Earlier, illustrious playwrights wrote plays specifically for a cast of child actors. Lyly, for example wrote his plays for the boys actors at St Paul's where they drew large audiences. The great appeal to the sophisticated audiences of these highly artificial plays presented in the private theatres is often credited to the charm of the young actors performing them. And Shakespeare, in addition to the female roles in his dramas which were performed by young boys, also peopled his tragedies and histories with memorable youths . The French playwright, Jean Racine, wrote two plays, *Esther* and *Athalie* for the girls at Saint-Cyr aged from six to nineteen. Swartzell (1990: xiv) believes that

Children`s Theatre is at once the youngest and the oldest of the theatre arts...youngest in the sense that conscious attention has been given to creating a theatre specifically for youth only in the current century; oldest in that children have been part of theatre from its beginning.

3.1 The child performer in the pre-20TH century era

According to Swortzell (1990: xix), children and young people had been part of theatrical presentation from the earliest times when young children participated as performers in ancient Egyptian rituals – the young girls as dancers and the boys as acrobats. Children took part in early Greek rituals and dramatic performances dedicated to the god Dionysus. Historians have suggested that children mimed these roles while adults actors delivered the lines. Children apparently formed part of Roman Pantomime troupes:

In Roman Pantomime, troupes of players, often including children, performed on hastily erected stages in the open air ... Pantomime underwent many changes, eventually growing into an elaborate theatrical art, investituted with ornate scenery and costume, but still using children as cherubs, cupids and other mythological figures. (Swortzell 1990: xx).

During the Middle Ages, the first liturgical plays were performed by priests and choir boys. According to Hudson (1971: 8) it was a chorister who would have played the angel at the empty tomb of Christ, greeting the priests portraying the three Marys .The choirboys of St Paul`s not only took part in this little scene, but in many other dramas and plays that gradually evolved from it. Inevitably they were cast as angels; resplendent in their wings, they stood high up in the cathedral roof to sing out the glad tidings of Christmas to the shepherds at the altar far below; or, standing over the crib, greeted the three wise men as they followed the candle-lit star that hung above the choir from the great west door of the Cathedral .The boys were not only cast in the obvious angelic roles – occasionally they also did duty as little devils:

The Devil emerged followed by his minions, little imps who cavorted gaily in wild abandonment. Their mischievous pranks quickly earned them laughs and no doubt especially pleased the parents in the audience because they were portrayed by the town children. (Swortzell 1990: xx).

According to Swortzell (1990: xx) children were by no means only given non-speaking parts and indeed performed main parts in plays such as *The Brome Abraham and Isaac*.

When liturgical drama moved out of the cathedrals and churches and onto the townsquare or market place and were taken over by the townspeople themselves, it can be imagined that children still remained part of family groups performing in cycles of plays performed in market towns.

An early example of educational theatre can also be found in the 10th century when Hrothswitha of Gondersheim, a teacher in a school in Saxony, decided to accomplish several academic tasks at once by giving her students short plays to enact. She wrote in Latin, thereby improving the language skills of her pupils as they spoke her lines. And because she told stories of Christian martyrs, religious instruction was also vividly provided, along with such other benefits as the improvement of students' voice, diction, poise, concentration and socialization. (Swortzell 1990: xxi). Like Hrothswitha, Roger Ascham and Nicholas Udell in Tudor England also advocated the use of drama as a means of attaining several educational goals. (Swortzell 1990: xxi)

During the Renaissance, travelling family troupes performed Commedia dell'Arte plays throughout Europe. These troupes surely must have used child performers in the staging of their plays. The Renaissance saw the publication of the first plays specifically written for children. *A new Interlude for Children to*

Play, named 'Jack Juggler', Both Witty and very Pleasant was written between 1553 and 1558 and was the first published play expressly written for children to perform. Another play written during this period specifically for children to perform was *Play of the Weather* by John Heywood (Swartzell 1990: xx).

At the same time as Shakespeare and his troupe were performing at the Globe theatre, we know that children's companies, under the leadership of choirmasters, also existed. The children's companies consisted mainly of choir boys at chapels or cathedrals (Brockett 1969: 132). The choir boys of for instance, the Chapel Royal in England, were seen as part of the royal household and, as part of their duties, had to entertain the nobles with with songs and dances (Hudson 1971: 17).

Hudson (1971: 18) believes that the choir boys were at the forefront of the development of English drama:

As with the choirboys who, in the Middle Ages, had found themselves performing the Miracle Plays in the abbeys and cathedrals, the Chapel Children were doubtless unaware that they had joined in leading the development of English drama. Yet it was inevitable that they should; for it was to the noblemen's courts that the playwrights now came, and in their halls that were chiefly performed the new 'Morality plays' and the 'Interludes' that had evolved from the old religious drama.

The boys of the Chapel Royal were by no means exceptional. The choir boys at St Paul's cathedral were also encouraged to entertain their elders by acting the old plays of Terence and Plautus for a better education. The choirmasters also wrote plays for their charges and Hudson believes that herein lies the origin of musical theatre (1971: 20).

When Sebastian Westcott became choirmaster of the boys at St Paul's, he soon realized that the talented boys of St Paul's were quite as capable of providing

entertainment as the Children of the Chapel. He formed the boys into a company and took them to perform before Princess Elizabeth in 1552. She was apparently impressed by them because when she took to the throne they became the favourites at court. This started a new trend and many schoolmasters were quick to seize advantage of the queen's enthusiasm for drama. Before long the boys of Eton, Merchant Taylors and Westminster were all performing at court (Hudson 1971: 21).

Playwrights of the day also approached the boys' companies to perform their works. One of the most notable playwrights was John Lyly. John Lyly had become associated with the boy players in 1584 when he wrote *Campaspe* for them. (Nicoll 1957: 257). The audience delighted in the grace and artificiality of his dialogue and his sly references to contemporary scandals (Hartnoll 1967: 84). Lyly's gay, delicate plays were particularly well-suited to the boys' lyrical voices, wit and charm. The relationship was mutually beneficial because not only did the boys bring out the charm of his plays with their natural singing, acting and dancing skills but they became a major attraction because of the excellence of the plays written for them (Hudson 1971: 26).

In 1576 the Chapel Boys opened their own theatre at Blackfriars. The Blackfriars Theatre was also sometimes leased to the boy-actors drawn from the choir schools of St Paul's and the Chapel Royal, for whom Ben Jonson wrote some excellent comedies on classical themes. They had earlier appeared with great success in a smaller theatre nearby, when their chief playwright had been John Lyly. In 1600 the theatre was leased to the manager of another boys' company which was extremely successful until 1608 when it was silenced for violations of censorship (Brockett 1969: 130).

The boys' companies were a rarity in theatre history – children's companies performing mainly for adult audiences with scripts which obviously appealed to adults and were specifically meant for adults.

The boys' companies went into decline possibly because of a growing awareness that many choir masters were, in fact, exploiting the pupils for personal gain (Brockett 1969: 132). In addition, the adult companies were now flourishing and they replaced the boys' companies as the queen's favourites at court (Hudson 1971: 31).

It was within the adult companies that child performers were to continue their careers. Initially, they would have joined a company, from about the age of 10, as an apprentice. Each company employed approximately three to five boys as apprentices and they performed child and female roles. A boy began his apprenticeship when he was between ten and fourteen and continued until he reached the age of eighteen to twenty-one. At the end of his training he might be taken into a troupe as a regular member, or he might enter another trade. Each boy was apprenticed to an individual actor who trained him and gave him room and board. The company paid the master for the boy's services (Brockett 1969: 132).

The children were mostly drawn from humble homes and probably lacked basic schooling. Nevertheless, theatre managers were constantly on the look-out for talented children. The playing booths in the village fairs and the street pageants would have provided them with a showcase for talent. The boys performed the roles of fairies, pygmies, beggars and pages. Hudson (1971: 43) believes that the many roles of this nature in Elizabethan plays give us a clue as to the young performers' natures:

In their cheekiness and self-confidence we can know exactly what sort of children they were.

But perhaps their most important roles were those of females. Boys had to portray all the female roles as women were not allowed on the Elizabethan stage. To a modern audience this might seem strange and disconcertingly unrealistic but to an Elizabethan the spoken word was all-important, not the visual element (Hudson 1971: 44).

Playwrights also wrote their plays with the foreknowledge that a child had to perform the lines. Shakespeare showed great awareness of the limitations of boy actors in their inability to cope with strong emotions. In roles such as Viola, Rosalind and Portia, he poured the feeling into the lines, so the child needed only to speak the poetry to create the desired effect (Hudson 1971: 44).

The boys' companies staged a comeback 16 years later. First the boys of St Paul's started performing again at the little theatre in the Almonry House and were attracting considerable attention. Soon after in 1600 Nathaniel Giles, Henry Evans and James Robinson decided to revive once more the acting company of the Children of the Chapel. For this purpose they relied on the Queen's earlier permission granted to choir masters to take any child into service. This led to the kidnapping of at least eight boys and, unless their fathers were gentleman, they could do nothing about it (Hudson 1971: 50- 55).

Admission fees to the indoor Children's Theatres were more expensive than at the open-air public theatres such as the Globe, with the result that the Children's Theatres were frequented by a higher class of patron. Even ladies could attend the theatre without damaging their reputation. The plays were popular for their beautiful music, lavish costumes and the poetry and wit of the playwrights. A typical performance would have started with musical entertainment provided by the Chapel orchestra, followed by choir singing by the boys. This would then be followed by the play itself which usually tried to display the boys' talent for 'artificial comedy'. They had tremendous wit and personality, and indeed,

potential, but their youth prevented them from performing high tragedy. Indeed, on the occasions when they had done so they were greeted with derision, and they actually were to parody their own attempts in Johnson's play *The Poetaster* (Hudson 1971: 58, 66).

The playwright, Benjamin Johnson, used the Blackfriars Theatre as a base and wrote many plays satirizing other popular playwrights. The playwrights Thomas Dekker and John Marsden launched a counterattack with the boys from St Paul's. The boys even parodied the players in the public theatres. The actors at the Globe apparently did not take kindly to having Children of the Chapel poke fun at them in this way (Hudson 1971: 68). Much rivalry existed and plays were often "stolen" from one another as when The Chamberlain's Men stole *The Malcontent* written for the children by John Marston and performed it as *One for Another* (Hudson 1971: 68).

Even Shakespeare had to admit to the Boys' ability. In Act II Scene 2 of *Hamlet*, the following conversation takes place between Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

Rosencrantz: There is, sir, an eyrie of children....that cry out on the top of the question and are most tyrannically clapped for't. These are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages...that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goosequills and dare scarce come thither.

Hamlet: What, are they children? Who maintains 'em? How are they escorted? Will they persue the quality no longer than they can sing? Will they not say afterwards, if they should grow themselves to common players (as is most like, if their means are no better), their writers do them wrong to make them exclaim against their own succession?

Rosencrantz: Faith, there has been much to-do on both sides, and the nation holds it no sin to tarre them to controversy. There was, for a while, no money bid for argument unless the poet and the player went to cuffs on the question.

Hamlet: Is't possible?

Guildenstern: O, there has been much throwing about of brains.

Hamlet: Do the Boys carry it?

Rosencrantz: Ay, that they do, my lord. Hercules and his load too.

When one of the boy actors died of the Plague in 1603 at the age of 13, Ben Johnson (Hudson 1971:70) wrote the following epitaph:

Weep with me all you that read
 This little story:
 And know, for whom a tear you shed,
Death's self is sorry.
 'Twas a child, that so did thrive
 In grace, and feature,

As *Heaven* and *Nature* seemed to thrive
 Which owned the creature.
 Years he numbered scarce thirteen
 When *Fates* turned cruel,
 Yet three filled *Zodiacs* had he been
 The stages jewel;
 And did act (what now we moan)
 Old men so duly
 As, sooth, the *Parcae* thought him once,
 He played so truly.
 So, by error, to his fate
 They all consented;
 But viewing him since (alas, too late)
 They have repented.
 And have sought (to give new birth)
 In baths to steep him;
 But, being so much good for earth,
 Heavens vow to keep him.

Life for the boy actors were by no means easy: first abducted and then forced to live under choir masters who were often not too concerned with their general well-being. One choir master, Giles, was brought to trial for his abduction and treatment of boys and thereafter forceful recruitment was abolished.

Life for these children became somewhat easier when James I ascended the throne. The children now received tenpence a day and a free university education when their services were no longer required.

Yet the companies again went into decline. In the early days their comedies were popular as audiences delighted in listening to playwrights slight each other. Yet the children were to come to find themselves caught in their own trap.

The public now expected this kind of entertainment from the Chapel Boys, but the original sources of material were fast drying up. The 'War of the Theatres' had dragged to a close, and the playwrights, searching about for fresh victims to attack, found they did not need to look far. (Hudson 1971 : 76-77). Their attention turned to the king himself. Despite the fact that King James' wife, Anne of Denmark, had taken the Blackfriars Boys under her patronage, Ben Johnson, John Marston and George Chapman wrote *Eastward Ho*, a witty, amusing play strongly critical of the king. The playwrights were arrested and the queen withdrew her patronage of the company. They were now known as the "Children of the Revels". Yet this incident did not deter the company. They staged a second satirical play, *The Isle of Gulls* which so angered the king that he ordered all involved arrested and a division between the acting and singing sections of the company was made as it was felt that children singing in chapel should not be allowed to also appear as comedians and actors in profane exercises. When the acting division, now known as "The Children of Blackfriars" staged a third satirical play, the king had them arrested. When released, some of the children joined the open-air public companies whilst others, like the very talented Nathan Field, joined a new subdued Whitefriars where he became known as the finest actor of his day, taking the place of such great men as Edward Alleyn and Richard Burbage. But the success was short-lived despite his services. Children of Whitefriars never achieved the vitality and brilliance of the hey-day of the Chapel Royal. Without the notoriety of their satire the children could be no match for the King's Men; and eventually they degenerated into a touring company, to fade gradually away into oblivion. The company at the Chapel Royal had not been involved in the same quarrels as the Blackfriars/Whitefriars group, choosing instead to play a far more subdued role. This in turn led to their slide into oblivion and in 1606 they finally closed their doors (Hudson 1971: 78, 81, 84).

But during those years children had given much in service to the theatre. While like themselves the drama was young and growing, they suited each other. And the children brought vitality and singing to many of the plays their elders wrote. Without the boys' companies one may wonder if much of the work of Ben Jonson, John Marston, Thomas Dekker and many more, could ever have seen the light of day...it had been an important, indeed vital, contribution...their influence had left its mark upon our theatre, for we can feel it yet in our musical comedy..(it) had sowed the seeds of a theatrical tradition that is with us still....theirs had been no small contribution to the history of the English theatre (Hudson 1971: 88).

The decline of the Elizabethan boys' companies certainly did not mean the end of children on stage. Throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries there is evidence of child performers on stage. According to Kester (in Siks & Dunnington 1961: 45), a certain Madam de Genlis engaged French children during the 18th century in miniature performances for the delight of the nobles and the education of her young charges. Her dramas for children were collected under the title *Le Theatre D'Education* (Swortzell 1990: xxiii).

The 19th century saw an upsurge in the popularity of children's literature and although few playwrights wrote scripts for the stage, many of these children's novels were dramatized and adapted for the stage such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Carroll was a staunch supporter of Children's Theatre and advocated legislation to protect stage children (Swortzell 1990: xxiii). The 19th century was the era of the child actor and some of these performers were so successful that adult actors despaired at their popularity. In England, "Master Betty", known as Young Roscius, performed Hamlet in 1804 at the age of 13 and was apparently more popular than Mrs Siddons. It is reported that Parliament was adjourned on a motion by William Pitt the Younger so that members could attend his performance (Leach 1970: 48).

The young Betty, in fact, generated an kind of Bettimania which swept England at the time. A certain Joseph Weston dedicated the following verse to Betty:

Nature, one day, with Art was notes comparing,
 'I cannot bear' said she, 'your vaunts of sharing
 My sole creation! If I grant that Kemble
 May, of us twain, yourself the most resemble,
 And that, though I bestow'd the shape and face,
 You added action, energy and grace-
 What then? Exclusivity is Cooke my own;
 Of thee regardless- nay to thee unknown!'
 'Marry come up!' quoth Art, 'since thus you flout me
 Try! make one man (depriv'd of my assistance)
 A perfect play'r- and I will keep my distance.'
 'A man!' Dame Nature in a rage replied,
 'A child-a very child shall crush thy pride!'
 True to her word, she stamp'd her infant Son
 The faithful miniature of Roscius gone –
 Cooke, Kemble, Holman, Garrick – all in one!
 (Playfair 1967: 5)

According to Playfair (1967 :75), Betty was to a large extent, fashion's discovery. What he provided was an escape from tedium- a new 'style of conversation' to replace the topic of Napoleon and his invasion threat which was presumably becoming a bore. In the same way, it may be noted, the Beatles ousted the Profumo scandal late in 1963.

Other child actors included Howard Payne, Cordelia Howard and the sisters Kate and Ellen Bateman aged seven and nine who interpreted great Shakespearean roles such as Portia, Hamlet and Shylock which audiences clamoured to see. These children, however, appeared in adult productions staged for an adult audience which even at the time, drew great criticism from certain quarters. The reporter Leigh Hunt wrote in *The News* at the time that the introduction of children on the stage in characters irreconcilable to their age and size was systematically absurd (Playfair 1967: 135).

The notion of children appearing in plays appropriate to their age did not exist at this stage. A movement started however which saw the benefit of children taking part in plays - this time not as a theatrical innovation of public entertainment, but as a means of education. Initially it usually meant acting plays and learning about dramatic literature. The educational value of this seemed to lie in the fact that pupils who take part in performance of plays learn to speak well and to express emotion becomingly; to be expressive yet restrained; to subordinate the individual to the whole; to play the game; to be resourceful and self possessed and mitigate personal disabilities (Tave in Robinson 1980: 142).

3.2 The emergence of Children`s Theatre

In the early 1800`s the idea of children performing for young audiences emerged for the first time with the development of the Christmas pantomime but it was only at the beginning of the 20th century, in 1914, that *Peter Pan*, a play specifically designed for young audiences was staged. According to Wood (1997: 9) this can be regarded as the first widely successful children`s play although this was preceded in 1903 by the Children`s Educational Theatre in New York staging five seasons of childrens` plays specifically for children (Swortzell 1990: xxiv). It was only in 1914 that theatre aimed specifically at children really started developing when Jean Sterling Mackay tried a season of children`s plays as a substitute for the pantomime in the Christmas season. (Goldberg 1974: 60). In 1920 Natalia Sats opened a theatre for children in Moscow which became very successful and inspired the composer Prokofiev to compose *Peter and the Wolf* for them (Swotzell1990: xxiv).

In 1927 Bertha Waddell founded the Scottish Children`s Theatre, the first professional company of its kind (Wood 1997: 9).

The period following the Second World War saw the formation of several children's theatre companies such as John Allen's Glyndebourne Children's Theatre, John English's Midland Arts Centre, George Devine's Young Vic Players and Caryl Jenner's Mobile Theatre which subsequently became the Unicorn Theatre, the first full-time professional theatre for children in London (Wood 1997 :9). Natalia Sats also returned to Moscow after spending the war in exile and founded the State Musical Theatre where a repertory of operas and musical entertainments for children and young people were staged (Swortzell 1990: xxvi).

According to Swortzell (1990: xxvi), a period of adaptations for the stage followed. A.A Milne, for instance, specialized in dramatizing the works of other authors such as Kenneth Graham's *Wind in the Willows* as well as his own *The Ugly Duckling* for Children's Theatre.

Many original scripts for the Children's theatre stage were also created. Starting with *Jack and the Beanstalk* in 1935, Charlotte Chorpenning wrote a series of more than twenty plays and Aurand Harris contributed nearly forty plays to the genre.

At about the same time, the Walt Disney film studio made their presence felt with films such as *Snowwhite and the Seven Dwarves* in 1939 and *Pinnocchio* in 1940 which were to influence most future styles and performances in Children's Theatre. The Disney studio, in turn, was influenced by stage productions on the Children's Theatre stages. Apparently whilst working on *Pinnocchio* they attended as many as seven performances of the production by Yasha Frank staged for the Children's Unit of the Federal Theatre Project in Los Angeles. Frank had created a vigorous physical style of performance that

incorporated the skills of numerous vaudeville entertainers who were out of work at the time. This production, written in sing-song doggerel and fast-moving scenes, became a hallmark in American professional Children's Theatre productions (Swortzell 1990: xxvi-xxvii). It can be argued that even today, virtually all Children's Theatre productions are greatly influenced by the current Hollywood Children's films on circuit.

During the twentieth century, children were also actively involved in opera and musical drama. According to Swortzell (1990: xxvii) many well-known composers composed music for children's productions. These included Natalia Sats' work with the State Musical Theatre in Moscow, Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht with their composition of *Der Jasager* as a school opera to be performed entirely by students and works by Carl Orff, Benjamin Britten and others specifically written for performance by children.

Theatre productions for children, however, mostly followed the pattern of plays performed for a child audience by mostly adult actors. This is the case with the English Polka Dot Theatre, Leon Chancerel's Theatre of Town and Field in France, Italy's Teatro per Ragazzi, Germany's Theater der Jugend, Madam Satz's Central Children's Theatre in Russia, the National Youth Theatre in Bulgaria. There were a few exceptions where children were used as the actual performers – like Gerald Tannenbaum, Executive Director of the China Welfare Institute in Shanghai who in 1947 used child actors to build a communal ensemble which did plays incorporating both the modern drama and the traditional Peking Opera style (Goldberg 1974: 77).

3.3 The emergence of Educational Drama

Drama in schools during the post-war era was doing very well. Although this still mainly referred to the production of school plays, the emphasis was beginning to shift.

There was a shift in the educational climate as a whole. The developing field of child psychology, for example, was beginning to give a new prominence to the value of play and 'learning through experience'....self-expression and creativity were now becoming by many to be seen as the real point of drama in schools (Robinson 1980: 143).

From the 1950's British Children's Theatre was influenced by Peter Slade and his ideas concerning the participation play. This set the teaching of drama on a new course, away from theatre (Robinson 1980: 144). The avoidance of theatrical convention became the general norm of productions for children in England. Goldberg (1974: 61) remarks that England is one of the few countries in the Europe with an extensive interest in the drama as *process* in developing the child. It is little wonder that here is great interest in creative dramatics, recreational drama and forms of theatre which heavily stress process, like the Way, Berman and TIE methods. In 1953 Brian Way founded the Theatre Centre Ltd which became the prototype of all participation drama in the English – speaking countries of the world. He evolved a style of arena production with absolute simplicity of decor and heavy involvement of the young audience in the drama. At his productions, the children are always limited in number to a group that can participate creatively in the action of the play (Goldberg 1974: 60).

George Devine at the Royal Court Theatre founded the Studio to establish the primacy of creative expression on the part of children so as to give them an equal voice with the actor and not hinder them with any preconceptions about who should be doing the acting and who should be watching it.

The group later formulated the following principles in their work with young people:

1. To give any young person the confidence to know that their voice is worth listening to.
2. To give status to their voices (Chapman in Robinson 1980: 128).

They decided that any professional skills which they might be able to offer should not be used to interfere with what the company wanted to say. They attempted to retain some of the natural characteristics of the company, i.e. a capacity for a great deal of fun and enjoyment, raw energy, naturalness, a high level of imagination and intuition coupled with a real desire to learn (Chapman in Robinson 1980: 130).

All these above groups contributed to a the blossoming of Theatre-in-Education and small-scale touring children's theatre groups and a growing interest in children's theatre as an art form (Wood 1997: 10).

3.4 Children's Theatre in the USA

American Children's Theatre originated with children actually involved in the performance. Alice Minnie Herts founded the Children's Educational Theatre in New York in 1903 in a settlement house on the lower East side of Manhattan as a recreational project for the entire neighbourhood where participation in theatre provided an introduction to the English language and to American social behaviour for many of the participants. Since most of these immigrants were

literate but unfamiliar with America, the project was a direct appeal to their interest in cultural enrichment as well as an attempt to integrate them into a new community through a neighbourhood project. (This project is of particular interest when viewed from a South African perspective and could form the basis of further research). According to Goldberg (1974: 27) this pattern, really a recreational drama approach, dominated the children's theatre movement during the first decades of its existence.

This was followed by a period of community theatre projects. During the pre-war era there was great interest in local theatricals. In 1910 the Drama League was founded and provided production advice and a chance to share ideas about community theatre, including theatre for children performed by adult and child casts. The Drama League, however, disbanded in 1931 (Goldberg 1974: 28).

Professional theatre did not show much interest in children's theatre and few professional companies showed any interest in staging plays for children. According to McCaslin (1978: 3) one exception to this rule was Clare Tree Major who toured all over America in the 1930's and 1940's with a programme of plays for children.

Children's Theatre was further encouraged by the recreation programmes in many municipalities. This led to the founding of influential groups such as the Palo Alto Children's Theatre. This was a theatre project funded by the city of Palo Alto's Recreational Department and it used only children and teenagers in the casts of the plays. Occasionally this type of Children's Theatre occurs within schools as well as was the case with the Hopkins Eisenhower High school in Hopkins, Minnesota, a suburb of Minneapolis, under the leadership of Tony Steblay, where the students were responsible for all aspects of the production.

Some programmes use professional adult actors to lead groups of children in playmaking as is the case with the Children's Theatre International who sent

their actors into school. The Minneapolis Children's Theatre Company also relied on a collaboration between adult and child performers.

According to Goldberg (1974: 30), the universities also started incorporating Children's Theatre into their training programmes. The first project of this nature was started by Imogene Hogle at Emerson College in Boston in 1920. Some organizations included the child in a role other than that of the spectator. Such was the case with the federally sponsored Federal Theatre. Since the goal of the Federal Theatre was not simply entertainment, new scripts were developed with educational content, audience research was carried out and children's involvement in the playmaking process was also explored.

According to McCaslin (1978:3), the first distinction between children's theatre and creative dramatics was made by Winifred Ward at the North Western University's School of Speech. The same rift hereafter occurred between the followers of theatrical presentation and the advocates of participational drama as was seen elsewhere.

3.5 Children's Theatre in South Africa

The development of Children's Theatre in South Africa largely mirrored the developments in thinking elsewhere. The same conflict between the DIE and Children's Theatre movements also manifested here.

In South Africa, the late 1800's and early twentieth century saw some British and American touring companies visiting with children's productions such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. During the 1940's a turning point was reached when Celia Ward came to South Africa from Wales as part of a teacher exchange programme. She started a campaign in 1942 for the establishment of Children's Theatre in South Africa. This led to the founding of Children's Theatre calibre

and to mount productions that were both lavish and elaborate. These lofty, ideals, ironically, resulted in the demise of the organization when escalating costs could not be met. The Johannesburg branch of the organization did, however, manage to stage 74 productions before its demise in 1962 (Storrar 1987: 272).

Rosalie van der Gucht arrived in South Africa from England in 1940 and was to become a most significant driving force behind the establishment of Children's Theatre in South Africa. She was initially also involved with Children's Theatre Incorporated but broke away after five years in 1956 to form Theatre for Youth and her own style. This split represented a general dichotomy in the views concerning Children's Drama and theatre. On the one hand, Evans and Children's Theatre Incorporated believed in the 'magic' of the theatre and to this end her productions made use of elaborate settings and sophisticated stage machinery that the audience could watch with wonder. Van der Gucht's approach on the other hand, was one of simplicity and it encouraged participation rather than observation, she wanted to harness not only the entertainment value but also the educational possibilities. Van der Gucht's sets and costumes were simple and as her actors, she used students from the University of Cape Town's drama department. Her work served as inspiration to other groups and individuals such as Robin Malan who became leader of PACT playwork in the 1970's and Janice Honeyman who extensively wrote and directed for Children's Theatre (Storrar 1987: 273). Van der Gucht's legacy was upheld specifically by the members of SAADYT where individuals such as Esther van Ryswyk and Gay Morris continued her work. Other universities also continued Van der Gucht's work in their drama departments.

The Performing Arts Councils' Drama Departments during the 1970's and 1980's all had a Children's Theatre division and many new scripts were workshopped or written for performance in both English and Afrikaans. These performances, however, usually meant performance by adult professional actors for a child audience.

There is in fact, no doubt that the majority of Children`s Theatre groups, whether commercial or non-commercial, consist of adults performing for child audiences. The child as performer has been largely overlooked. Even more so, has been the formulation of a suitable methodology for working with children. We have come a long way in our understanding of children and their needs since the days of the Elizabethan choir masters and yet, very often, children are subjected to treatment which is not very far from the unsympathetic treatment the choir boys received from their masters when working on a production.

The specific values and aims of Children`s Theatre should be examined and an attempt should be made to determine whether participation in a theatrical event is of any benefit to a child. Should this be the case, a satisfactory methodology which benefits the child in his/her personal development should be formulated.

CHAPTER 4

THE VALUE & AIMS OF CHILDREN'S THEATRE

Crucial to the whole issue of Children's Theatre is the question of whether it has any value at all. If participation in a play is of no value to a child then the formulation of a methodology would be superfluous. For that reason, the value of Children's Theatre needs to be discussed before any aims can be formulated and only when aims have been outlined can a specific approach be drawn up accordingly.

4.1 The Value of Children's Theatre

The first and most obvious question to be asked surely has to be 'Why children's theatre at all?' Why go through all the effort, frustration and exhaustion of staging a children's play with children as the performers?

Robinson (1980: 151) states:

the raw materials of drama and theatre are among the most common elements in human behaviour and social action. We have a fundamental capacity for dramatizing which is as common as language and gesture; the capacity to represent; to let one action or experience stand for another. It begins early in childhood as symbolic play and it persists into maturity and beyond in the capacity to take on a role. We take on the personality of others to bring them to life for the listener and to add our commentary on them through the way we represent them. Drama teachers and those in the theatre have not invented this capacity, anymore than a sculptor invents the stone he works with.

Working with children on a production is therefore drawing on very basic human behavioural elements.

Drama as an extension of children's play was, as stated before, greatly emphasised by practitioners such as Peter Slade. The benefits of child's play then obviously extended into dramatic play. Slade (1958:35) makes a distinction between Personal and Projected play. According to him the former leads to various physical pursuits such as athletic activities as well as child acting (which illustrates the point that Slade perceived child acting to be no more than imitational in nature). The latter, according to him, leads to

Art, playing instruments, love of freshwater-fishing, non-violent games, reading, writing, observation, patience, concentration, organisation and wise government. To these should be added Play production .

Slade (1958: 107) lists 31 benefits of Play, ranging from the working off of emotions to "depth experiences" being more easily absorbed. He also cites 15 benefits of dramatic play, specifically. These include the study of group and team work to the development of sincerity and absorption.

Although Slade mainly refers to free dramatic play, children partaking in a production can also experience many of the benefits of free, dramatic play.

Children, according to Swartzell (1990: xvii) experience a need to "dress up" and play games (see Chapter 2.4.1) and play participation allows for this natural tendency. This also complies with what Allen (1979: 42) sees as children's natural acceptance of constraints to their free play and the tendency to want to regulate events. Play rehearsal and production is therefore not an external constraint forced upon children but follows a natural pattern which children themselves provide when playing. In addition, play rehearsal, which to advocates of unconstrained play might seem like unnecessary restriction on free play is, in fact, in line with Freud's assertion (in Lowenfeld in Hodgson

1972:49) that repetition strengthens mastery of a situation which in turn gives children a sense of accomplishment and confidence.

Lowenfeld (in Hodgson 1972: 50) describes four functions of dramatic play, and participation in a production fulfills all four of these functions. They include the function of emotional expression (even though the emotions which they might be required to express are not strictly their own but belong to a fictitious character, they are still drawing on their own emotional reserves to understand and express the emotion), the functions of relaxation and amusement (play production as a recreational activity) and the function of social interaction (children interacting during the rehearsal and performance period both socially and intellectually, whilst discussing the script).

Slade (1958: 35) states that:

Play calls forth courage, both moral and physical. And out of this particular form of activity arises the term team-spirit. Team-spirit is connected with social consciousness. It is the development of Self outwards, towards a consideration of others. One aspect of the child's development which is often overlooked as far as drama and theatre is concerned, is the socializing function of drama which occurs when children are involved in a project.

In addition, exploring a certain idea and social reality might lead to clarification of that reality and therefore greater understanding of a given situation. Robinson (1977:162-163) is of the opinion that in drama and theatre we envisage other realities and look through them to the actions and experiences they represent. In this manner we can reflect upon such realities.

A theatre group also exists within a certain given social reality – whether they come into the project as strangers or as old friends- and within this reality they have to negotiate with each other to bring the project to fruition. In this process individuals might have to change their perceptions of each other and accommodate each other so as to attain the common goal. In education circles

during the last few years we have seen renewed affirmation of the school's responsibilities for pupils' personal and social education. This is taken to include the training of the physical, the social and spiritual self of the child.

Participation in a play will develop each of these aspects of a child's personality – from the physical “me” using personal skills to perform the role, to the social “me” who has to function within a cast and who has a responsibility towards that cast, to the spiritual “me” who has to use creativity and imagination in the portrayal of a fictitious character. Through play participation the child will be learning valuable life skills.

How, in fact, do children learn? Piaget (in Wood 1997: 5) places action and self-directed problem-solving at the heart of planning and development. Wood (1997: 5) believes that the child learns how to control his world by acting on it and discovering the consequences of his actions. In addition, Wood (1997: 17) states that social interactions facilitate development of thought as a child is exposed to other points of view and conflicting ideas which encourage him to rethink or review his own ideas.

Bruner (in Wood 1997: 38) explores the nature of creative thinking and originality in terms of our ability not only to acquire information but also to “go beyond it” by inventing new codes and rules. Bruner (in Wood 1997: 41) also referred to cultural tools or amplifiers which exert a formative influence on human cognition. The child becomes adept at using such tools by observation and interaction with those who are masters of their use.

From the above theorists' point of view it seems clear that children need to be actively involved in a process and contribute to solving the problems which occur along the way. They need to interact with other individuals in the process, planning and negotiating and creating new structures if needs be.

Children need to manipulate the given elements under guidance of those who are masters of their use. As Fleming (1998: 5) remarks:

one of the significant insights of drama education theorists was the recognition that, left to their own devices, children are unlikely to create drama of any depth.

Ken Robinson (1980:152) echoes this and questions the popular notion that children seem to be able to instinctively create and become involved in drama work.

I once heard someone say 'We don't make children do drama at school. We allow them to do it.' I think that anyone who has spent any time trying to 'allow' an unwilling fourth form to do drama will find this curious...why should it be, if it is so natural, that so many children genuinely find it difficult to get involved in drama work?

On the other hand, through structured work, as can be found in the staging of a play, children can be guided to personal discovery and enrichment. Byers (1968: 95) believes that playmaking frees the imagination, enlarges vision, and stimulates powers of observation. Courtney (in McCaslin 1978: 22) feels that it is the student's mental activity that allows his consciousness to provide the artwork with meaning. The type of mental activity involved in this case can be typified as imagination which is built on the energetic mechanism of identification and impersonation, swinging between inner and outer, the subjective and objective. In genetic and development context, this energetic

mechanism activates the mind to relate to the environment by considering possibilities. Yet it is through play that the children learns to utilize this mechanism. Play occurs when identification becomes externalized, and play is the way in which the child begins to relate the inner and outer worlds through mediate objects. The child builds the endless worlds of play into the adult world structures.

Courtney (in McCaslin 1978: 24) also lists spontaneity and creativity as two advantages of children participating in theatre. When children watch a children`s play as a member of the audience only, then they experience spontaneity in terms of the mind. However, when they participate in the theatrical event, they experience total spontaneity.

What is the value of spontaneity? Courtney (in McCaslin 1978: 24) states that spontaneity prepares an individual for a new event or experience, placing him/her in readiness for the act of creativity. He believes that there are three levels of creativity at work when children participate in theatre, namely the potential for creating personal achievement, the potential for creating a creative product and the finished product.

Courtney (in McCaslin 1978: 25) states:

Consciousness has the power of conceiving imagination – coming forth with a product that has been fused by imagining. The artist works with an imagined conception and externalizes it is action through the chosen medium. Similarly with the child in participational theatre: He or she externalizes an imagined conception in spontaneous dramatic action. In the process the child learns to “image” an imagined outcome.

According to Byers (1968: 95-96) the child comes to believe in the self by discovering that he/she is capable of producing ideas which are both imaginative and useful. While creating a play, the child becomes aware of personality traits, character motivation and the consequences of words and actions. As he/she develops character, plot and dialogue he/she cannot help but

bring his/her own ideas, feelings and expression into focus. This provides an emotional outlet at the same time bringing him/her to a point where he/she can analyze a thought or act objectively. He/she eventually arrives at a critical evaluation of his/her own work. Through art he/she is learning to organize his/her own thoughts and concepts. The child will also experience the satisfaction of completing a project and will learn the importance of self-discovery, concentration and flexibility of thought. He/she will develop confidence and imagination as he/she begins to experience independent thought. This will, in turn, lead to lead to greater faith in him/herself which will result in what Byers (1968:96) describes as

a new energy burst as the new self-image emerges. The creative centre of the student has become active, deepening his sense of worth.

I have personally witnessed the above occurring when working with children on a project. The children developed far greater concentration and ability to organize themselves and their work. They became confident in their ability to handle the situation and after completion of the project their work revealed a far greater degree of creativity and structure.²

² See APPENDIX 5 for a detailed description of this project.

4.2 The Aims of Children's Theatre

Children's Theatre can only truly be of value to a child if the experience is of a positive nature. This can only be achieved if the aims of the project are to mainly benefit the child involved.

The historical overview of the child in theatre revealed the child in a number of roles – the child as performer in adult plays performing for adults, adults performing in children's plays for children, and finally, the child as performer in plays written for children. It is the latter, which will be investigated further for the purposes of this study. Does a child in this role become tempted, when an audience is present to “show off” as Peter Slade suggests? Or can a child reap longlasting benefits from involvement in theatre productions? And if so, what is the best way to guide a child in this experience so that he/ she is truly enriched by the experience?

It might help to clarify the matter by considering what children should NOT experience. Heathcote (in Hodgson 1972: 158) cautions that

(drama) belongs not to the artificiality of the first night theatrical production, the so-called “practices for the night” in a school production, to the painted books on the stage flats and the wine-gum jewels on the ladies' costumes.

Or, as Butler (1975: 1) describes the school play,

like a bad cold – an irritant to be annually disposed of with much relief. It has an image of ad-libbing teachers and pupils mumbling and posturing before tumbling scenery, while an audience of bored parents sits dutifully for interminably long intervals on uncomfortable seats.

Heathcote (in Hodgson 1972: 164) believes that if we are going to use play production as a medium of education, it is absolutely essential that teachers understand the fundamental nature of this work and the demands which it makes upon children. These demands are not unsurmountable and if emphasis is laid upon the fact that the play production means “living through” rather than showing to, then it is not wrong for children to interpret plays.

When working with children it should be realized that drama is, as Heathcote (in Hodgson 1972: 157-158) puts it “ a releaser of energy” and it is in this, specifically, that drama is valuable to the child. Unfortunately, this, to a large extent, is not fully understood by teachers who, through no fault of their own, but simply because their own experiences of drama, lead them to consider only the finished product. The contribution to the growth of the child is therefore pushed to the background.

It is this overemphasis on the finished product that results in many school play productions turning into nightmare experiences for all involved – the teachers as well as the pupils – and that, at the end of the exercise, everyone involved would rather forget the whole episode as soon as possible. Children, especially, suffer in the process. What child would enjoy rehearsing the same play for more than a year! And yet this happens in many schools where the sole aim of the exercise is to concoct a finished product which would somehow heighten the reputation of the academic institution or allow the teachers and principals involved to be one up on a neighbouring school. What possible benefit can there be to the child in a situation where he is regimented to the point of exhaustion and screamed at and where there is no thought given to the educational, emotional or even physical needs of the child? It is this kind of negative experience which has given children’s theatre - and especially, the dreaded school play - a bad reputation in many spheres. At the typical school play rehearsal, drama definitely does not function as Heathcote’s “releaser of

energy” because the child that dares release any energy is normally punished in some way!

Yet Children’s Theatre should, according to Pogonat (in McCaslin 1978: 37), match adult theatre as far as aesthetics is concerned.

All separation between children’s theatre and adult’s theatre should be used only to differentiate two kinds of audiences. Unfortunately, we often make this division based on aesthetic criteria. Theatre as an art is indivisible and the dichotomy between theatre for children and theatre for adults is usually to the discredit of children’s theatre. Normally, performances for children should present the same qualities of care and aesthetics, of research and ingenuity as those expected from performances presented to adults. All compromises that we are tempted to make in children’s theatre weakens the theatre as a whole because children will be the adult audience of tomorrow.

Corey (in McCaslin 1978: 94) believes that it is a clichè of our profession that theatre for children is a lesser achievement or an easier assignment because mediocre work will go unnoticed. It condemns the one who believes it and those who believe it perpetrate theatrical crimes, ignorantly insulting two audiences – today’s and tomorrow’s. Corey (in McCaslin 1978: 94) states:

Theatre for children must be truer. That is, it must belong to the universals of mankind.

For many years the same formula regarding the education of children has been followed – a split between intellectual tuition, with children receiving formal schooling in a classroom situation and physical tuition, with children spending time on the sport field or in gym halls. Churches and parents had to see to spiritual and moral education and, as far as the emotional, artistic and expressive aspect of a child’s development was concerned, token classes in art and singing were thrown in. The shortcomings of this form of education has become more and more apparent over the years and it is generally accepted that a far more balanced approach to the overall education of an individual has to be

formulated. It is in this search for a more holistic approach that Children's Theatre has a role to play. Robinson (1980: 50) states:

If educators will not shift schooling into using more balanced cognitive and affective teaching styles, here is an area where the work of sensitive actors could begin the process of moving our schools into the 20th century.

Experience of the theatre exposes the child to all and more of the benefits derived from participation in, for instance, school sport:

- Physically: Participation in theatre is physically challenging. It requires physical training in movement, dance and mime which develops all major muscle groups without the imminent risk of injury as the above movements are far more controlled than, for instance, running away from opponents about to tackle you.
- Socially: Participation in theatre requires group co-operation. It requires as much team spirit to make a success of a production as it is needed to win a match. It teaches the child group discipline and the importance of not letting a group down. In addition, through vocal training and discussion sessions, children are taught to express themselves more effectively and learn vital communication skills.
- Intellectually: Discussion and analysis of a script depends on intellectual understanding. Children have to make intellectual choices regarding for instance, character portrayals.
- Emotionally: The child experiences, discusses and comes to understand a range of emotions. It also teaches him/her emotional mastery and control when having to deal with, firstly group rehearsals and secondly, performance.

- Aesthetically: the child learns to appreciate good literature, music, art and design by exposure to good examples of each art form.
- Regarding discipline, participation in a play is an excellent and unobtrusive way of demonstrating to a child the importance of discipline – both personal (through, for instance the necessity of learning lines) and group discipline – the undisciplined individual can spoil the whole production for everyone else.

In addition, participation in a play not only creates an informed future theatregoer but it makes the individual a more informed and discerning viewer of theatre, film and television which certainly will enrich the future adult's life. It might even, in some instances, lead to a lifelong love of and participation in amateur theatrics which will lead towards creating meaningful recreation for future life. One need only look at the wonderful sense of camaraderie and purpose that exists amongst the members of amateur dramatic groups where involvement in theatre provides an enriched adult, and even geriatric, life to many. Love of theatre is something which can continue throughout a whole lifetime and need not be given up as sport activities have to be given up when the individual ages. In some countries, such as the UK, local amateur dramatics is an integral part of life in even the smallest villages. It serves to create a sense of community and performs an important socializing function.

4.3 Formulation of Aims and Values for Children's Theatre

Heathcote (in Hodgson 1972: 157) says that drama should be a releaser of energy for children and, if that is the basic premise then one cannot afford to work only towards the finished product. The opportunity must be made for the

process to be concluded, probably with an audience, however small, but the fact must not be overlooked that it is the making of the drama which is going to contribute most to the growth of the child. Therefore, we should be concerned not with rehearsing for the event, but with living through the event (Heathcote in Hodgson 1972: 158). Gerke (1996: xi, xiii) is of the opinion that children should be given a sense of control over their lives. This will happen if the adults working with them allow them to freely express their ideas and share ownership of the play production. The purpose of doing plays with children should be to provide an enriching, educational and fun experience and one that promotes self-esteem and preserves the dignity of the children. Heathcote (in Robinson 1980: 27) says:

I've got to win the drama but I've also got to win *honour* and that's the most important. It doesn't matter what happens to the drama if the honour's all right because we can do things to get the drama going again. But if I make one false move on honour, I haven't really got anything. I have to throw silken lines across to them and however thin, they must be pure and honourable. All this is affirmation of the *thou-ness* of children and I don't see how you can ever get learning of the type I want without honour...the honour is to do with making them feel secure – that I won't let them down. In most, what goes on in schools, kids feel dishonour and so I tend to plaster with a big trowel. But it's not a facade. They're going to have to accept it if anything worthwhile is going to happen to them.

The aims of Children's Theatre should therefore be twofold: On the one hand, the aim should be to create a product which is aesthetically sound and of a high quality. This will not only instill an immense sense of pride in the children involved but also give them a yardstick by which to measure future theatrical presentations (as performers and as members of an audience). Children are intensely aware of, and ashamed of, being involved in secondhand presentations. Adult practitioners who concoct poor work often rationalize by thinking that the child performer (and audience) will not know any better as they lack the necessary experience against which to measure their experiences.

This is a total misconception. Children will sense a poor product even if they have had no previous experience in this field.³

On the other hand, the effort to achieve work of a high quality should not override the whole process. It is of utmost importance that the process by which the work is put together is viewed as as important to the whole project as the end product. The project should not only be judged by the end product (the production) but by the process (the rehearsal period) as well. It is important that both these processes serve the needs of the child – and not the needs of the director or other adults involved in the process. If Dorothy Heathcote's sense of "honour" and the "thou-ness" of children is kept in mind, if care is taken to preserve the dignity of each child, it would go a long way towards creating an uplifting and positive experience for all concerned.

The methodology should be such that the child cast can claim ownership of the final production. This will only truly be achieved if the director allows the participants to share in the creation of the end product. This will inevitably mean that the process will be slower than perhaps desirable but the director should remain aware of the fact that he /she should still be teaching and guiding throughout the rehearsal period. Children should be led to achieve true understanding of the imagined reality they are dealing with. In addition, they should be given sufficient time to reflect upon and share and discuss ideas with others in the cast.⁴

It is important that the fun element or play element of the enterprise is retained. If this is achieved, children will even tolerate the frequent repetitions of rehearsal.

³ See APPENDIX 1 for a description of a project with learners at a Special Needs School. Even with very little previous experience the learners could themselves gauge that their performance was not particularly good.

⁴ See APPENDIX 5 for a description of a play with children where the planned rehearsal schedule had to be adapted to allow for the developmental needs of the cast.

It is also of utmost importance that rehearsal take place in a situation of trust. The children should know that whatever they bring to a rehearsal – and especially if it involves the portrayal of deep emotions – they will not be criticized or mocked for it - not by the director and not by their peers. The director should try and ensure that every child in the cast eventually walks away from the project with a deepened sense of self worth.

The director of children in a children`s play will only be able to create an experience of growth and enrichment for each cast member if he/she has carefully considered certain aspects and problems specific to Children`s Theatre. Failure to do this will result in the director losing focus and being distracted by issues which should have been resolved beforehand instead of concentrating on the development of the child cast.

CHAPTER 5

PROBLEMS SPECIFIC TO CHILDREN'S THEATRE

The director working in Children's Theatre often has to contend with a number of problems which are quite specific to Children's Theatre and which might hinder him/her in the fulfilment of his/her task. The following issues should be considered when working in Children's Theatre:

- Script
- Venue
- The Child audience
- Directing the child actor

5.1. Script

5.1.1 Finding a suitable script

One of the first problems which a practitioner in the field of Children's Theatre encounters is the lack of suitable scripts. McCaslin (1978:5) states that there is a need for "workable, literary playscripts". Good playwrights, by and large, are not interested in writing for children. One notable exception was Bernard Shaw, who stated that he had written *Androcles and the Lion* to show what a play for children should be like. He believed that great children's works such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Arabian Nights*, *Pilgrim's Progress* and the Grimm fairytales had in fact been written for adults. He felt that a play for children should never be childish as nothing offends children more than being played down to. Goldberg (1974: 122) believes that

most plays for children are written by amateurs who have no hope of financial return, but are merely turning out what they think will please an audience; or by would-be professionals picking up a little extra cash by turning out commercial 'kiddy' plays according to a formula.

And yet, a well-written play is exactly what is needed as far as young actors are concerned because, as Allen (1979: 139) contends, it is far easier to act in a good play than a poor one. A well-written play gives the actor all he needs to act: the poorly-written play requires a considerable contribution from the actor.

Kartak (in McCaslin 1978: 143) feels that if a play is worthy of being produced, it should be rich enough in material that a child viewing it is able to take ideas about art, music, history, sociology, psychology and literature.. Any play selected should be a challenge, both for the group producing it and for the group viewing it.

Goldberg (1974: 122) believes that we must all revise our concept of what is suitable for children to even include plays previously thought of as adult plays.

McCaslin (1974: 6) states that a need exists for children's plays that are

free of condescension, and presented with integrity, artistry and intelligence. I am offended by the 'spoof' and the 'in joke' that attempts to appeal to both young and old by irrelevant and often vulgar humour. Even when this kind of thing is defended on the grounds that children enjoy it, I cannot accept it as honest work. It encourages laughter for the wrong reasons and, what is worse, cheats an audience that has come expecting something else.

Goldberg (1974: 127) criticizes so-called formulas for playwriting and advocates for the dismissal of so-called essential ingredients in a children's play. These non-essentials include the typical hero (who traditionally has to be close in age to the child audience and be of virtuous character), shallow conflict (with a villain who is not too evil), simplification (especially of plot as the assumption is that children cannot follow a complicated plot) and the assertion that children's plays must be somehow moral in tone. These non-essentials need not be considered by a playwright as rules. Instead, a playwright

should consider firstly, respect to the child and secondly, the entertainment value of the script.⁵

As far as respect is concerned, Goldberg (1974: 128) feels that this entails being respectful not only to the child in the audience but also to the child as performer. He feels that child performers should be viewed as “serious artists worthy of the author’s finest efforts”. Writing for children is far more difficult than writing for adults as one not only has to understand the child’s world but also realize that the child functions in the adult’s world and is influenced by it. The child, therefore, should be approached both as a child and as an adult. At the same time, one should respect children’s weaknesses. Children’s extreme involvement make them vulnerable to manipulation and they have no safety valves to protect themselves against their nightmarish fears, their self-deceiving fantasies or their physical weaknesses. Making certain decisions for children is part of respecting them. We can damage children by expecting too much of them as we can by expecting too little.⁶

5.1.2 Qualities of a suitable script

According to Goldberg (1974: 129), a play for children may be educational, didactic, moralistic or not, but it should always be entertaining. He believes that if it is not entertaining, it is nothing. For a play to become entertaining to an audience of children, it should include a presentational or theatrical style rather than a realistic style and a sufficient amount of non-verbal communication in the form of, for instance, mime, slapstick, action and elaborate stage business.

⁵ See APPENDIX 5. During discussions prior to the rehearsal period, the child cast expressed very strong preferences as to the type of play they wished to perform. Their two main criteria were that firstly, the play had to be entertaining and secondly, that they did not wish to appear ridiculous to any friends which might attend the performance.

⁶ See APPENDIX 1. The challenge in working with this type of group where children have been labelled as having behavioural problems, the director has to be extremely careful not to bring that preconceived notion to the process.

In addition, children like repetition (in dialogue and action) and action. In addition, Goldberg (1974: 130) believes that children find great delight in the defeat of the villain and the romanticising of the heroes and whilst they like references to their own contemporary world, take-off on other eras and theatrical styles, in jokes and camp have no meaning for them. Corey (in McCaslin 1978: 98) concurs:

Too often the theatre we make for young people is arrived at by willful suspension of our experience as theatre people. Malpractice and bromides are indulgences that we would never inflict on an adult audience. Gamesies and low cabaret humor is an ancient theatrical entertainment that needs no defence and deserves no condemnation. But its employment – its technique that is – is widespread in theatre for children. My charge is not moral. Children are realists. My charge is waste – waste of the audience, for they are so much more alive than mindless and artless clichés. Yet we inflict devices and performances on children that even cabaret would professionally blush before doing.

Corey (in McCaslin 1978: 100) further quotes Dan Sullivan, *New York Times* critic,

May I suggest we save 'camp' for the grown-ups and for the children substitute Quality? Maybe even Art?

The trap of falling into in-jokes, camp behaviour and even suggestive wordplay seems to be especially pertinent in training institutions where students workshop their own scripts for Children's Theatre. Very often and very sadly this is seen as an enterprise not worthy of much thought and instead of compiling a script for the children in the audience they rather play to their peers in the back row leaving the children completely baffled as to exactly what is going on. As part of this study I personally attended many children's productions as was horrified to note how many times this actually occurred.

Goldberg (1972: 131) is of the opinion that a children's play should include sufficient action – in this regard he quotes Charlotte Chorpenning as saying

“Show it, don’t tell it” and adds that a play which depends on narrative or on dialogue or on description of off-stage events may contain enough virtues to make it interesting to adults, but it will never make a good children’s play.

Both Goldberg (1974: 133) and Wood (1997: 73) are in agreement that a children’s play should not have too many interruptions of the main plot. This is often the weakness of unsuccessful children’s plays. Goldberg (Goldberg 1974: 133) states that according to his experience, the basic plot which depends on a chronological sequence of dependent events is the most popular kind of play for children. When enacting this kind of play it is important not to distract the child. The unity in plot is not, however, exclusive. Unity could lie in other elements such as character development or mood – as long as there is some unifying element. A children’s play should therefore probably be about one thing primarily to make it more accessible to children. Other things add to the mainstream and many techniques can be used to follow that stream, but nothing should distract from it. The successful writer of children’s plays should try to develop a sense of the rhythm of children’s concentration levels and attention span. This would entail sensing when to include more action, new characters, comedy elements etc to keep the child audience (and the child actors) engrossed.⁷ On the whole, Goldberg believes that children do not enjoy philosophical discussions, witticism and underlying motivations for characters’ actions. These elements should therefore, be avoided or kept to a minimum. In addition, Kartak (in McCaslin 1978: 148) feels that scripts for children should not be longer than one thousand lines (running about forty-five minutes).

The script also has to be selected with the eventual audience in mind. In Children’s Theatre this will always be an audience of children although the

⁷ See APPENDIX 5. During work on this production it became clear that scenes had to be reasonably short and varied to avoid the child actors (and consequently the audience) becoming bored. Lengthy scenes which consisted of mainly dialogue were especially problematic and had to be altered to either include action or other effect such as comic routines.

specific age group will greatly influence the choice of material. Selecting plays for performance to a child audience is a matter which demands much consideration. The matter is complicated, according to Johnson (1971: 38), by the fact that the modern child audience, exposed to television from an early age, has become far more informed than before. Before the days of television it was more possible to establish the degree to which a child of a given age had developed imagination and insight. Now, however, all who write or perform for children must reckon with an unpredictable level of maturation and new sophistication that confuse the issue of age in appraising the relationship of a theatre experience.

Even so, the child audience has very specific requirements depending on the specific age group. The child in the age group 5 to 8 years old is still learning what it is to be a member of an audience. Goldberg (1974:104) sees this as a period of transition, in which the child will be partly involved in playing, and partly involved in learning to be an audience. He/she will sometimes want to move and mimic, and sometime be willing to learn about behaviours he/she has not seen before; he/she will sometimes insist in spontaneous but familiar actions, and sometimes be open to rehearsed and novel action. The best type of play for this age group would probably be what Goldberg (1974: 104) refers to as participation dramas which involve the child creatively as they contain opportunities for role play by the children. When adult actors stage this type of play they will obviously be able to guide the children in role play. However, when children themselves are the performers, it would probably be expecting too much of them to be able to control an audience of their peers. Children at the upper end of the age range e.g. children of 13 and 14 years old, however, should be able to control younger children if the participation of the audience is limited and well rehearsed. However, during a project to assess children's ability to deal with audience participation, I also found that some children have a natural aptitude for working with younger children, some not. The ones who

are not able to deal with this situation should not be forced to do so.⁸ There should be supervised preparation for audience participation worked into the play itself. Goldberg (1974: 105) believes that this leads to the establishment of rapport between the actors and the audience, before the characters of the story are introduced. With child actors, it might be wise to get the child audience on the side of the young actors even before the start of the play.

The child audience between the ages of 8 and 11 can understand theatrical protocol and conventions which makes this an easier audience. Children at this age also do not have as much need for participation as the younger audience which makes them easier to perform to than the younger audience. Goldberg (1974: 106) believes that he should sit behind a 'fourth wall' and watch a representation of life that does not depend on his active participation, but does depend on his aesthetic participation. Otherwise he can never learn the difference between the two. He must learn to accept the reality of the fantastic events and theatrical wizardry. The child of this age needs spectacle. Without spectacle, he cannot develop the right attitude towards it and therefore cannot develop the right attitude towards imagination which substitutes for spectacle.

From eleven to fourteen years old, Goldberg (1974: 107) believes that the child needs to learn theatre's relevance to his own life. The child of this age has experienced the shock of being unable to be everything he wants to be, the bitterness of peer disapproval and the frustration of developing sexuality unwished for and apparently uncontrollable. If the theatre is to do anything for this child, it must do it by showing him himself and his immediate concerns.

This is the period for plays about characters with the psychological problems of peer acceptance, tolerance and a need to find their own limits and abilities. Children in this age group like adventure stories because characters are removed from society's norms and have to make up their own rules. It is doubtful whether the child actor who is him/herself struggling with these very issues personally would be able to convey them successfully to his/her peers.

⁸ See APPENDIX 2 for a description of this project.

In reality, the children's play will most probably be performed to an family audience consisting of children even younger than five, older children and adults. Stokes (in Lifton 1974: 25) states that while there may be a narrow band of experience which only children can appreciate and another narrow band which only adults can appreciate, there is a vast everman's land in between that children and adults can appreciate together, though perhaps on different levels. Goldberg (1974: 109) refers to this type of play as a family play which will simultaneously appeal to many ages, including adults. In other words, the play must have something for every age group – but not always the same thing for each. This type of play is hard to locate, hard to direct and hard to perform for child actors and would probably not be a very good choice for child performers. Yet, when it is performed successfully by child actors (and it can be) it is highly effective.

5.1.3 Children creating their own scripts

Some practitioners believe that the children in the cast should create their own script. This should, however, not be confused with children doing a spontaneous improvisation (although improvisation can be used as a stimulus) as part of an educational drama process, which then gets shown to an audience. The scriptwriting in the case of writing a play for performance, should be far more deliberate and formal and well constructed so as not to fall into the trap which Evans (in McCaslin 1978: 125) foresees:

Too many performances that start from improvisation are shallow and without substance, exhibiting all the negative values that have brought

criticism to traditional theatre for children but without even the saving grace of a coherent story line. Too much participation theatre is apparently aimless, unfocused, without point. In both cases it seems as if no one took charge of shaping and refining the performance. Is this fair to the audience? Is this theatre Magic? Someone at some point has to say that the performance is ready and until that time it should not be brought to the public.

Ruth Byers is an example of a practitioner who has worked with children creating their own scripts and managed to, very successfully, get children to even script their own “Greek tragedies” and “Shakespearean plays”. Byers (1968: 2) states that by the time children are eight, they are amazingly resourceful with original stories and are constantly seeking ways to act them out. Channeling this energy into achievement is the purposeful process of creative playwriting. She suggests that all attempts should be preceded by an period of discussion (or instruction, if the format is to be foreign to the children as would be the case with, for instance, ancient Greek theatre). A number of stimuli could be used to instigate action e.g. movement, pictures, music etc. Children can be asked to either individually write scripts or sections of scripts or engage in what Byers (1968: 70) terms “group playwriting”. This method has inspired her children’s casts to create, for instance, *Camea* a “Greek tragedy” created by ten to twelve year olds and *The Curious Komedi* in the style of a Roman comedy.

5.1.4 Interpretation of the script

Allen (1979: 52) believes that children should develop a sense of the dramatic form first – applying their creativity specifically to drama - before attempting the interpretation of a script. Through exploration of the dramatic form and dramatic elements such as action and conflict children will understand the demands of a set script much better.

Another aspect of script interpretation which is problematic and from which much controversy arises, is the question of learning of lines. Allen (1979: 129) disapproves of the learning of lines parrot-fashion yet at the same time he states:

If children can read and speak with reasonable fluency they do not find it particularly difficult to learn lines. Whether it is desirable that they should do so is another matter. Contemporary opinion seems on the whole not to favour the practice but I think that very often contemporary opinion is being a little mealy-mouthed. To learn the lines of a play is like learning the lines of a poem or a song: it is to come into sharp contact with inherited form.

Allen (1979: 130) feels that in order to avoid a “parrot-like” learning of lines, the teacher/director should help the child actors to make the lines their own and to integrate them with the characters being portrayed. This would obviously involve the actors understanding every line of script in the same way as adult actors have to understand the meaning of each line.

The understanding of the script would also be linked to the vocal interpretation of the script. Should the child actor be given every nuance of modulation? Would this entail a “parrot-fashion” learning of lines? Probably, yes. The child actor should at least be given the opportunity to experiment with a line after he/she has understood its meaning. The period of experimentation would probably would not take as long as an adult actor would require because of limited technical ability and the director, functioning as teacher, could give subtle hints as to, for instance, use of pause, inflection, pace. This is part of accepting the child as a creative artist in his/her own right. He/she might be inexperienced but he/she should not be viewed as stupid.

5.2 Venue

McCaslin (1978: 7) believes that Children’s Theatre should be presented in venues designed specifically for the purpose as having a building of their own gives children pride of possession whilst going to a special place adds another

dimension to the occasion. She believes that far too often Children's productions are given in adult theatres during off hours, in large high-school auditoriums, or in all-purpose rooms in community centres or elementary schools. Rarely are these venues adequate. What then should an adequate venue consist of?

Allen (1979: 4) states:

I think that a theatrical performance requires its own proper atmosphere which is compounded of a balance between adequate playing-space, a good actor-audience relationship in physical terms with well-arranged seating and good site-lines, provision for the necessary lighting, reasonable acoustics and a general atmosphere that does not wholly dispel the possibility of creating an atmosphere of recreated reality.

According to McCaslin (1978: 7) a children's theatre should include an auditorium

small and attractive, with good visibility from all parts of the house and excellent acoustics.

Kartak (in McCaslin 1978: 137) also believes in creating a venue specifically for Children's Theatre and feels that it is advantageous that the child should travel to the play for several reasons. The experience is more exhilarating when the child leaves his customary environment to attend a special event such as a play. He therefore tends to appreciate the experience more. Secondly, if theatre for children is a training ground for adult appreciation of theatre, which it is, then part of that training is to learn one must go to the theatre. Travel to the theatre is a habit desirable to instill in the child.

Sigley (in McCaslin 1978: 170) states:

Going to the theatre has great social significance...in an age when people are becoming more and more isolated and television is their main means of communication, we must encourage live happenings and performances. There is really no substitute for actually being there.

The greatness of theatre is that it requires the coming together of all these elements to make it work.

She recalls having to virtually force a tough young boy from a working class background to visit the theatre. She relates:

His argument is worth remembering. First, he didn't know where it was and a journey beyond the top of the road was like a voyage into the unknown. Second, it would cost money. It hadn't occurred to him that it could be as cheap as the cinema or a football match. Third, he thought he had to dress up and eat after the show. 'And I hold my knife and fork in the wrong hand'. His presumption of required social graces, added to the fact that the idea of going to the theatre was not part of his family's life style, might have kept him away forever if I hadn't pushed him a bit... Years later I met him at the first night of a very serious play and he told me that the theatre had become part of his recreation. It remained different from anything in his life but he enjoyed it and so he continued to go.

Bowskill (1973: 320) also advocates the use of a specific building – even if it is an old shed or garage. He states that it is far better to cope with a bleakness of environment than with the busy trimmings and disturbances of some entirely different activity. In this regard one would think of school hall during school time when other study fields tend to compete for the use of such a space or other “public and private” houses which Bowskill refers to. He states that there are many reasons why these are not suitable, the main being the social atmosphere and surrounding furniture. The obvious traffic that is associated with private dwellings and the even more obvious conviviality that permeates public ones offer too many distractions.

Way, on the other hand, (in McCaslin 1978: 54) believes that a formal theatre building is superfluous. He feels that any venue, at any time, would suffice although the school is his most preferred venue as it usually contains a hall of some kind and it is a familiar as an environment to the children. It brings theatre into their own community like libraries and swimming pools and pubs and shopping centres and therefore helps to forget the idea that going to the theatre involves a long journey with a packet of sandwiches!

Stokes (in Lifton 1974: 23) echoes this sentiment as he believes that all theatre is much too auditorium-bound. Children's Theatre, in particular, should free itself from the auditorium so that it can go where the children are. He does not disapprove of elaborate sets, only with those that anchor the theatre to the auditorium. Theatre ought to be prepared to climb into existing transportation for the afternoon and go wherever children and adults can gather – gym floor or all-purpose room, cafeteria or parking lot.

Although Way and Stokes' views certainly have merit in that it exposes children to theatre where it might otherwise not have occurred, this has tended to become an excuse for not putting too much resources and effort into staging a children's production. Children, if given the choice, would still prefer to attend or perform in a production when it is staged in what they perceive as a proper theatre. When I put this issue to a group of children aged between 11 and 14 all responded in the same way: They all preferred attending theatre in a venue specially designed for this purpose and removed from their community – it made the occasion more special. In addition, they all preferred performing in a play which was to be staged in a proper theatre in contrast to, for instance, their school hall. In both instances, the group felt that the occasion had more legitimacy when staged in a theatre specifically designed for the purpose.

In addition to the physical building, one could here also refer to the requirements for stage and scenery. As far as the latter is concerned, McCaslin (1978: 7) believes that all too often in Children's Theatre it is carelessly assembled. Old scenery, left over from adult plays, and ill-fitting, sometimes dirty costume are used in the apparent assumption that children do not know the difference and therefore it does not matter. 'Dressing-up' is all that is required. This is not only an insult to the child in the audience but a missed opportunity to cultivate the aesthetic and the intellectual.

Goldberg (1974: 167) believes that because children depend so much on the visual, the director/designer relationship in Children's Theatre is more important to success than the director/playwrights's relationship. McCaslin (1978: 8) states that imagination should be the basic ingredient to design for Children's Theatre. Children are responsive to visual excitement and love sudden changes of setting, colour or light.

A number of practitioners, such as Kartak (in McCaslin 1978: 148) prefer the thrust stage as an acting area. He believes that it keeps the action close to the children, yet it still gives him the opportunity to let the action appear in a full setting, or, preferably, a series of full settings. He mostly works on a proscenium style but always attempts to build out the playing area so as to let the action of the play spill out beyond the confines of the proscenium.

As far as the child actor is concerned, good acoustics is probably the most important consideration as far as choice of venue is concerned as children are not yet as technically capable of good voice projection. If this is unavailable, the director might be wise to consider using sound amplification. Purists would shudder, but it would be as bad to expose children to possible vocal abuse. In addition, the child audience would definitely not remain interested in the play if they cannot hear everything which would put young actors in the unenviable position of having to cope with a disinterested child audience – something even an adult actor would baulk at!

The child actor would probably also be physically dominated by a very large stage and auditorium, so a smaller venue might probably be more sympathetic to a young cast. Allen (1979: 155) believes in this regard that excessive space can be nearly as great a limitation as too little.

5.3 The child audience

As most productions in which children perform are in fact, children's plays, it stands to reason that a large percentage of the audience would also be children.

McCaslin (1978: 15) describes today's children as different from children growing up in the days before mass communication. They know more today and they see more. They are freer and more open. They might be more difficult and less obedient than children of fifty years ago, but they live more richly and more interestingly. This of course they owe to those adults who helped raise life to a higher level and created its new quality. To look at today's children through the eyes of an earlier childhood is pedagogical and even historical myopia.

Evans (in McCaslin 1978: 123) agrees with this. Children of the modern era are sophisticated products of a technological age which means that because of their exposure to the mass media, they do know more than those who lived in a simpler age. Oftentimes they show a remarkable intellectual grasp of ideas and events. They are able to make value judgements, and they are increasingly perceptive. This, of course, puts the child performer in a special position of privilege - because he/she is closer in age and experience to the audience, identification with and sympathy towards the audience is much easier. Even so, the child audience has a very specific nature and should this not be taken into account by the director and (child) actors, the chance of the play being a success is slim. This, in turn, would have a negative effect on the child performers who would find it hard to respond to a negative attitude from the audience. Losing an audience or losing control of a child audience is a frightening experience for an adult actor, therefore it would be an even more negative experience for a child actor. Because one cannot expect a child to have the coping mechanisms of an adult, the director should anticipate audience reaction and prepare the child actors for this very carefully. The director has to go through the script

meticulously and identify possible trouble spots so as to prepare the child actors. This process should start with the selection of the script as discussed earlier

An additional complication, as far as child actors and child audience are concerned, is the issue of audience participation. Children tend to spontaneously participate in plays – whether this has been planned as part of the production or whether it is simply a spontaneous audience reaction caused by children's inability to control all their reactions. Whatever the case may be, the child actor would probably have to cope with audience reaction. The question now arises as to whether they are indeed able to. Practitioners in the field⁹ feel that they are quite capable of doing so, as long as it has been rehearsed beforehand with the director and other cast members acting as an audience during rehearsals, reacting in all possible ways imaginable and discussing strategies and coping mechanisms with the cast. When this theory was put to the test¹⁰ this was indeed found to be the case.

The problem which faces the director of children in Children's Theatre is, according to Kester (in Siks & Dunnington 1961: 48), the need to reconcile the responsibility to his/her audience which he has as a director and the responsibility to his/her class which he/she has as teacher. The director in Children's Theatre is, therefore, in the unique position of not only providing an enriching and educational experience to the audience but also to the cast of child actors. This double function complicates matters and calls for the greatest expertise as will be discussed in the following section..

⁹ See APPENDIX 3 for an interview with Cheryl Abromowitz, a director of Children's Theatre, in which she expresses her belief that child actors can, in fact, deal with audience participation.

¹⁰ See Appendix 2 for further details of a practical project conducted to determine whether children can cope with audience participation.

5.4 Directing a children`s play

The director of a play for children has to, in some aspects, approach the play in a similar fashion as a director of an adult play would as far as commitment and honesty are concerned. On the other hand, the directing of a children`s play also makes some very specific demands on a director. The type of director who would surely not succeed at directing a children`s play, is the individual who regards the process as inferior, is only directing a children`s play because an adult play is not available and has no knowledge of or interest in the child and children`s issues. Such a person should be kept well away from directing in children`s theatre. If, in addition, the cast also consists of children, the problem is even greater and much harm can be done in the process.

Pogonat (in McCaslin 1978: 39) believes that to work in children`s theatre the director of children`s theatre should love children, understand them, respect them and feel at ease in their complex and fascinating world. He states:

As far as I am concerned, a real creation in the field of children`s theatre can be done only by artists who have kept a child`s soul, together with the intelligence, the formation, the experience and the culture of an adult.

5.4.1 Concepts when directing for Children`s Theatre

Goldberg (1974: 138) believes that nearly all of the differences between the artistic production of a play for adults and the artistic production of a play for children can be discussed by examining seven directorial concepts. Goldberg`s seven concepts, whilst referring to directing for the child audience and not necessarily the child actor, could also be viewed with regards to the latter. These seven concepts are the following :

1. Emotional truth – this relates to the fact the staging of the play should be accessible to the child's mind without over-simplification. Adult logic, complex social imagery and complicated plots are not desirable. But it does not mean that everything must be oversimplified. The greatest error in children's theatre is condescension.

When working with a cast of child actors, consideration should also be given to the fact that the script must also be accessible to the young actors' stage of personal development. This does not mean, however, that they should be underestimated. As Byers (1968: 70) proved, child actors can even cope with plays written in a classical style and dealing with classical themes.

2. Visualization – the successful children's theatre director is the one who excels at visual representation as the visual impression dominates in children. The child audience mainly absorbs the plot of a play by what they can discern visually.

Korogodsky (in McCaslin 1978: 17) also feels that children experience theatre on many levels. Children react not only to the subject and content revealed by the plot of a dramatic work but also to a great deal more than that – to the many elements that make theatre a work of art, such as the implications of the play's events, the metaphoric associations, the timing, the style of staging, the colour and lighting. If the children did not show responsiveness to this, then we could not regard theatre as a source of aesthetic education. The essence of aesthetic education is the indissoluble bond between the content and the aesthetic means of its dramatization. Therefore, when we assert that children are not capable of, or have not yet matured sufficiently for aesthetic appreciation, we often remain unresourceful, uninventive in marshalling the kinds of expressive means that serve to illuminate - to make strongly impressive - the moral values suggested in the content.

Corey (in McCaslin 1978: 94) feels that theatre for children, intrinsically more adventurous and theatrical, requires high performance and production achievement indeed.

The child actor, on the whole not as technically able as an older actor, would also benefit from visual aids to characterization.

3. Variety in presentation – this is of the utmost importance so as to accommodate the shorter attention span of the child. In addition, modern children have grown up with television and its constant changing of camera angles, visual montages and commercial interruptions. Goldberg (1974: 143) warns that the director of children's theatre must be aware that this problem exists, both as a result of television exposure, and as a natural condition of the young mind. One solution he finds, lies in the syncretism employed by the director, Korotky, who manages to synthesize disparate elements into one production. He would, for example, include in one production elements such as puppetry, mime, dance, song, magic, acrobatics and other circus skills.

Variety should also be included in the scene length and mood. Goldberg (1974: 144) also suggests the use of an arena or thrust stage for children's production as these offer more opportunities for variety in blocking.

4. Multi age considerations – Goldberg (1974: 146) believes that, even though a play might be aimed at one specific age group, the director should direct it as if it is intended for a multi-age audience. In this manner, the child is challenged by those moments which might be intended for an older audience and comforted by the “younger” moments. If you only aim a play at one specific age group you are, in effect, saying that you know the child's maximum level – thereby insulting the child's creative potential.

5. Casting of the play for production is of special interest to the director working with a cast of children. Goldberg (1972: 146) views this issue from the audience's point of view only, as he is not particularly considering the child

actor. He therefore suggests two approaches – casting to type i.e. complying with what would be the child audience's natural expectations of a certain character (the princess must be pretty; the witch ugly) or challenging their expectation (ugly princesses can also be good and pretty witches bad) thereby enlarging the child's view of the world and combatting stereotype.

If, however, one is working with a child cast, would child actors be able to create portrayals against type? The competent child actor probably would, whilst the more average child would struggle. In my experience, children, as a rule, do not like to appear foolish and any role which is far removed from themselves in a negative way e.g. being very fat or very stupid would have to be approached with great sensitivity by the director. Most children, with the exception of very confident children, are still too insecure within their own personalities so as to experiment with others. Yet the children's play normally always contains at least one evil and/or one silly character and someone has to portray these. How do you go about casting these roles? Once again, the very confident children would probably be able to handle this type of characterization but this will inevitably lead to type casting in the sense that the same children always portray these roles. In addition, children are far too sensitive for a director to cast obvious physical choices i.e. the overweight child plays the fat character, the unattractive child, the ugly ogre! In this instance, the director would probably be well advised to use an alternative method of casting such as asking for volunteers or by drawing lots. This, of course, complicates the directorial task as the director might end up having to cope with completely inappropriate casting. The director could rely on the use of costume and make-up in this instance to complement casting. Children are prepared to even accept what is to them embarrassing roles if the costume and/or make-up are somehow outrageous. I experienced this in a production of *Cinderella* when I decided to use traditional pantomime casting and cast the ugly sisters as two fourteen year old teenage boys. I expected a lot of embarrassment and complaint but in the

end none materialized as the boys' costumes were so ridiculous that they actually enjoyed it and found it funny.

There is also the issue of "stretching" performers by having them perform in roles against type. This is probably not called for when working within this age group as the main aim of Children's Theatre should be not so much the training of performers as it is the enriching of young lives.¹¹

An additional problem as far as casting is concerned, is the fact that, although most children participating in a theatre group are there because they want to be there, occasionally you come across individuals who join a group either because of either parental or peer pressure. Such individuals may lack commitment and focus. Bowskill (1973: 16) states that there are many children, however, who wish to learn how to concentrate and become absorbed in what will help them as actors, but who find it difficult to do so except in short time-spans. Indeed, if their own assessment is accurate, some of them find it impossible. Since the motivation is right it is not too difficult to help this group. A group that is much more difficult to help is one made up of, or containing, those who appear to have a keen interest in the theatre but unfortunately also appear to have no wish to learn how to concentrate upon anything. Bowskill (1973: 16) is of the opinion that it is probably best not to try and work with children from this group because the theatre arts require a high level of concentration and the difficulty in attaining group concentration and sensitivity if any one member of the group is not fully prepared to search after his own is enormous. The question of the individual's preparedness to work towards high standards of concentration and absorption is a crucial criterion in accepting or retaining a child in a drama class or theatre group. In practice, I have found Bowskill's recommendation difficult to apply. There are occasion when the teacher/director simply has to work with a specific group of children and refusing one child might be an impossibility. In addition, refusing a child goes against the basic

¹¹ Chapter 4 describes the aims and values of Children's Theatre and concludes that it is the enrichment of the child's whole personality which should be the major focus and not the training of performers.

aims and values of Children's Theatre as discussed in Chapter 4. It is exactly this difficult child who would ultimately perhaps benefit most from involvement in a production. If a child is shown away it simply means that the director/teacher's focus has shifted from process to product – the child is excluded from the group as it might ruin the end product – and this is not acceptable practice. I feel that the only instance in which a child should be removed from a group is when he/she makes the process completely intolerable for the other children involved.

6. Audience participation – whether this is actively called for, by for instance, inviting children to comment, or not, by the nature of the audience, participation is almost inevitable. Goldberg (1974: 148) warns that children are a volatile audience, easily moved to a noisy exteriorization of their inner feelings. They have not learned the politeness which requires that they moderate their actions.

With a cast of child actors it would probably be wise to limit opportunities for participation – especially early on in the play as this might excite the audience too soon and lead to them becoming unmanageable by the end of the play. Even with adult actors in Children's Theatre Wood (1997: 173) warns against inviting too much audience participation too soon. However, even with limited opportunities for audience participation, the child actors should be trained in techniques to handle the restless child audience. Goldberg (1974: 149) suggests in this instance the use of contrast in business, line delivery, action, pace or unusual events such as a new character entering or a special effect. If audience participation is to be attempted with child actors, it should be part of the rehearsal process and should probably include some type of specific activity such as the teaching of a song or dance to be performed by the audience at appropriate times. Lifton (1974: 14) describes Brian Way as choreographing the participation moments in his scripts as carefully as a ballet, whilst Jack Stokes reportedly sent a description of the play to future audiences thereby

appealing to the children in advance to participate in certain places within the action, making them accomplices to the success of the production.

A background in creative dramatics will also prepare young actors for dealing with an audience as, according to Goldberg (1974: 161) it will teach the actor the techniques of phrasing questions so as to elicit a diversity of responses, and then help him to select the most creative efforts for praise and reinforcement ¹².

7. Theatrical “magic”: This concept refers to “magic” in the sense of something extraordinary, exciting and unexpected. According to Goldberg (1974: 151) this is a most important component of Children’s Theatre although care must be taken that it is not overdone. Children can become exhausted by theatrical magic. They require a considerable portion of relaxed concentration to balance the production. Child actors undoubtedly like theatrical “magic” as well and, in fact, somehow feel cheated if the set and costumes are minimalistic and representational. It somehow makes them feel that they are not worth the effort and definitely detracts from their enjoyment of the experience. Child actors love the sensation of being surprised by costume and set as much as the children in the audience do. As a whole children within this age group generally do not have much interest in helping to create set and costume. From a directing viewpoint, the director would, however, be wise to guard against the set and costumes overpowering the child performers.

5.4.2 Directing the child actor

In general the director of Children’s Theatre needs to take a much firmer grip on the process than, for instance a director in adult theatre. Goldberg (1974: 153) states that blocking, pantomime dramatization, character business, costumes, scenery or props are proportionally more important than are internal

¹² See APPENDIX 2 for a practical project exploring children’s ability to handle audience participation. The group that took part in this project all came from a creative dramatics background and were accustomed to improvisation and impromptu speaking. This, no doubt, prepared them for this task.

components of character or line readings as a result of adhering to the principle of strong visualization in Children's Theatre. In this sense, theatre for children requires stronger direction than does theatre for adults because the picture is much more important than the words or ideas and the director is the only person, theoretically, who sees the whole picture. The director who excels chiefly in freeing his actors' creativity and draws strongly internalized portrayals from them should probably avoid directing for children.

What then about the director working with child actors? The question that is raised here is whether child actors are capable of "deeply felt portrayals". The Polish educator and children's playwright, Janusz Korczak, felt that they are capable of such portrayals. Korczak (in McCaslin 1978: 17) states that the child surpasses the adult in the emotional forcefulness of which he is capable. The child is therefore certainly capable of great emotion but should a director expect this from a child actor – is it indeed necessary or desirable to perhaps push a child into a terrain where he maybe should not go? Some critics feel, according to Allen (1979: 135) that an overindulgence in artificial feeling cannot be good for a young person. Can a child actor internalize another identity when his own is still in a state of flux? Allen (1979: 136) feels that this is not an issue as children do not characterize as much as they identify with a character. He states that for a child the process of characterization comes slowly. It is clearly related to and explained by stages in personal development, especially where affective qualities are concerned. Allen (1979: 136) refers to recent studies by neurologists and psychologists who have concluded that mimicry of an emotional expression has no real creative force and does not touch any of the centres of emotion in the brain. Emotions, however, which are recalled, often have the intensity of the original emotion. Children, however, seldom manage this level of intensity. Allen (1979: 139) feels that there are different stages in the creation of character: a stage of identification, done by

very young children, followed by an imitative stage where there is deferred imitation when the imagination can make use of memories both emotional and of characters that have been observed. This is followed by the role-playing phase when the young actor can enter the cognitive life of the character. It is only in the final stage when the actor can transform the role with emotional and imaginative adhesions until something approaching a complete transformation of the personality has been achieved (Allen 1979: 138). As this stage is normally only reached once the individual's own personality has reached a certain level of maturity, the child actor in this study would probably fall outside this phase as few individuals would have matured enough by the age of 14 which is the maximum age as far as this study is concerned.

There is no doubt that child actors, as much as adult actors, should be expected to approach the task at hand with sincerity and commitment and certainly child actors should be led to an understanding of their characters and their motivations. In fact, this will probably have to be done more so than with adult actors as child actors have much less life experience and will find it difficult to understand situations which are completely foreign to them. Such situations would probably have to be placed within their own frame of reference – hence the importance of the director knowing the children and their backgrounds. By doing this the director would be helping the child to “live through” as Heathcote (in Hodgson 1972: 158) suggests instead of just “showing to”. Allen (1979: 132) believes that as we get older and pass through the phases of development, we get better at acting. We control our instincts for identification since the process of assimilation has now been superseded by one of recreation as we learn to adjust with ever increasing adroitness to the curious personalities we meet in daily life; and the close study of personality in a subjective or

sensory manner becomes the material of acting. We move from identification with a character to full characterization. Allen (1979: 132) states that

the young actor will do what the teacher bids him do, open his eyes and ears, look about him and imitate. At first why not? We know that many children are excellent mimics.

To avoid mimicry remaining the only means of acting, however, Allen (1979: 132) suggests a twofold approach – not encouraging the mimicry too actively and secondly, tactfully suggesting other aspects of character. He does not decry an element of mimicry in acting but mimicry as a superficial skill. The imitative aspect of character portrayal for him is not immediate but deferred. He explains:

The teacher tells the children to use their imagination. They are not quite sure what this means. In time they realize that imaginative creation is the result of selecting from all their memories and deferred imitations those aspects of human nature they can piece together to create the character they want. Imitation is a learning process; it involves the assimilation of new observations and experiences; but if we simply copy, instead of assimilating, making it our own, adapting the model to our own mental schema, the experience will be unproductive (Allen 1979: 133).

Goldberg (1974: 156) suggests that the actor in a children's play should be sure to flesh out his part by having a specific voice, a walk, and a physical carriage as the characters in children's plays are often general types. The director directing child actors would have to spend some time helping children in this regard as children are generally technically less experienced. Corey (in McCaslin 1978: 100) is of the same opinion:

I demand more style rehearsals of my actors than I do of the text. *How* we do the play is more important than *what* we do.

Should one expect children to characterize beyond this? Could one expect deep emotional involvement from child actors? Would this be expecting too much from them? Fortunately, children's plays seldom call for this type of emotional involvement. This does, however, not mean that children's acting should remain on the superficial level. With good directing and understanding of children, a director should be able to elicit deeply felt and sincere performances from children almost without them being aware of it.

Allen (1979: 58) believes that we do not therefore teach children to act but to express, to embody, to project. This also explains why the most able child is often the best actor, because intelligence is not a separate concept from that of expression but a part of the same internal mental structure expressing itself in action.

The question now arises as to whether a dictatorial style of directing should be used when working with child actors. Should the child actor be given every voice inflection, every gesture, every nuance of performance? From practical projects done with a group of child actors¹³ it seems that children, when only exposed to a dictatorial style of directing, tend to accept this stoically – whether they actually enjoy the process is debatable. However, once children have experienced a freer style of directing, they are loath to return to the former style. They seem to certainly derive more pleasure from the rehearsal process and are quite capable of coming up with their own creative suggestions. Too

¹³ See APPENDIX 4 which describes the process whereby two groups of children were exposed to two differing directorial styles.

often, though, children are only exposed to a dictatorial style of directing usually done by persons unqualified in the field of directing, who seem to have some notion that this is what directing should be all about – a type of theatrical sergent major marshalling the troops with certainly no interest in their creative input. Too often, unfortunately, this is the type of directing dished out at the annual school play and many children's only experience of participation in a play. The value of this type of experience is dubious. It certainly gives the child no opportunity to experience the spontaneity and creativity which Courtney (in McCaslin 1978: 24-25) envisages for children participating in theatre.

Of importance is also Allen's view (1979: 65) that drama will almost inevitably lack truth and substance if it is neither the outcome of a stimulus nor the stirring of the creative imagination. Drama cannot exist outside its various elements: thought, feeling, imagination, vocal and physical expressiveness. Goodrich (1970: 3) feels that, whether in informal or formal drama, the teacher should avoid dominating the work. In many schools drama fails to develop the child because of excessive domination by the teacher. No real exploration of any area of human experience can be achieved by children or young people when the area to be explored, and in many cases the manner in which it is to be explored, have been arbitrarily imposed.

There can be no doubt that it is the approach of the director which will determine whether a production has been a rewarding or a negative experience for a child. If the director is negative or reluctant from the outset, if the director is ill-equipped to deal with children or if the director simply means to impose his views on children seeing them as too insignificant to contribute to the process, then the production as an opportunity for enriching children's lives would have failed. From the point of view of the audience the production might even seem successful but from the point of view of the participants it probably would have contributed little to their personal growth. Children themselves

might even be swept up by the praise of the moment and state that they enjoyed a production which everyone now praises but the crucial question to be asked is whether they wish to repeat the process at a later stage. If children seem reluctant to do so and even worse, if they continue into adult life with a distinct aversion to theatre, it is clear that somehow the process failed. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the methodology which the director employs is sound.

CHAPTER 6 AN EXPLORATION OF SOME APPROACHES

Children's theatre occurs in different settings and circumstances and in each case the approach – and methodology – will vary slightly.

6.1 Children's Theatre in the school – The School Play

The School Play has been subject to much criticism. The reason for its shortcomings probably lies in lack of knowledge and poor work methods. Should these be addressed, the School Play can become a source of much enjoyment to all participants.¹⁴ In addition, theatre in schools can contribute to the learning process. Heathcote (in Robinson 1980: 47) raises the question in this regard:

How far can theatre and schools, by approaching one another, make a safer journey possible for pupils through the differing pressures of subjects, aims and explanations of intent offered in the name of education? How far can theatre share with schools' drama the task of enabling learning?

Despite much criticism, some critics will admit that the School Play does serve some functions in a school. Butler (1975: 1) states that it has always had some value. It is useful as a team enterprise mixing teachers of all interests with the pupils. During my involvement with one specific school whilst working on their school production, it was of great interest to note that the staff's view of school productions changed considerably during the process¹⁵. I believe that this change in attitude occurred as a direct result of the positive work methods adopted by this school.

¹⁴ See APPENDIX 6 for a description of the working methods of one specific school. This is a record of how strong teamwork and organizational skills can contribute to the success of a production.

¹⁵ See APPENDIX 6 for details of a questionnaire completed by the staff of this school which illustrates their general positive impression of the school play and their approval of the specific work method.

The school play forms a valuable and stimulating community activity and the performance gives pleasure to audience and performers alike. Butler suggests that for the play to be of real value it should refer directly to the school curriculum. It should present a core from which the work of the various humanities subjects can radiate. It is then an integrated collection of activities; a project designed to please everyone so that the deeper purpose of the play is to be the centre of a whole range of activities which will occupy children for half a term. Butler suggests that the rehearsing of the play should occupy half the weekly timetable (for half a term) and should replace the work normally done during the arts, crafts and humanities subjects. Whether this is viable with today's very full timetables, however, is doubtful. Done with one class group only, it might still be possible to structure the year so as to be able to undertake a project of this nature but if it has to be a school play in the true sense of the word, i.e. the whole school participating, this might be problematic. Butler (1975: 1) suggests that a team of teachers undertake this project. There must be careful forward planning and preparation: a list of date dead-lines should be established, work spaces allocated, and the activities assigned in such ways as to make the best use of the varied interests and abilities of the different members of staff. The validity of Butler's method was clearly illustrated by a practical project involving a local primary school¹⁶. Butler (1975: 2) also emphasizes the importance of team discussions by staff before the start of the project to ensure integration of all aspects. If the play is to be, as he suggests, part of a term's learning area, resource material and other material such as work charts should also be organized.

¹⁶ See APPENDIX 6 for an example of a practical application of Butler's theories in this regard.

6.2 Children`s Theatre in the Drama studio

The advantage of attempting Children`s Theatre within the setting of a private studio which offers drama classes as an extramural activity is that the majority of children attending a studio are there because they want to be there. As the parents are usually paying for their children`s tuition, they are usually supportive of the whole enterprise as well. This of course makes the staging of such a play that much easier. The only major drawback is the fact that all rehearsals will be conducted after school hours which means that there will be competition with other extra-mural activities and sport fixtures. The wise director/drama teachers should somehow try to work around this and not be confrontational in this matter. Children are subjected to enormous pressure from schools and sport coaches and should not be subjected to further stress as far as this is concerned. It is grossly unfair to reduce a child to tears because he/ she has to choose between attending a rehearsal or playing a match. Children participating in plays should not be seen as young actors/actresses in the making who have to “learn discipline” and “suffer for their art”. This totally defeats the object and goes against all the aims and values of Children`s Theatre as discussed. On the other hand, as one of the aims of the process is to help children socialize and function within a group, they should also be made aware of the fact that they have a responsibility towards the group and this includes attendance at rehearsals. The best compromise is to sit down with the group before rehearsals start and work out a rehearsal schedule together. Once children have committed themselves to this schedule, they should be made to stick to it.

Once rehearsals start, the normal rehearsal and production procedures may be followed. Children are quite capable of responding to this as well as adults. The director should, however, always be aware of the fact that he is also functioning as teacher and would probably have to help the child actors more with

characterization, voice modulation etc. The director should also be prepared to adjust the pace and subject of planned rehearsals to accommodate the children's needs of the moment. Much more will be achieved by a flexible attitude in this regard than rigidly trying to stick to a rehearsal schedule. During a practical project of this kind, this fact was brought home to me when I had to change the planned sequence of rehearsal, intersperse rehearsals with theatre games and omit certain exercises such as an initial readthrough to maintain focus and enthusiasm for the project.¹⁷ The same level of professionalism as far as learning of lines, concentrating on stage, responding to fellow actors and general theatre behaviour should be expected of child actors as of adult actors. Only in this manner will they be able to achieve a performance of substance as well as be enriched in the process.¹⁸

6.3 Children's Theatre within the Workshop group

The staging of a Children's Theatre production within this setting is quite similar to the previous situation in that children attending such a group would probably also be doing so outside of normal school hours and would therefore probably also be there because they want to be there. A difference which probably would occur, however, is the fact that the workshop group often has a second reason for its existence and that is its socializing function. Leach (1970: 38) states that the workshop group should be allowing young people a forum to work out and explore in dramatic terms their own preoccupations and ideas.

¹⁷ See APPENDIX 5 for a detailed description of the rehearsal period of a children's play done with a cast of children.

¹⁸ See APPENDIX 3 & 5:

APPENDIX 3 is an interview with Cheryl Abromowitz, director of a Children's Theatre company, in which she gives some insight into her own work methods.

APPENDIX 5 is a record of a studio production which was undertaken in an attempt to formulate a satisfactory methodology.

If a theatre workshop is to fire the imagination of young people it must be more than the conventional drama society and it must be more than an extended rehearsal period for the traditional Christmas Nativity play, or the School Play. It must possess a dynamic of its own and the young participants must see this and feel part of it. The aim of the Theatre workshop is to interest and involve young people in all forms of theatrical activity. Leach also feels that a dual aim should be addressed – and in this he sees it as a kind of social service – and that is, on the one hand, the fact that it offer young people a creative intellectual outlet but on the other, it is educating them towards a mature response to the art of theatre.

As far as the actual running of the workshop is concerned, the creation of a group identity would be as important in this instance as stated before and an ensemble approach would best serve to encourage group cohesion.

Leach (1970: 40) feels that time should be spent on improving the participants' basic acting skills. He believes that even though exercises might be somewhat tedious they can be enjoyable and serve the useful function of demonstrating to what uses the body and voice can be put as well as being a useful aid to improving acting standards. Exercises and games, he feels are useful devices for warming up or ending off a session but should not go on for too long. During a studio production with a group of children, I also found that games and exercises are not only a good way into a rehearsal session but also a good device for warding off boredom and re-energizing a group during rehearsal. At the same time, certain basic performance skills are honed.¹⁹

As the socializing function of this kind of group is of great importance, decisions taken regarding performance should therefore not only look at performance aspects but also at the general social functioning of the group.

¹⁹ See APPENDIX 5.

Each of the above three situations in which Children's Theatre can occur has its own specific requirements. Basic to all three, however, is the specific approach which the teacher/director applies. This approach should be grounded in certain specific principles as will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7 TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE METHODOLOGY

7.1 Educational drama as background

Teachers started moving away from the typical educational drama approach even whilst the educational drama theories still persisted. Robinson (1980: 154) notes:

Drama teachers themselves have long since begun to move on to a more structured form of work which makes greater demands on children and on them. Putting creative activity to some effort requires control, discipline and skill.

In addition, Robinson (1980: 155-156) feels that too often so-called expressive work existed in a vacuum.

We cannot create drama about nothing, and for what we do to be expressive we must feel involvement with whatever the work is about...an expression is always both *of* and *about* something. If, for example, we see someone crying we may wonder that the crying is expressive of...and also what the expression is about...the first question is asking for a description of the 'intentional state' and the second for a description of the 'intentional object' of the state...the exact failing of some so-called expressive work in schools and elsewhere is that we do not ask these two questions of it. Getting children to 'express grief', for example, without any sense of context or impulse to do so only produces imitative behaviour which is not about anything and therefore not genuinely of anything either. It is not a genuine act of expression at all, because in both senses of this word, it has no *object*.

Robinson (1980: 156) feels that in drama instead we should create an intentional context where we know the events are not real but a metaphor for real events. This seems to point towards scripted work.

Creative dramatics can, however, be viewed as an introduction to scripted drama. Burger (in Siks & Dunnington 1961: 185) expresses the conviction that creative dramatics can be used as an approach to Children's Theatre. According to her it can be used as an approach for acting, tryouts and casting, developing a scene in a scripted play and the building of a discriminating future audience for Children's Theatre. She quotes Mary Nightswander as promoting transition from creative dramatics to formal drama and Winifred Ward and Rita Cristle stating that in the Children's Theatre of Evanston they only use children in casts who have a creative dramatics background. Burger (in Siks & Dunnington 1961: 186) also refers to Ella Hambrodt saying that children who join their Children's theatre group only work in creative dramatics during their first year. At the end of this period, they are ready to try a one-act play. I found that a background in educational drama certainly prepared a group and made them far more receptive to receiving direction during a practical project conducted with a group of children.²⁰ Creative dramatics, additionally, would serve to prepare a child for performance in front of an audience as it is of great importance that a child is, in fact, ready for this type of exposure. Allen (1979:117) feels that to suddenly place a crowd of infants in front of two or three hundred adults to give a performance requiring a variety of skills, far more complex than anything they have yet learnt to handle, is educationally inadmissible.

Siks (1961: 186) believes that educational drama and Children's Theatre are in harmony as they provide for enjoyment and child growth. Children's Theatre provides strong impressions, creative dramatics provides for strong expressions. The guidance that is provided in educational drama seems to provide an indication of how to approach children in Children's Theatre.

²⁰ See APPENDIX 5 for a description of a play rehearsed and performed with a group of children.

Fleming (1998: 4) agrees that children should be guided in the creation of drama. He stated that this view marked a departure from earlier practitioners who based their work on the efficacy of unfettered child play. The solution offered which changed the emphasis from pure play, was for the teacher to intervene and take over responsibility for the creation of drama. The teacher should provide significant content and artistic form. Even in process drama and in many practical books which have been published in recent years, it is the teacher rather than the pupil who is acting as “playwright”, orchestrating the work and planning which conventions to use. Fleming (1998: 4) offers a possible alternative to the teacher offering content and artistic form to the work. He says that a deceptively simple alternative would have been to teach the pupils how to do the same by teaching them the appropriate conventions. He suggests doing this by examining the way dramatists take an idea and translate it into dramatic form as well as gaining insight into the nature of drama and dramatic convention. To this end, he identifies 25 conventions: Alternative Perspective, Analogy, Beginning, Counterpoint, Endings, Exposition, Externalising Inner Conflict, False Identity, Framing Action, Incongruity, Irony, Mime, Minimal Context, Minor characters, Monologue, Narration, Object focus, Off-stage action, Pause, Play within a play, Reported action, Ritual, Time shift, Unspoken thoughts and Voices to be explored with children so as to facilitate their ability to create their own plays.

7.2 Creating a group

Leach (1970: 10) believes that for theatre to become a force in the lives of children and young people, a theatre workshop has to be created which would enable a group of like-minded young people to come together to practise the art of theatre, to develop ideas which will bear fruit in production and to develop a mutual understanding which would benefit the production. I have found this to be certainly true. The group with which I performed a studio production for the

purposes of this study²¹ still meet weekly for a workshop session and have been doing so for at least five years.

Heathcote (in Robinson 1980: 57) also emphasizes the importance of creating a group identity when working with a group of actors and, even more so, with a group of children. Children are normally more “me” centred and do not naturally fall into a pattern of give and take which is so crucial for successful theatre. She finds it crucial to spend some time on the development of a group identity. Yet is time well spent. Byers (1968: 72) notes that group interaction has great value in its ability to encourage individual growth especially when there is common ground for exchanging and acceptance of ideas. Heathcote (in Robinson 1980: 57) creates group coherence in the following way:

You may do work, or discussion work, on the scenes of the script so that you find out how they relate individually and as a group. If you do something which everybody talks a bit about - their lives or attitudes to the subject – they level out...they have a sense of having an identity in a group.

Leach (1970: 11) looks to professional theatre to seek a working method towards the creation of a group identity. He isolated two features which might be of benefit when working with children. The first feature involved the creation of a permanent company and the second, the use of Brecht’s working methods and use of ensemble acting.

As far as the first feature is concerned, there will obviously, when working with children, be a limitation on the degree of permanence. Children grow up and become too old for a specific group or they change their extramural activities and leave the group. Yet within these limitations a degree of permanence can be achieved. If a child joins a drama group at approximately 8 years of age

²¹ See APPENDIX 5.

he/she could spend up to six years within such a group which would allow for a great sense of group identity to develop. For this reason a mixed-age group has advantages above a single age group. Younger newcomers are always being introduced to the group and informally learn skills from the older members who pass on their expertise. This helps to create an even stronger sense of group identity. This sense of identity created will underline Leach's second feature identified, namely the use of Brechtian working methods. Brecht saw his group of actors primarily as an ensemble with each member being of equal status within the group. This is the ideal manner in which to run a children's theatre group as well. There should be no stars within such a group and leading parts should be allocated on a rotation basis as far as possible. Children can be quite philosophical in this regard and if they realize that they are all being treated fairly they will not begrudge another child a major part in one specific instance. Children themselves are also amazingly quick to spot exceptional talent and will normally point this out to the director with guileless candour when they think that someone is well suited for a part. This was practically illustrated to me whilst working on a practical project with children. At the first rehearsal they accepted the casting of the more experienced and more adept members of their group in bigger parts without question.²² It is usually only when adults interfere that jealousy with regards to casting rears its head.

Robinson (1977: 165) feels that the teachers should also have an understanding of the social background of the group. He found that dramatizing and getting involved is not always as natural and easy for children as it is made out to be. This is because of the social relationships surrounding the group which may range from total unfamiliarity and tentativeness with a new grouping, to long-established sets of friends and rivals with completely fixed expectations of each

²² See APPENDIX 5 for an account of a production done with a drama group.

other in an old one. The actions of a group in a drama session, in role or out of it, are not just a response to what the teacher asks them to do. They are also responses to the expectations they have of each other. They do not simply drop social roles just because they are asked to act-out another one. On the contrary: they now have two sets of roles to handle. In working with the group for the first time, or with one which is uncommitted to drama, the teacher needs to know how the social network is operating. Otherwise, whatever the group does will only ever make partial sense. For some individuals, in some groups, taking on certain roles may be all but impossible. At other times, particularly with people who are completely new to drama, it may not be taking on any particular role which proves to be difficult – for, example a quiet person being asked to play an aggressive one – but the fact of doing it at all.

Robinson (1980: 57) states that in a drama session with children, the teacher usually has to work in the initial stages on welding the individuals into a working group. This is not always as easy as it seems.

Children are often asked to get into groups in drama. This is not quite so simple as it sounds. If they don't know each other at all, this can be a very difficult choice. If they know each other very well they may feel that they've got no choice at all. The teacher can easily lose control at this point of one of the most important aspects of the session: that is, *how* the individuals will work together. The teacher is responsible for the social lubrication of the group, making relationships as fluid as possible; creating opportunities for fresh contacts and new ideas... If drama has a potential for changing understanding it does not come of itself but through the skill and control of the teacher. The members of a group do not forget who they are and how they relate to each other simply because they are asked to take on a role (Robinson 1980: 166).

Yet once this has been achieved he believes that drama fulfills its prime function, and that is a social one. Robinson (1980: 158) believes that the use of

drama helps to take individual education out of its customary social vacuum and enables children to learn openly from in each other in an atmosphere of social interaction.²³ Theatre was discredited in drama teaching because of a mistaken emphasis on self-expression and individuality which overlooked the social nature of these processes and the possibility of their having more than one function. Teachers should also be sensitive to exactly what it is that they are asking of a group and an individual. For some children even the smallest amount of participation might seem like a personal risk and Robinson (1980: 166) believes that few people, whether children or adults, will take the necessary social risks which drama requires with productive involvement without some sense that it will repay the effort or, unless they can be sure, through confidence in the teacher, that they will not regret it. The alternatives are easily available: sitting back, appearing to be involved, treating it as a joke, not taking part at all.

7.3 The role of the teacher/director

Kester (in Siks & Dunnington 1961: 47) believes that a director of plays with children is primarily a teacher. Because his students have had little time to acquire knowledge in theatre, he must instruct as well as direct. Kester further believes that the teacher/director of children's plays should be a mixture of a child psychologist (understanding both the child actors and the child audience), a theatre director (with knowledge of staging and stagecraft), a theatre technician (as he/she will usually have to control this aspect as well), a business manager and a literary agent. Whiting (in Siks & Dunnington 1961: 3) echoes this and adds that the director in Children's Theatre should have a love for children and a love for theatre, be a gifted leader, be prepared to work long hours, have an interest in children's literature and education. This description I

²³See APPENDIX 5 which is an account of a studio production with a group of children between 7 and 12 years old. What really impressed during performance was the way in which the children interacted – especially backstage – and the manner in which they supported one another. See REHEARSAL 28 and PERFORMANCE 1.

can personally vouch for as this is exactly what I experienced when doing a studio production with a group of children. One could, of course, lessen the burden by getting other adults, such as parents of the children, to help although after my experience with a number of ballet mothers²⁴ I feel that this, in the end, creates an entirely new problem.

Most problems with directors in Children's Theatre occur in this area of versatility: very often individuals directing plays for and with children might be an expert in one field but not necessarily in another. Directing for Children's theatre requires an individual with a range of very specific abilities. Should the individual have expertise in one area but none in another, the problems are numerous – whether it be a director usually working in adult theatre, now directing a children's play with little knowledge of children's theatre, or a director with no teaching background trying to work with a cast of children or a teacher with no theatre background trying to stage a play.

Goldberg (1974: 137) believes that the children's theatre director should have a belief in children's theatre, an understanding of the developmental process, and an insight into the child's interests, abilities, vocabulary, attention span and humor. He ought to be able to accept the child's cruelty and his compassion. He must read children's books and watch children's programmes on television, for these constitute the artistic background of the audience. He also profits by watching children at play, from which he learns the way their imaginations flow.

Heathcote (in Robinson 1980: 12) also examines the role of the teacher and attempts to analyze when she is functioning as teacher, when as director, when as playwright or counsellor. Heathcote concludes that there are three essential ingredients to a drama teacher's growth:

²⁴ See APPENDIX 5: Rehearsal 25 and 28.

1. to remain accepting of the ways of children and present conditions whilst considering how best to interfere, and to bring about shifting his own and the children's perspectives and understanding,
2. to be able to affirm and receive from others,
3. to remain curious.

Heathcote (in Robinson 1980: 15) describes her view of the director as follows:

It is in the spirit of the acceptor of what children bring to the situation – always the receiver, the curious one, the playwright, the creator of tensions and occasionally the director and the actor – that I have to function.

The teacher must work very rigorously in planning for the growth of children's perceptions. Often there is not the necessary rigour in preparing for learning through drama (Heathcote in Robinson 1980: 46).

On the subject of the teacher, Bolton (in Robinson 1980: 80) believes the principal function of a drama teacher should be the use of the theatrical form in order to enhance the meaning of the participants' experience: by using the theatrical elements of tension, focus, contrast and symbolization, actions and objects in the drama become significant. He suggests that this theatrical structuring is combined with the spontaneous existential mode of the participants. A useful parallel for comparison can be found in formal games such as football, where the participants are experiencing within a highly structured framework. Both games and drama require commitment. Drama is further complicated by requiring emotional engagement with the subject matter. Another function of the drama teacher, therefore, is to work for commitment to drama and, more importantly, delicately to adjust the quality, degree and intensity of emotional engagement the topic arouses, so that the participants may with integrity, spontaneity and a sharpened consciousness enter the

fictitious context. If some of the class are not interested in the topic, he/she may have to 'capture' their interest. He/she may have to modify the emotional loading that a topic carries for a particular class. The teacher will often find him/herself structuring the dramatic activity in order to change the 'emotional temperature'.

The teacher/director has to adapt to the children's stage of development and state of mind. The integrity of the experience will depend on the quality of feeling the teacher brings to the activity. The feeling must be appropriate to the context. If the child bursts into a fit of giggles, we could reasonably agree that feeling and context were incompatible. Getting into the action of drama is an approximating process of finding quality of feeling that matches one's understanding of the theme and context. It is often very difficult in fact for children to evoke appropriate feeling quality. Much depends on the mood of the pupils before the lessons starts. If a group chooses a topic which requires the expression of emotions far removed from their reality then a starting point for that must be found to cater for their actual feelings. Bolton (in Robinson 1980:81) warns against the practice of pushing children where they cannot go as they then normally switch to superficiality. In many schools children have been trained to 'switch on' imitative emotional display, so that they give a *demonstration* of emotion that has little to do with real feeling. They sometimes mistakenly think that this is what a real actor does. Many children, given a taste for superficiality, resist working at finding an appropriate feeling quality. Bolton feels that it is his responsibility to protect them into a context that does not expose, a context that naturally permits them to indulge in 'introverting' emotion while gradually opening up the topic. It is flexible enough to allow, as some of the class break from their self-consciousness, a change in feeling quality. When releasing this kind of emotion, certain safeguards would have to be in place. Bolton (Bolton in Robinson 1980: 84) suggests that role play should be in name only so that the individual is somewhat removed from the process.

In addition, safeguards lie in the tightness of the teacher structuring the experience and the teacher allowing for affective or cognitive change.

Working within the theatre form provides a fourth safeguard. Theatre requires the most disciplined behaviour. Dramatically, the experience gives them great freedom but *psychologically* that freedom is taken away, for they are bound by the rules of working symbolically. They are “*released into self discipline*” (Bolton in Robinson 1980: 85). Another safeguard would be the teacher insisting on the agreed upon degree to which objective reality must be met as well as the teacher insisting on the logic of whatever the found reality. Whatever the reality found within the fiction it will have its own logic, its own rules. Again it is the teacher’s responsibility to insist that the class keep to that logic. Sometimes an over-excited child or particularly egocentric child will break the implied rules and distort the fantasy beyond the class’s intentions, again challenging credibility. The teacher must step in on these occasions. Stopping the process of the drama is a final safeguard. Bolton states:

I have no qualms whatsoever at stopping the process of the drama. Indeed I establish with most classes that I shall often hold up the drama for us to examine what we are creating...so I constantly put a brake on the dramatic flow, not to hold some intellectual discussions, but to check on the integrity of the experience. (Bolton in Robinson 1980: 85)

Byers (1968: 96) believes that the teacher/ director and child actors in a children’s play should become joint participants in a learning experience that provides untold discoveries for each person about himself and those around him. She also felt that the teacher should allow what seems to be chaos while students work out ideas. The teacher should learn to distinguish between incoherent, haphazard activity and the free form of expressive probing necessary to create discovery. This perhaps is one of the most important lessons

any teacher can learn. Goodrich (1970:3) feels that the most important function of the teacher is that of observer. The teacher must be able to discern what is significant in whatever the child does in relation to his present abilities, his growth and development. The teacher also has to watch for over-excitement in the class leading to lack of control.

All in all, the teacher has to be very aware of the group's mood and what degree of emotional maturity they have reached. If they do not respond with the correct emotional responses, the director/teacher has to take responsibility for this as it is he/she who has the additional responsibility of setting the correct mood for rehearsal or performance. It is quite unlike working with mature adults where the responsibility for appropriate responses rests with each individual.

Directors/teachers who do not realize this often become despondent and even angry when the child cast does not display appropriate behaviour and focus. They do not realize that as the leader of a group of children the director should ideally be indulging in something best called "edutainment". Without actually going into dictatorial directing where each move and nuance is demonstrated to the child, the director has to somehow convey the appropriate emotional tone and energy level to the cast. Directing a cast of children requires not only great emotional and intellectual stability and endurance but also great physical stamina.

The exact methodology of directing would obviously differ from individual to individual although a practical project²⁵ in this regard revealed that even children work best under a more democratic form of directing. Dorothy Heathcote (in Robinson 1980: 56) says:

²⁵ See APPENDIX 4: Practical project comparing directorial styles.

I work very off the cuff as a teacher. I like to have a starting idea – what I'm going to do in the first few minutes – or I panic completely. But after that I like to respond very much to what happens.

Dorothy Heathcote's method, although referring more to a creative dramatics session, is of some validity here in its emphasis on the teacher/director's openness to what the children might bring to the process. Even when working with a set script, a dictatorial style of directing with no opportunity for the children to contribute, would lead to a far less enriching experience for the participants²⁶. Children will usually be very stoic even under the worst directing but obviously such conditions are to be avoided at all costs as this totally negates the value of such a project. The directing style would probably also be influenced by the experience and nature of the group. A practical project²⁷ in this regard with a group of children with poor attention span and impulse control demonstrated the need for adapting to the children's specific needs as it was soon obvious during the course of the project that the children could not deal with a more democratic directorial style which another group had flourished under.

One of the most important tasks of the teacher/director is, according to Byers (1968: 91), to help the cast realize the difference between clarity in their own minds and clarity in presentation to an audience. This can be quite a daunting task as children, even though they understand the initial motivation, often find it difficult to sustain that immediacy of response in repeated performances without the work becoming mechanical.

MacGregor (1977: 13) feels that Children's Theatre lacks the immediacy of response which characterises educational drama. This immediacy of response is exactly what makes the effort worthwhile as it is this immediacy of response which can lead children to insights and discoveries they might not otherwise

²⁶ See APPENDIX 4.

²⁷ See APPENDIX 1 for a description of a practical project at a special needs school.

experience. This is probably where educational drama departs most from Children's Theatre as in a rehearsed play responses are studied and rehearsed. If the teacher/director could, however, retain some of the immediacy of response in theatrical performance, it would serve the same function and lead to, as Bolton (in Robinson 1980: 85) puts it, an experience with "integrity". Bowskill (1973: 36) also emphasizes the importance of spontaneity or the immediacy technique. He feels that by freeing spontaneity, the imagination is also freed. Pupils then learn that spontaneous responses are easier than carefully considered ones and are imaginatively richer and fuller as well. Not all pupils initially find it easy to respond spontaneously. According to Bowskill (1973: 37), it might be necessary for the teacher/director to assume an authoritarian tone instructing them to break through blocks which might have been caused by a number of reasons - fear, politeness, compassion, religion morality, etiquette.

On the other hand, the teacher/ director might also have to check over-heated spontaneity which might become destructive. Especially when working with children, one has to be sensitive to their backgrounds as children are still in their parents' care and the teacher therefore has to take the parents' convictions, morality etc into account. This would be especially pertinent in a multi-cultural society.

7.4 Setting

Where is the ideal place for Children's Theatre to take place? According to George Devine (in Robinson 1980: 107) in the school.

I am deeply and entirely convinced that the solution lies in the schools and a radical re-appraisal of the teaching of drama.

And yet Allen (1979: 128) is of the opinion that the school play, which is the occasion when the theatre arts are traditionally most fully realized, has been the subject of particular vilification, and often not without justice. This, however,

has not deterred teachers from putting on plays or headmasters from encouraging them to do so; but it has tended to drive a wedge between more traditional forms of theatrical activity and the work of the new wave of specialists with their enthusiasm for all those aspects of drama which distinguish it from theatre.

What are the main criticisms levelled at the traditional school play? The usual criticisms levelled at the school play usually range from bad costuming and set construction to poor lighting and sound to children being inaudible and mouthing lines with little involvement or understanding. In addition, from the child's point of view, it may include having suffered under bad directing and unmotivated blocking, self-consciousness caused by lack of skill or lack of group involvement. Clearly, if the school has to be the place for advancing drama and theatrical arts, much has to be done to avoid this type of situation. In this regard, the project of one particular primary school is of note.²⁸

Swortzell (1990: xxxix) believes that

Even though the sentiment prevailing is to keep the amateur and professional organizations separate, just as it does in adult theatre, the excellent work that goes on in schools need to be better known and respected. Skilled directors working in non-profit companies and educational settings are as significant in their field as professional directors are in theirs. Yet they seldom achieve recognition outside their own regions, except from young people with whom they work who recognize how much they have gained and remain often for the rest of their lives, deeply indebted.

For too long a type of theatrical snobbery has existed where work which is being done in Children's theatre and in schools is being viewed as inferior and of lesser importance. Why should a good production which is probably being done with limited resources and funding and in hall which was by no means

²⁸ See APPENDIX 6 which is a record of the very successful working method of one particular school where good organization has resulted in an enriching experience for all involved.

designed for the speaking voice be deemed less valid than a professional production which has the best resources to its disposal? Why should a production which touches the lives of many young individuals and perhaps bring about drastic change in the level of confidence and sense of self-worth in a child be viewed as less valid than a theatrical entertainment which provides but a few fleeting hours of enjoyment to an adult audience?

A new approach and sound methodology should serve to ensure a good standard in all children's productions which, in turn, might contribute to improving the reputation of such productions within and outside of schools.

7.5 Proposed outcomes

Wood (1997: 5) believes that Theatre for children is a separate art form with qualities that make it quite distinct from adult theatre. It is not simplified adult theatre; it has its own dynamics and its own rewards. Some theorists believe that these rewards go far beyond the pleasure of the immediate performance. Kester (in Siks & Dunnington 1961: 45) believes that the impression made upon the participants in Children's Theatre may have lifetime implications.

MacGregor (1977: 16) feels that the function of the arts is to make sense of, express and communicate from the inner world of subjective understanding. In acting-out the individual himself/herself is the prime medium of expression. It is the exploration and representation of meaning using the medium of the whole person – physically, emotionally, intellectually.

Heathcote (in Robinson 1980: 27) believes that children should be led to reflective participation and the realization that art celebrates true significance. Heathcote (1980:12) states that children should also be allowed to function as artist but their processes are different and demand different skills from the teacher/leader. The teacher should be led by the children's level of development

as well as their day to day level of receptiveness. Children have less impulse control than adults and the director should keep this in mind and work around it if necessary. During a project involving children with learning disabilities and other behavioural problems²⁹ I was confronted with this fact rather forcibly. It is useless to try and force children to participate at a certain level if they are distracted in any way or for whatever reason. To force them to continue rehearsals as planned is useless as they become resentful and extremely uncreative. The director should then rather devise a strategy to instantly work around this so as to keep the process alive and vibrant. This is one of the reasons why directing for children is so challenging. The director cannot merely assume that a specific goal will be reached within a certain rehearsal. The director has to be prepared to instantly adapt. Even when working with children who do not have any behavioural problems³⁰ this will apply.

In spite of the above differences, however, children's basic materials are the same as those of adults when working creatively. They are also individuals exploring their own attitudes, reflecting upon living and expressing their point of view as precisely as possible but realizing that it is a temporary moment of perception which may change in the act of expression. It is up to the teacher/director to guide them in this process. If this is done with commitment and care then McCaslin's (1978: 9) ideal of a Children's Theatre might be achieved – Children's Theatre which is:

An art form, created with respect and a caring concern. An art form that is technically as fine as that produced for adults. An art form that touches every level of consciousness, though not necessarily at the same time or in equal measure. An art form that stretches the mind and stirs the emotions.

²⁹ See APPENDIX 1.

³⁰ See APPENDIX 5 for details of a children's production where the rehearsal schedule had to be adapted to suit the children's level of concentration.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The approach formulated in the previous chapter has been based on the one hand, on the views of practitioners in the field and, on the other hand, insights gained from a number of practical projects in which most of the views expressed by practitioners in the field have been confirmed. The approach is applicable in all possible performance situations – whether a production is staged in a school or within a private studio.

The approach is based on sound educational principles so that the process is a positive, enriching experience rather than a negative one. Children should come away from the experience with a heightened sense of self worth and confidence in their ability to handle themselves in a stressful situation. They should have experienced the satisfaction which participation in a successful group project brings and they should have come to know what it feels like to have a group rely on you as an individual. Success in performance should not be the yardstick. Instead, children should be led to measure their own success and growth by their individual contributions and sense of responsibility towards the group as was shown in a practical project undertaken with a group of children³¹.

Central to the whole process and the single most important determining factor, is the contribution of the director. If the director realizes that he/she is also functioning as a teacher, then sound educational principles should be adhered to throughout the rehearsal process. The teacher-director should use every opportunity to guide and instruct. The general approach to the pupils should be a positive, constructive one so that the process remains positive. This obviously

³¹ See APPENDIX 5

means that general condescending behaviour and poor self control should be avoided at all costs. The director would have to make an enormous input seeing that the rehearsal process does not come easily to most children who have limited impulse control. The secret lies in somehow keeping interest alive during rehearsals. It would serve the director in good stead to view herself as an **edutainer** who not only instructs but also keeps the children motivated and focused throughout. The director should lead by example as far as focus and energy input is concerned.

If the cast of children comes to the rehearsal process via participation in an educational drama group, then focus, group co-operation and improvisational ability will be strengthened. If this is not possible, then even a few session of educational drama activities at the start of the rehearsal process could be incorporated. Educational drama activities could also be interspersed with normal rehearsals so as to keep the rehearsal process alive and interesting.

When preparing children for a Childrens` s play, a longer period of time should be allocated for rehearsals than when working with adults. This does not necessarily mean that children take longer to settle into a role - although they will need more guidance in the process with regards to characterization, voice modulation and expressive movement – but it simply takes the reality of children usually having full timetables into account. Even if children thoroughly enjoy preparing for a production, the reality is that their lives are still filled with schoolwork and other commitments.

The style of the director should allow for some input from the children. The director should take great care to try and incorporate any suggestions from a child, even if in modified form. The sensitive director will take a child` s idea, mould it so as to fit in with his own vision but still let the child feel that the idea was his/hers. Children experience great pride when they see their own visions manifested on stage. A child should also never be made to feel inadequate. If, for instance, a child really struggles with a role, then rather

rewrite the role or get another child to join in. The explanation given for this action should obviously not reveal that the motivation for it lies in the child's poor performance.

As far as the selection of script is concerned, it should be remembered that using an existing script for this age group is probably the more sensible option. If the director, however, opts for workshopping a script, he/she should start the workshop process with quite a definite idea of what should be achieved in mind. Improvisations set around the central idea should therefore give the cast quite definite boundaries otherwise the process would probably flounder as the children become overwhelmed by the lack of constraint. When working with a set script, some children, especially those at the younger end of the age range, can become distracted by the piece of paper in hand and lose their ability to focus. In this instance, it would be better to learn lines by rote.

The audience attending a children's production would mainly consist of children. Therefore the selection of a script should not only consider the child actors performing the script but also the child audience viewing it. An inattentive audience who is bored by a mediocre script should be the last thing inflicted on a young performer on stage. The production should include sufficient variety and visual elements to keep such an audience enthralled and therefore aid the young performer. The director's task is therefore of a dual nature – he/she should consider both the child on stage and the child in the audience. It should also be kept in mind that the two – child performer and child audience – might communicate quite directly at times as especially the child in the audience might participate very actively whether it is the appropriate moment or not. The child cast should therefore be prepared for any such eventuality during the rehearsal process.

If possible, children's plays should be staged in a venue specially designed for this purpose. In practice, however, it will probably be problematic to locate such a venue. Whatever alternate venue is selected an effort should be made to

somehow make it more child-friendly – for both the child audience and the child performer. Children should not be given the impression that their production has to make-do with leftovers from adult theatre. The same rule will apply to the use of set, props and costume.

Historically, the child as performer has not often been seen for what he/she is. He/she has either been viewed as a miniature adult providing novelty entertainment for adults or has been discouraged from even appearing on stage. Educational drama achieved a lot by its emphasis on the experiential nature of creative dramatics but completely overlooked whatever benefits might be derived from stage performance. I believe that this was because of a one-sided view that the only reason for a young person to be on a stage is to be in training for a career as a performer. This is a rather shortsighted view and is rather like stating that children can only participate in sport if they wish to make this their career. If this was the case, a wonderful opportunity for contributing to the holistic education of the child would be lost. The same can be said for active participation in theatre. It should be seen as an essential tool in the process of educating the whole child.

The challenge, of course, is to somehow encourage the use of a sound methodology where it really matters – amongst practitioners working, more often than not, in a school setting. Resistance to change old work methods, which on the surface at least gave good results and lack of knowledge are but two factors which could adversely delay the introduction of sound methodology. I would recommend further study into this question so as to determine an effective method of getting teachers/directors to employ a methodology which would benefit the children involved.

Further study could also be undertaken in the use of Children's Theatre as a tool for social integration³² – something which might be of great benefit in the South African context.

³² See Pg 53.

APPENDIX 1

The following practical project was conducted at Jan Kriel School for Special Needs education in Kuilsriver.

BACKGROUND

The school was initially founded as a school for children with Epilepsy but over the years it has evolved into an educational centre for children with special needs as a result of physical or behavioural challenges. The school now includes children with diabetes, dyslexia and other reading/learning disabilities, children with poor impulse control, children with short term memory retention problems and many children with ADD or ADHD. None of the children are, however, mentally challenged. Most of the children received some form of medication.

THE GROUP

The children were exposed to drama fortnightly for an hour. The class sizes were small, on average 10 learners per class. The school grades included in the project were Grades 4, 5 and 6. For 6 months a programme of general educational drama was followed. After this period, one class, a Grade 6 class, was chosen as a group to be used for a special children's theatre project. The choice of class was random in that it was not an exceptional class in any way – their timetable simply made it easiest for them to attend one class a week. The group consisted of 3 girls and 8 boys. Instead of the usual fortnightly session, the group was seen once a week for a period of 12 weeks.

AIM

The aim of the exercise was to determine whether involvement in a Children's Theatre project would benefit the children, specifically in three areas:

1. Improving concentration span – something which most of the children in the group have problems with.
2. Improving group cohesion and co-operation. During the preceding period of educational drama it was found that the level of aggression in all the classes was exceptionally high. Discussions with class teachers could not really shed any light on this phenomenon. A possible cause could be the high level of frustration which each of these children experience individually in their daily classroom activities. In addition, the children had all been transferred from other educational institutions at some point so that there was very little shared "history" amongst many of them. A large percentage of the class also commuted to the school on a daily basis which meant that they shared very little extramural time with the rest of the class. In addition, many of the children were labelled as "difficult" at previous schools where their needs were perhaps not understood or being met, which resulted in poor self image and an almost fatalistic attempt to prove themselves "difficult".
3. Improving short term memory span through the memorizing of lines.

PROCEDURE

The first major obstacle to overcome was the fact that scripts could not be used as so many of the children had reading problems and script reading (if at all possible) would have turned this into a negative experience. On the other hand,

I felt that total reliance on improvisation and workshopping of a script would not be effective either as the children were far too unfocused for in depth group discussions. In addition to poor concentration, there was also a very high level of aggression amongst the children and a near total inability to partake in a normal give-and-take discussion without violent outbreaks of temper. The class had also been quite traumatized during the previous term when a boy with near total lack of impulse control had terrorized the rest of the class. He had been removed but the effects on the class were devastating. There was extreme mistrust and aggression within the group which made normal group discussions impossible.

I finally selected a method of structured improvisation around an existing script. The script I selected was *The Wind Pearl* by Pamela Gerke.

Rehearsal 1 : I narrate the story of the play in abbreviated form. A complete readthrough would not have hold their poor attention span. As it is, it is difficult to get through this very simple telling of the story as they are more interested in the casting. This leads to very vicious arguments and much name-calling. I terminated the session with a discussion on the importance of group work and consideration.

Rehearsal 2: At the 2nd session they arrive very lethargic. This is a common feature of the children. They are often affected by a number of external factors – from changes in the weather to changes in their medication. They have lost most of the first week's enthusiasm for the play and seem to have forgotten the story completely. I decide not to retell it but to rather get going with blocking as soon as possible to try and energize them again. I select a narrator – a very competent boy who had proven to be quite reliable in previous class work. None of the others begrudge him the part as he is one of the few easy-going children in class who seem to get on reasonably well with everyone else. I simplify the

words from the script and tell him, about three lines at a time, what he has to say. He repeats after me – not exactly, but basically getting the gist of the lines. This method seems to work quite well. By the end of the session, he basically only needs a word or two of prompting to complete each section. He does however, not repeat the lines in exactly the same way each time he says them. When I try to get him to do this he becomes severely agitated and I decide to let him do it his way. It is certainly a new way of doing lines and I will have to see how this develops.

I cast a few more roles and rehearse the opening scene in the same way. The children cannot really cope with more than two repetitions of a certain section before the session disintegrates into bickering, boredom and chaos. It is as if the normal problems which one encounters with a cast of children (shortened attention span, physical restlessness etc) is increased tenfold. I cut the rehearsal short and end the session with concentration games.

Rehearsal 3: The group arrives exuberant and full of energy. They find it very hard to focus and have no interest in working on the play. Instead they want to “do something else”. I do a few games to focus them and then go back to the rehearsal of the opening scene. It is hopeless. They change the moves, change roles, change the play. The only one trying to repeat what was done before is the boy playing the narrator. He gets extremely agitated by everyone else’s lack of focus. I decide to leave the opening scene and jump to a scene further on which involves robbers attacking the king’s army which results in sword fights and fisticuffs. I first prepare them for the section, telling them that we will now do stage fighting (they are overjoyed!) and point out the need for care and control. They are very eager to start and even attempt to control their tempers and get on with each other. We start the fight sequences in slow motion and amazingly enough, they actually manage to control their movements and we manage to get through the section without any casualties. Their interest in the play is now revived!

Rehearsal 4: We go back to rehearsing the play chronologically. They seem to really try and some of the moves are beginning to fall into place. They do, however, find it virtually impossible to visualize themselves in space with the result that normal stage directions mean nothing. Basic stage instruction such as moving right, left, not upstaging, facing the audience make absolutely no sense to them and I cannot get them to work with any stage awareness at all. They do however, seem to be able to follow certain floor patterns so I break up all movements into circular/ zigzag floor patterns. This they can follow to some extent although they tend to get carried away. If they, for instance, like a circular movement they will carry on doing it senselessly for ages with no regard to the meaning or appropriateness of the movement. In the end I decide to rather go for a type of arena staging. This solves many problems.

Rehearsals continued in this manner for the rest of the term. The problems encountered were mainly behavioural. The children would arrive either extremely agitated and aggressive or lethargic and dull. Outside factors such as a sudden rain storm can completely ruin a day's rehearsal as they become completely distracted and unfocused. At times, it feels, as if the whole process is grinding to a halt and I am about ready to give up completely. The children are unfocused, they fight, they are tearful, they are bored, they are aggressive. But we persevere. They insist that they want to continue. On some occasions they try very hard, on some they do not try at all!

By the time we get to the last few scenes, interest is really waning and I cut the scenes drastically. I try and inject some life into the project. One day we leave the classroom and have our rehearsal in the school gardens. The setting is perfect – there is an ornamental pond with a bridge for the robbers to hide under, there are reeds and a big tree as a real live set. I consider staging our play

here in the open air. The rehearsal however, is disastrous! They vanish in all directions, they roll in the grass and are quite overcome by the occasion! Without the limitations of the classroom they are totally incapable of doing a runthrough. They find it completely beyond them to adapt to the new setting.

By the end of rehearsals they are losing interest fast. They see no need for polishing. A decision has to be taken regarding the outcome of the project – they seem incapable of developing to the point of being ready for an audience. Yet I fear that they will be very disappointed if there is no closure. In the end I compromise. I tell them that we will perform for their teachers and then we can decide what we want to do with it after the school holidays. They seem to like the idea. The teachers duly come and watch “a performance”. They fumble through it, yet seem very pleased with themselves. After the holiday, perhaps thankfully, they will have lost interest in the project.³³

The project had underlined the typical problems when working with children rather forcibly. Every single hurdle was there but, in this case, amplified!

The following list of problems seems to be typical:

1. Script.

Children find it boring to rehearse from a script. They find it difficult to visualize character and action and need to be led to experiment with characterization or else they will use the most abysmal stereotypes. Chronological rehearsals often bore them. Scenes might have to be rehearsed for their level of “excitement” and variation.

³³ During the holiday I was quite amazed when one of the mothers approached me and told me that her son, whom I thought was not really interested in the whole affair, had lived for their weekly drama class that whole term. He could not stop talking about the play, rehearsed sections at home and had suddenly become eager to go to school. She thanked me literally with tears in her eyes. I was amazed and humbled and again reminded of how precious it is to work with children.

2. Focus

Children find it very hard to focus for even an hour of rehearsal. Rehearsals work best when interspersed with games.

3. Physical energy

Children find it hard to contain themselves physically for a whole rehearsal period and probably need some kind of physical release midway through rehearsals.

4. Adaptation

Children find it hard to adapt to any changes – whether in set, costume, venue, etc. They will need more time to adapt to changes.

5. Polishing

Children find it very hard to understand the notion of polishing a play before performance. They see no sense in repetition and will repeat something with no enthusiasm when asked to do so. Variety should be used in rehearsal (e.g. varying pace, voices, etc) to keep the interest.

6. Stage awareness

Children do not have natural stage awareness. I have seen children standing threequarters in the wings blissfully unaware that no-one can see them. The proscenium arch stage, especially, seems to make no sense to them. An alternate form of stage might be a better option for young performers.

7. Fighting

Children fight mercilessly. The notion of give and take on stage and especially, during rehearsals, is foreign to them. Group cohesion has to be fostered – it does not come naturally.

Could there have been any other way of handling the process with more success? Perhaps a longer period of creative dramatics would have led to greater group sensitivity and individual focus. Perhaps for children such as these, a more improvisational approach as far as script would have been indicated. Most of the children involved were extremely focused on themselves – whether this is as a result of the fact that most of them had come from other schools where they had been labelled as “difficult” or as “having problems” is not clear. Perhaps if one had used this self obsession and asked them to workshop their own script based on their own lives and problems in the manner of a project based on Boal’s approach they might have been more interested in the project.

CONCLUSION

Although the culmination of this project could by no means be labelled a successful production, in the term following this project, I gradually became aware of a change in the class dynamic when we returned to the usual educational drama activities.

1. There was definitely greater cohesion in class and greater willingness to cooperate.
2. The children felt that they were somehow expert and made the other classes aware of this fact! This pointed to a sense of achievement and an improvement in self-image.

3. Attention span was still poor but they did occasionally make deliberate attempts to focus as a class.

Although my feelings directly after the project were rather negative and I felt that not much had been achieved, during the following term I rethought the process and decided that there had actually been a small breakthrough. I believe that had this project been repeated, results would slowly but surely have improved. I now believe that a project of this kind can be of immense benefit to children such as the above. It would, however, be a very slow and laborious process but could ultimately lead to results which could benefit these children for the rest of their lives.

APPENDIX 2

PROJECT TO TEST CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO HANDLE AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION WITH A CHILD AUDIENCE

For this project a group of nine 14 year olds were selected to stage a children's play at a preschool. The average age of the audience was 5 years old.

The script

The group selected a well-known children's story, *Goldilocks*, and devised a simple storyline, following the basic plot of the story.

As this was their first attempt at children's theatre, and as I was unsure as to their ability to handle audience participation, audience participation was kept to simple question-and-answer involvement instead of more complicated teaching of songs and dances.

Rehearsal

During the rehearsal period I acted as an imaginary audience and called out possible audience responses. We discussed possible answers and responses to potentially tricky situations.

Performance

Some cast members were extremely nervous when we arrived at the playschool and were confronted by a sea of small faces. One girl was completely unable to control her nerves and lost concentration, giggled and had to be addressed severely.

During the performance it became clear that those children who had knowledge and experience of younger children (siblings, babysitting) were far more able to cope than others. In addition, children who naturally were quite confident in themselves, could also handle the situation even if they had limited experience

of younger children. Children who were insecure in themselves, however, had great difficulty in coping with a young, responsive audience.

Conclusion

When casting a play where audience participation might be required, it should be kept in mind that not any child will be able to deal with this. Only those children able to handle audience participation should be cast in roles where they are required to do so. It is best to protect an insecure child from a responsive audience in a role which is neither confrontational nor likely to entice an overwhelming audience response.

APPENDIX 3 INTERVIEW WITH CHERYL ABROMOWITZ

This is a summary of an interview conducted with Cheryl Abromowitz, founder and director of Stagecraft Studio, Cape Town. Stagecraft Studio stages a production for children, with a cast of predominantly child actors, once a term at Artscape theatre and other venues.

How often do you stage plays with children?

Termly. Children come to class, extra-murally, for approximately four weeks and then they start rehearsing the play for four weekends followed by a week of daily rehearsals before opening.

What age groups are the children in your plays?

The children are all ages – from approximately four to eighteen. Occasionally adult actors may be included in the cast.

What age groups are the audience?

From two upwards – therefore a mixture of ages. No age group is specifically targeted. The audience is often a family audience.

What types of plays do you select for mixed family audiences such as these?

The plays must firstly have personal appeal and secondly audience appeal - what will get the audience to come to the theatre - and thirdly, family appeal. There should be something for everyone in the play – some aspect that they can relate to.

Plays should not be too long - fifty minutes including an interval. The first half should be longer than the second half.

Mostly scripted plays are used (mostly from the UK). Story dramatizations are also used. Plays evolving from class improvisation are never used.

The stories are always traditional children's stories – not youth issues which might relate to a teen audience.

Do you use audience participation?

Always.

Can child actors handle other children during audience participation?

Definitely. Child actors can handle audience participation and interruption if they have rehearsed it. We throw possible questions at the children during rehearsal to prepare them for this. They may not ignore or dismiss a reaction.

What type of venue do you use?

Different types of venue are used from the theatre foyer in Artscape to conventional theatres.

Theatres, with their opportunity for special effect in lighting and set design are wonderful for older children. What David Wood refers to as the “magic”. Smaller children might be frightened by the dark. In this instance, the theatre foyer works better for them – it is never completely dark and therefore less threatening. The Polka Dot theatre in Wimbledon, England also has two venues – the “baby theatre” downstairs which is more toddler friendly and with brighter lighting and the more conventional theatre upstairs for the older children.

How long is an average run of one of your plays?

Two weeks.

Can child actors cope with such long runs?

Certainly. Two shows per day are sometimes run – three shows per day have even been done in the past. They develop tremendous discipline.

Do children do all the backstage work as well?

Yes, they have to set up their own props and costumes. Sometimes an adult supervises backstage when the cast is very young but it's more for trips to the bathroom.

Do you follow the normal procedure when starting rehearsals i.e. read through, blocking etc.

No, the play is watched on video if possible without children knowing which role they will be portraying, then they are given the casting. Children get only those parts of the script on which their own lines appear. Younger children who cannot read are taught their lines by rote – older children have to memorize lines in the normal way.

Do you believe that children are capable of in-depth characterization?

Children tend to be type cast – they are never really cast against type. The plays hardly ever require any form of in-depth interpretation.

What do you say about the often-heard remark that children acting in plays will become show-offs?

It all depends on how children are handled. If they are treated as if they are just taking part in another recreational activity, as if it's nothing special, they react accordingly. The tendency to show off should be channelled into something constructive.

What, do you believe, are the benefits of children taking part in productions?

There are many benefits. They develop self confidence and great self discipline. They develop a sense of commitment. It also has a socializing function as children from different backgrounds have to work together.

APPENDIX 4

PROJECT COMPARING DIRECTING STYLES

The following project was conducted on two groups of children to view the effect of two contrasting directing styles. The two groups were similar in size (approximately 10 children) and age (ages ranging between 9 and 14).

The first group (A) had been exposed to creative dramatics for an average of 3 years and had worked on a number of group improvisations where the main impetus for the project had always come from within the group. In addition, most of the children in the group had done at least two productions during which a freer, improvisational style of directing had been followed. The children were all very articulate and often expressed their opinions and ideas. Rehearsals for a production usually took approximately 20 weeks of one session per week.

The second group (B) had had very little creative dramatics experience and whenever they had done improvisations, it had been teacher directed. The group had less performance experience (some had done one performance, others none). The style of directing that was followed with this group was dictatorial. Students were given each move (with no suggestions from the group accepted), and each nuance of facial and vocal interpretation. Children offered no suggestions during class. Rehearsal ran for 10 weeks.

Results:

Group A certainly took longer to get their production to a performance level but there was much more creative participation during rehearsals. Children seemed to enjoy rehearsals and worked with much more enthusiasm.

Group B had their play polished within a shorter period of time but rehearsals were rather uninspiring. Children offered no suggestions, were slow to become involved in rehearsals and struggled to remain focused.

As a further development, the procedure for the two groups were switched i.e. a more dictatorial style was followed with group A and a more relaxed style with group B

Results:

Group A became extremely resentful and unco-operative. They lost focus and interest and wanted to discontinue the project.

Group B also lost focus and were unable to cope with the freer style. They were mostly dumbstruck and needed much prodding to come up with their own suggestions.

Conclusion:

1. The group exposed to creative dramatics was certainly more able to deal with a freer style of directing. They could contribute creatively. This in turn, seemed to increase their level of enjoyment.
2. The group unaccustomed to creative dramatics struggled with a freer style of directing. They tolerated a directorial style as this was all they were familiar with but did not seem to derive much pleasure from it. Their level of creativity was certainly diminished.

As far as the end product was concerned, there was not much difference between the two – an outsider would probably not have been able to ascertain which production had been done in which style. The *process*, however, differed vastly and I believe, the benefits to the children also varied considerably with

the children in Group A , I believe, having experienced the more enriching of the two experiences. The children in Group A consistently delivered work of a much greater level of creativity whether in a classroom or a performance situation. They were also able to work together with focus and needed very little stimulus from teacher/director to become involved in the action. Their typical reaction at the start of a project would be impatience to get to the task at hand. The group also seemed to gain great enjoyment from their work as they all continued with their classes for more than a year. (The group is, in fact, still functioning very strongly after four years with three of its members now in their 11th year). The second group, B, very often produced lacklustre work. They were typically very slow to become involved in a task and had to be guided very strongly. They wasted a lot of time and became easily distracted. There was a lot of bickering and rivalry within the group and a sense of ensemble never developed. Enjoyment levels did not seem to be very high as most of the group members left after a year.

APPENDIX 5

CHILDREN'S THEATRE PRODUCTION of *The Wizard of Oz* with a group of children in a private Speech & Drama studio

This is to be a production for children by children.

THE GROUP

I will be using a mixed age group ranging in age from 7 years to 12 years old. The children have all been doing some private drama classes with me – some have only started recently, some have been coming to class for up to 8 years already and have participated in eisteddfods, external drama examination and other productions.

The group is normally divided into 3 age groups (the under 9's, the 9 to 11's and the 11 to 12 year olds) with the result that they do not really have any experience of functioning together as a group.

THE PLAY

I decide to be led by the children's ideas on this. We have a meeting (quite a few months before production) and discuss possible plays. I make some suggestions such as workshopping our own play (they do not like this idea at all!) and using a new script which no-one would be familiar with (not much enthusiasm for this either). The general consensus seems to be that a play has to be something which is well-known! Is this unusual or are children much less adventurous in their tastes, at this age? Experimentation still seems to hold little attraction.

We discuss a few possibilities and finally reach consensus on *The Wizard of Oz*. I start working on a script. I read through the original novel by Frank N. Baum as well as three different dramatizations of the novel by three different playwrights. None of the dramatizations really inspire me – they all seem to be written for performance by an adult cast for a child audience. I decide to

dramatize my own script based on the novel. One of the scripts (*The Wizard of Oz* by Adele Thane) does, however, make use of a newly created character – the Witch's cat – and I decide to make use of sections from this script. It seems worth it even if it means that I will have to pay royalties on the use of this script.

ENVISIONING THE PRODUCTION

As so many pupils also belong to a local ballet school and can do a variety of dance forms (ballet, Irish dancing, funk, modern dancing, tap) I decide to incorporate dance into the production as well. I have discussions with the ballet teachers and we decide on a combined dance/drama production. This will be less of a financial burden as well. With combined finances we can also afford a better venue, lighting, etc. We decide to stage the production at a good local theatre.

As far as our work methods are concerned, we decide to each work on our own sections and then finally put the two together. There is, of course a danger of the production not gelling but it does solve many practical problems e.g. rehearsal times. This advantage seems to outweigh the possible disadvantages at this stage. I also know the ballet teacher's work and feel confident that it will be of a good standard.

I give her a copy of the script and indicate to her the sections where I have envisioned dance items. She adds a few ideas of her own and we finally end up with 10 dance numbers to be incorporated into the production. They will range in style from classical ballet to funk, tap and Irish dancing.

I show her my designs for costumes and she indicates that she will do her own. We decide to keep the making of costumes separate. I mostly do all my own costumes while she makes use of an army of volunteer mothers.

We decide on a very simple set – basically just boxes, rostra, steps - as we will have only one day to move into the theatre and only one technical rehearsal! We do, however, decide to spend quite a bit of additional finance on lighting to make up for the simplicity in set. I book the venue and the lighting and sound technicians.

Advertising, programmes and posters we will share between the two of us at a later stage – obviously doing as much of it ourselves as possible e.g. printing our own tickets and programmes.

CASTING

I am in the fortunate position to have five very strong twelve year old performers in the group. They have all been with me for a number of years and have been on stage a number of times in productions etc. On top of being talented, they are also easy to work with as they are conscientious and dedicated. Amongst them they can act, sing, dance and all have excellent vocal capabilities. The play is an excellent choice in this respect – all five of them can have major roles – Dorothy, Scarecrow and the Wicked Witch, the three girls and Lion and Tinman, the two boys. I feel absolutely confident in the casting of these major roles – I know exactly what the children will be able to achieve. The rest of the casting I decide to leave till the first rehearsals.

As all the children are used to attending one drama lesson per week (and their parents pay for that), all children will have to be called to a weekly rehearsal. The rehearsal schedule will have to be devised in such a way that each session contains a group rehearsal for at least an hour (their weekly class time) and an additional session for rehearsing smaller groups and individual scenes. I cannot keep them much longer than two hours, though, as that is about the limit of their attention span. Parents also do not want their children to stay at rehearsals for

much longer than that. As a result, the rehearsal period will have to be lengthy and drawn out as only a weekly rehearsal of a maximum of two hours per week can be done. This is a big departure from the normal rehearsal procedure when working with adults but I cannot see any other way of working with children who have other weekly commitments and interests. It is of great importance to not bore the children and to keep their enthusiasm alive – I cannot see that they have the maturity to work with focused concentration for say, a three to four week period. I do not think that children can envisage an outcome strongly enough so as to apply themselves and inconvenience themselves in the short term for the sake of a goal four weeks away. I believe that children live too strongly in the present (and want to enjoy the present) to sacrifice present enjoyment for the sake of a goal which they cannot really envisage either. The challenge is now to make each rehearsal enjoyable so as to keep the enthusiasm alive (and ensure that they do not withdraw from the project!) yet at the same time slowly develop towards a finished project which only I can envisage at this time.

REHEARSAL 1

This is supposed to be the first readthrough. I have decided to follow the normal rehearsal procedure as closely as possible and to note and make adjustments where necessary.

All arrive, are handed scripts. For economic reasons we only have a few complete scripts which they share at the readthrough. Once the casting has been completed I will hand out only those sections in which each character appears – very Elizabethan – but I have decided on this course of action again for economic reasons but also because I have found from past experience that children do not read anything else but their own sections. Study of the whole script is, alas, difficult to achieve with primary school children.

Whole scripts are also very bulky and difficult for small hands to hold – therefore, only sections.

There is great excitement. We have discussed the play before and all are completely focused on the final production – whom they will invite, what their friends will say, what they will wear. I warn them that we will have to rehearse quite a bit before we can go on stage. They are undaunted – discuss the possibility of touring throughout the country!

I tell them that the casting has not been finalized, that I will move them around a bit today. I explain that sometimes one voice (and I only refer to tone quality e.g. musical, fairylike, etc) might suit a part better than another and that I might have to swop them around again. I also try and explain the notion of ensemble acting to them – everyone is important – they look at me blankly – I know what they're thinking – “Oh yeah, but who gets the lead parts?” Although the casting of the lead parts are quite firmly fixed in my head I decide to be flexible on the smaller parts – ask for their advice, ask for volunteers etc. I announce the leads. All nod approvingly. What I anticipated and hoped for had occurred – they accept the fact that the more experienced ones will get bigger parts. Some of the other older ones look puzzled though. I tell them that I need them to be in charge of the smaller ones e.g. a lead mouse with the small mice. They relax.

We start to read. I try and explain the opening sequence to them – they seem to really like the idea that they will all be on stage for the opening. The first lines are delivered by Dorothy and Aunt Em – a small but important part as it opens the play – it needs strong vocal ability. I ask for volunteers. No-one seems very interested in a normal human. We decide to skip Aunt Em for now – maybe leave it for a girl who is absent today. It will give me time to assess them and see who is suitable. The next scene is Dorothy and Toto. Toto is on stage a lot but of course only barks. On this I can be completely open – anyone who wants to can play it. A normally shy boy volunteers very enthusiastically. I'm

surprised but give it to him before he can withdraw his offer. I actually need him in another boy's role but this is such progress for him that I'll rather have him doing this. He (and the others) will be stuck in their roles for many months – they need this enthusiasm to sustain them through the many months of rehearsal to come! I did initially envisage Toto being quite prominent and performing tricks etc. I don't think this boy will be able to do this but I'll rather scale Toto down than change the casting.

The next scene introduces the Munchkins. We need a few Munchkins coming on stage saying about one line each. I haven't fixed the number of Munchkins – I'm waiting to see what the response is. When I ask for volunteers four do so. Good, we'll have four Munchkins. Their abilities vary. Three are barely audible, the other one is strong. I have decided beforehand that I will not take a line away from any child once I have given it to him/her. If these soft Munchkins remain so soft I'll have to maybe add a few voices though – a Munchkin chorus. The Good Witch appears with the Munchkin. It is a strong part even if not very big. She has a lot of dialogue but for only about two pages, then she exits. It is the first sustained dialogue of the play, though, and can make or break the play at this early stage. I have only decided so far that I'll give it to one of the more senior girls. I let a few of them try it out – only one really has got the vocal ability and I decide to give it to her. It is a good choice I think, for other reasons as well. She has been with me for quite a number of years (therefore would expect a big part) but has great difficulty in learning lines. I cannot give her a bigger part – it would cause more harm than good, I think, as I have seen her agonize in the past when she cannot memorize lines.

I have made a pleasant discovery, though. One of the new girls, who up to this stage has been very very quiet in drama group classes, has a beautiful melodious voice and great confidence when she is reading (and not trying to improvise her own lines as they have to do in class). I will definitely consider her for a bigger part than I first intended.

The next three scenes introduce the three other main characters: Scarecrow, Tinman and Lion. I let them read only sections from these scenes as the smaller ones are beginning to get restless and have now started doing cartwheels on the carpet.

No sustained readthrough possible here!

We have a short break, wriggle around a bit, stretch etc , then back to reading. We read a few sections featuring the witch and her cat – that provides some diversion. I have to remember that this is not a normal readthrough with adults who understand the necessity of the exercise and can control their impulses – this is still a class in a sense and the composition of the session has to stimulate the children.

I tell them the next few bits of the story as the readthrough is going very slowly and the interest is waning. Some of the children read painfully slowly - everyone is beginning to feel frustrated. We read a few more group section e.g. in the Emerald city. I try out different voices in different roles but the readthrough is beginning to come apart at the seams. Attention is waning, they are not even too interested in who else will be playing what part. I decide to cut the readthrough short. I briefly tell them the rest of the story and then we conclude the session with some drama games completely unrelated to the play.

Conclusion: Readthroughs with do children do not really work – their reading ability makes the process too slow and tedious. Rather just tell them the story and maybe read a few snippets to try out voices etc.

REHEARSAL 2

I have to do some more casting of the smaller parts in preparation for this rehearsal as some parts will have to be doubled up and I need to make sure that people have time for costume changes etc. A few roles are still open, though, and I will let the children lead me in the casting of these roles. I try not to give

the impression that all the casting has been finalized but rather that they have a say in the outcome (and if possible I will let them lead me in this).

I have divided the play into 18 different units to make rehearsals easier – the group scenes and solo or small groups scenes are now separated - the former can be rehearsed during the first hour of rehearsals, the latter during the second hour when most of the children (especially the smaller ones) have gone home. I decide, however, to structure the first few rehearsals in such a way that all the children are in attendance for the full two hour period. This will be difficult but I want to try and develop a group feeling and cohesion. The children come from three different classes and age groups and have never worked together as one big group.

We start the second rehearsal with drama group exercises unrelated to the play but selected to enhance group activity, co-operation and concentration. The older ones are very confident and lead the activities. The younger and less experienced ones are very shy and take part with difficulty. I persevere and am glad to see that the older ones become aware of the others' reticence and are making an effort to include them.

We start rehearsing the play. I decide to leave the opening sequence till later as this is potentially chaotic (I want all characters to cross the stage in a circular pattern to create the effect of the tornado) and we start with the first group scene – the appearance of the Munchkins and Good Witch. I am hoping that the children will be able to cope with not rehearsing the play in sequence – I have never done it this way - I hope that I will not have total chaos in the end!

We start blocking the scene. It immediately gets bogged down as the girl playing the Good Witch – even though she is in Grade 7 – reads very poorly. It is totally frustrating, we are grinding along. The children are getting very

restless, they start reading her lines out loud for her, she gets cross. The Munchkins are standing around looking very bored. I try and describe their reactions to them but they find it hard to follow the scene as the reading is so broken. One of the Munchkins has a very short attention span – she cannot focus and starts to entertain the other Munchkins – chaos threatens. I do not want to interrupt the Good Witch either – I think it will be totally demoralising for her if I now skip this scene. We grind ahead and finally finish. Not a good start to rehearsals!

I break the rehearsal at this point with some physical activity and a group game. After the break we make quite a big jump to a scene where the main characters have already met up and are on their way to the Emerald City. It is the next big group scene in the play and introduces the mice (the youngest cast members). The little ones are very excited that they will be participating. I rehearse them without their scripts and instead of having them read their lines I prompt them and drill each line a few times making sure to link the lines so that they become familiar with their cues. It works well. I do not have the strength to listen to someone else battle with a readthrough! The main characters are coping extremely well with this break in continuity – they really are four exceptional children – I hardly have to tell them anything – they seem to sense what they have to do.

We end off the rehearsal with a short scene between the Wicked Witch and her Cat which follows on the Mouse scene and the entrance of a second group of Munchkins – this means that all the children were included in the rehearsal at least once.

REHEARSAL 3

I start the rehearsal with a short group activity – shorter than last week as we have to run through the blocking we did last week. This I think, is necessary as it is a whole week since our last rehearsal. The run does not really go well. Most children have forgotten what they did last week and we have to basically redo the blocking (will we ever get to performance!). They have little sense of their position on stage, of masking, of where the audience is, of the importance of sticking to the blocking. I sit them down and tell them that they must rehearse with their pencils in their hands so as to make notes and that once I have given them a movement they should repeat it in the same way when we do it again. I am a bit surprised that the older pupils who have done drama in a formal setting (e.g. external examinations) seem to have forgotten everything they have learnt. But there is much desire to co-operate and they all fall around for their pencils. Now we have to stop after each movement is blocked (“Stop! I have to write it down” - SLOWLY) but at least they are making an effort.

I start off blocking a group scene again – fortunately one that follows on the one where we ended last week. We do not finish the blocking planned for the day as the runthrough took too long – I will have to revise the schedule.

REHEARSAL 4

Start rehearsals with some group games to focus and concentrate the group. I also include more verbal games so as to get the shyer children to speak more freely. I have decided not to do any improvisations based on the play. At this stage I do not really see a need for it. The children are responding to the play, they are contributing and offering ideas. The biggest requirement at the moment is to focus them – they seem quite well stimulated. I rather want to develop some form of cohesion and framework.

I do a runthrough of last week's blocking. They have remembered their moves better than before – not perfectly, I will still have to redo a lot but I decide to

leave it for now, rather to work on the flow and continuity so that they can develop a sense of the play as a whole. We block the next section but have not really caught up on the backlog.

REHEARSAL 5

This is meant to be the last of the group scenes but we are still behind schedule. The rehearsal is frustrating – the novelty has worn off, the attention wavers. The children sitting and watching are very disruptive and cannot keep still. The ones busy with the rehearsal complain bitterly. I have told everyone to bring books, games, etc but they seem to tire of this as well. I have to stop a few times to stop soccer matches and the like. The younger children are the least problem – the older ones are the most difficult! Quite a few children are absent as well – sport fixtures etc – we have to rehearse around quite a few characters.

Fortunately most of the children leave after an hour. I intended to rehearse the opening scene but the part of Auntie Em is still not cast – the child who is meant to play it is attends class very erratically – I will give her one more week, then recast.

I spent most of the second hour on the Witch and her cat – the girl playing the Witch is meticulous – she notes down everything and tries desperately to execute instructions. Her cat is a bit more creative in his interpretation of my instructions! Between the two of them they should get it right – they really complement each other.

REHEARSAL 6

I have to cut down on the warmup time as we are still behind schedule in the group scenes. I also only have time to briefly redo some of the scenes previously blocked. I cannot redo all the blocking; it takes far too long. One of the problems is still the children's reading ability. I have told them that they do not have to learn their words yet – they merely have to be able to read it well but this doesn't work. Some of them are still struggling through sections which we

have done quite a few times now. I'll have to get them to learn their lines much sooner than planned so as to solve this problem.

I am feeling rather frustrated since I feel as if I am wading through mud without leaving much of an imprint. I have the suspicion that everyone has forgotten everything we have already blocked!

We block the next group scene and I feel relieved when the majority of the children go home. We go back to the beginning of the play and I settle down to a good rehearsal with the four main characters. They do not seem thrown by the fact that they have already done the group scenes well into the second half of the play but are only now doing 'the characters' first meetings. The rehearsal goes very well. The children are responsive, they are focused and I can go beyond the blocking and discuss characterization with them as well. I am feeling totally confident that the four of them will be able to carry the play. I doubt if that play would at all have been possible without their abilities. It is probably wise to give children who have the natural acting ability the stronger roles. Even though one does not want to deny those children who are less able the opportunity and experience of having to cope with a bigger role, you probably would not be doing them any good by putting them in a part which they cannot cope with. Such children should rather only be given bigger parts in an educational drama situation where they are protected from the gaze of spectators. Less able children would also not be able to carry a production successfully and the other children in the cast will easily pick this up and probably lose confidence in the production as a whole. With a bit of creative casting, the director/teacher should however, still be able to put less able students in prominent even if not important roles. The role of Toto in this instance would be a case in point. The character is very visible but does not really require any skill. A director/teacher could easily create a role such as this for children with less ability in any children's play.

REHEARSAL 7

We start off with a group rehearsal – I am so far behind that I feel I cannot even spend time on warmup or redoing last week's blocking. I am forging ahead because I want to finish the blocking before the June holidays because I want them to have the moves and words in their minds when they think of the play during this 3 week break in rehearsals. It has become a marathon – the children are tired, not very interested, I don't feel like entertaining them. This is not very good. After an hour they go home and I breathe a sigh of relief.

The small group rehearsal is not much better because we are doing the section when they meet Oz . It is an important part and I have taken a chance on a very young boy to play the role. I think he will be able to do it but he is struggling through the readthrough – once again, very frustrating! Am I imagining it or are children's ability to read out loud decreasing year by year?

REHEARSAL 8

This is the last rehearsal of the term.

I have called the whole cast for the whole two hours. We finally finish the blocking and start a runthrough. After about half an hour I realize that we will not get close to a runthrough in the allotted time. I decide to skip all the small group scenes and only do the crowd scenes. We finally manage to drag through the play. I make calculations and work out that, at this rate, if we had to do the whole play it would have taken six hours!!

I decide not to panic and start cutting any scenes – I have to trust my initial judgement when I compiled the script. At least we have finished the blocking and we still have a full term's rehearsal left (if they remember anything after the holidays!)

I decide to ask them to start learning their lines – I know that few of them will but it might at least get some of them to think about the play during the holidays!

REHEARSAL 9

The first rehearsal I have called after the holidays is a three hour Saturday afternoon rehearsal. The children all arrive in high spirits. The rest seems to have been good. They are excited by the prospect of the rehearsal and come prepared with games, snacks, etc. It looks more like a picnic than a rehearsal.

I have decided to call this one long rehearsal so as to get in the runthrough which we never completed at the end of last term. I need to get an idea of the play as a whole – to see whether the script works. I also think they – and especially the main characters – need to start seeing the play as a whole since our rehearsals were so fragmented last term.

The afternoon turns out to be quite a marathon. Surprisingly, though, the children have retained a lot of the blocking. Some even know some of their words. It is a slow process but not completely discouraging. We only manage to run half the play in three hours though! Because of Eisteddfod commitments in which most of the main characters are involved I decide to rather give them a week off (with instructions to learn their words) than have half a cast next week. One simply has to accept, I think, when working with children, that they are not professional actors and this is only one of many other commitments. Getting upset about it is useless. Children (and parents) simply do not see the necessity of regular attendance at rehearsals. Quite a few parents I have also found, fail to see the necessity of developing an ensemble. They want to bring their children just “to do their bit” and then “surely they can go home again?” The parents who most often have this attitude are, I think, those ones whose children are also involved in ballet and dance productions where this does seem to be the norm. “Do your item and go home”, with no concern for the production as a whole.

They simply think the drama teacher is being difficult. I find that I have to do a lot of letter writing explaining to parents the value of committing to a group project.

REHEARSAL 10

Another marathon runthrough which we fail to complete. The play is still running at about six hours! I receive the news that I will be losing my Glinda because of clashing commitments in the 4th term. This is quite a blow. I have to do some recasting and some children have to take on additional roles. They seem to think that this is exciting! I am beyond panic. I decide to give the important role of Glinda to the girl who was so very shy at the start of rehearsals. She has developed enormously. I ask her about taking the role and she answers very shyly but I can see excitement in her eyes. I decide to take a gamble. She looks very pleased when I tell her that she will be Glinda.

REHEARSAL 11

Again I attempt to run the play in three hours but this proves to be impossible. This is totally discouraging. I vow not to try and run the play again until the final rehearsals! The children's enthusiasm is beginning to ebb as well. I need to liven up rehearsals and work in smaller sections which are easier to manage so that the children can also feel a sense of achievement after each rehearsal. These attempts at runthrough are only discouraging.

REHEARSAL 12

I work in smaller sections -polishing moves, working on voice modulation where necessary, adding smaller gestures and detail, discussing characterization. The children are full of really good ideas and I try to use as many of them as practical. They are also completely open in the way they are trying to help each other. This is so refreshing – there are no overtones, no subtext in their

intentions – they want each other to look good. And they take direction from each other with complete openness – no-one seems threatened. I feel extremely satisfied that maybe somehow I have created this work environment. Everyone seems secure – even the shy ones are participating with gusto. A real ensemble is beginning to develop. The end product is, in my mind, becoming a side issue. THIS is what is important.

REHEARSAL 13

A large part of the rehearsal is taken up by such practical issues as taking measurements, fitting some costumes, etc! The children find this very exciting. COSTUMES!

REHEARSAL 14

I have obtained the use of a school hall for this rehearsal as we have never fitted our blocking on a stage. Despite my trepidations, the rehearsal goes well. We run the group scenes in entirety but only walk the smaller group scenes for placing. The children are coping well with the transference of moves to the stage. The only problem now is the adaptation of the voice levels to a bigger hall.

REHEARSAL 15

The rehearsal is of a more technical nature as I start introducing props and boxes. I do not try to run the whole play. I only do sections where these technical devices are introduced.

REHEARSAL 16

I start rehearsing the play from the beginning again but working in small sections and redoing each section until it runs smoothly. The children are mostly focused and seem to be getting more and more excited at the prospect of opening night. I have far fewer problems with discipline and even noise! I suppose it is becoming more of a reality to them now.

REHEARSAL 17

I am speeding up rehearsals now – working twice instead of once a week. I have only called the main characters to this rehearsal, though, so as to spend more time on their characterization etc. I find with such a large cast of children that one becomes so caught up in manoeuvring everyone that one is in danger of forgetting the acting of the main characters. They are after all only children and also need special reassurance even if they are coping very well.

REHEARSAL 18

Another rehearsal with the main characters only. The children have managed to create very solid characters. I am extremely pleased with their progress. The main challenge now would be a vocal one as they adapt to a stage and a much bigger venue. I am not too perturbed about this as I know they all have the vocal capabilities to project sufficiently. Only a few of the minor roles will have problems but I should be able to place them close to microphones once we are on stage.

REHEARSAL 19

The rehearsal is with the whole cast again and on the stage of the school hall. The adaptation of the movements from rehearsal room to stage has gone well. We actually manage to run the play within about 2 hours 30 minutes – still very long but a vast improvement on our earlier attempts at running the play. I am mainly focussing on polishing the voice work – projection, articulation and general clarity. The children are lively and excited but thankfully quite focussed.

REHEARSAL 20

This is the second run of the week – again on the school hall stage.. We have a three hour rehearsal session so I use the first hour for running the second half twice as I feel that this part of the play is still the weakest. Probably because I had to rush the initial blocking when we were getting behind on our rehearsal schedule and I did not have time to redo the blocking of the previous sessions. We finish by running the first half once.

REHEARSAL 21

This is the final week of term and all our runs will be on stage in the school hall. I have decided not to spend too much time on rehearsals during the one week holiday as I am quite pleased with the progress at this stage. It is a bit of a calculated risk and I am hoping that we will not lose too much momentum because of the break. I do feel however, that the children - especially the main roles – are tired and in need of a break and a bit of play.

My main focus on rehearsals this week will be on establishing the flow of the play. I think with children this is probably the most challenging aspect as they do tend to wander off, lose focus, miss cues, etc. Before we start I give them a

talk on the importance of staying focused throughout the play – even when off stage – so as not to miss cues. I tell them that they will be on their own backstage – that no-one will be there to cue them (I haven't quite decided on where I will be but I do not tell them that). I point out the importance of looking out for each other – the older ones must help the younger ones, etc. They listen with great attention and seem quite excited by the prospect of having to cope on their own.

We start the rehearsal and the run goes very well – no missed cues, even the most inattentive ones get dragged on stage by the others – I pretend not to notice. Our running time goes down to 2 hours 15 minutes. I am really feeling confident as far as these children are concerned. The main challenge will, of course, be at the end of the week when we have to get the ballet children in to do the dancing. That is going to seriously disrupt the flow, the ensemble, the general atmosphere. It will be an unknown factor to contend with. I do not really know what will happen – it is quite a leap in the dark. I have spoken to the ballet teacher and she seems distressed – hints at postponement. I am actually glad that the dates have been booked so long in advance – there is no possibility of postponement. I know that that will only affect my pupils adversely – so, no matter what, we will persevere!

REHEARSAL 22

The second run of the week. I again start with the weaker second half and then start with a run from the beginning. We actually manage to complete the run – running time is now down to about two hours.

REHEARSAL 23

Third run of the week and our final run on our own without the dancers. A wonderful ensemble has developed and the group is functioning perfectly – they help and encourage each other. Even if all else fails, this is a great achievement.

I am happy with what we have achieved so far and have great confidence in the finished product.

REHEARSAL 24

Last rehearsal before the holiday and the first rehearsal with the ballet school! We are totally overrun and outnumbered by the dancers by about 3 to 1. They swarm into the hall accompanied by dozens of mummies who chat loudly, make comments and offer advice! I am not used to this – I have a wonderful working relationship with my students' parents – they leave me alone unless invited in. I have never had to make rules about this, it just developed spontaneously and suits me fine. I have never barred any parents from attending class and a few have peeped in for a few moments but have never stayed for long. It is a silent agreement, I suppose. I never bother them with requests for making costumes etc (I prefer to do it myself) and they do not bother me. This chaos now convinces me that my own system of doing what has to be done myself is a far better one in the long run. The most interfering mothers at these rehearsals are those ones who have made costumes, etc and think they now have a say in the general procedure. It is a difficult problem to contend with. When working with children you obviously need the co-operation of the parents – but at what point does this become interference? All I know is that I cannot work the way the ballet teacher is working. All her costumes and props are miraculously made but at what cost?

I grit my teeth and decide to say nothing. The rehearsal is very slow – as expected. At the start of each dance sequence we have to stop, set up the dancers, do the cues, run the dance, do the exit and redo everything to get a general flow. The drama pupils are exhausted – not only because of the repetition but because of the general noise level in the hall. The dancers are obviously not used to keeping their voices down when others are working - the music, I suppose, normally shuts them up. I feel very irritated when I see the struggle the drama children are having.

It is a long, hard rehearsal but, I expected it to be. The dances have not all been properly choreographed yet so that we cannot do all the links. I can see why the dance teacher looks stressed. I do know, however, what she is capable of (if not, I would have been really worried now) and am confident that she will get the dances together especially as she has opted to rehearse the whole of next week during the holiday. I am now really glad that I have given the drama pupils off – we would not have been able to do much until the dances have all been finalized.

I give them all off until the next weekend (except for the main characters and the young boy playing Oz whom I feel is not ready yet).

REHEARSAL 25

I do a relatively short rehearsal with the main characters and the young Oz – basically just a solid hour of drilling – doing and redoing the same section. At the end of the hour I feel that he is getting more and more confident. I give them all off for the remainder of the week till the weekend when we have to do our dress rehearsal. I actually welcome this break myself as it gives me time to complete the final touches on costumes, props, etc. I do my soundtrack and prepare the technical copy of the play – as much as I can without knowing exactly what lighting/sound effects are possible. I have ordered standard lighting plus a special effects bank and about five loose microphones but nothing has been set up and tried out. This is nerve racking and not to be recommended. Having only one day to get to know the stage technically is something I could have done without. However, I am thankful for the background knowledge I do have about the technical side of staging. I cannot imagine staging this kind of play without the necessary technical knowhow. In adult theatre the director might still get away with having little knowledge of the technical side and rely on technical professionals but in Children's Theatre, more often than not, the teacher/director will be required to double up

as technical designer and even operator if necessary. The director/teacher who wants to stage children's plays should brush up on technical knowledge!

REHEARSAL 26

We have to use another school's hall as the other one is unavailable. This stage is much smaller and this affects the dancing and general placing adversely. So as far as that is concerned, the rehearsal serves no purpose. But at least we can work on the general flow of the play. All the dances have been choreographed and look good after a week's rehearsals. On the whole I am pleased with the work that the ballet teacher has done. Only one dance really bothers me as it is much too long and affects the flow adversely. Dramatically it has to be shortened but studio politics dictates that it stays as is because these are the mothers of the children who made all the costumes! This is the battle and the reality when running a private studio within a specific community, so once more we grit our teeth - although I do make myself rather unpopular with quite a few ballet mummies when I chase them out when the noise level finally drives me to total distraction! From this point I have to admit that my relationship with the ballet mothers took a dive. I think the ballet teacher eventually had quite a battle keeping us all apart. I plead guilty to losing my cool but I had really reached the end of my tether - especially when they started telling me that the drama children could not be heard and must speak louder and "act" more - this accompanied by wild face pulling and dramatic gestures within sight of the children.

We manage to reschedule tomorrow's rehearsal in the other school hall where the stage is much bigger.

REHEARSAL 27

The final rehearsal before moving into the theatre on Monday.

Once again the dance children swarm in en masse. The drama pupils huddle together – no chance of a bigger ensemble forming but as long as the drama children stay together, I'm happy. I have to give them a lot of private pep talks to keep them focused as a group and not to become distracted by the bigger crowd. They are really being very brave.

For the first time both casts are in costume. A flaw in the costuming immediately becomes evident to me.- the styles are totally different. The drama costumes are closer to realistic costumes whereas the ballet costumes are typically ballet costumes with a lot of tulle, glitter, etc. On paper the designs seemed complementary but when it came to choice of, for instance, materials, the ballet costumes were made out of silks, lycra etc. The drama children look rather drab compared to the flashy ballet outfits. Nothing to be done at this late stage, though.

The rehearsal runs quite smoothly. The running time is just 2 hours 45 minutes. I reckon that we will eventually run for 2 hours 30 minutes.

I am finding it very hard to sit back and objectively assess the play as a whole. I am too involved with the running of the play and looking at individual performances. I honestly cannot say whether the script is working or not. I think as a performance it will work but whether this will be because of the children's expertise and of course, the charm factor of characters like the baby fairies or because of the script and structure, I cannot say at this stage. I feel as if I have cottonwool in my head – my judgement feels clouded.

At the end of the rehearsal everyone looks rather jaded but after the ballet children have gone I decide to do a quick "Charlie Chaplin" style runthrough – in half an hour- to tighten cues and get the energy going. The children greatly enjoy this and it ends up as being just the right thing to have ended the rehearsal on. They now have one day off till the final dress rehearsal in the theatre.

REHEARSAL 28

Final dress rehearsal, technical rehearsal all-in-one!

I have called the rehearsal from 15h00 until 21h00 – the children cannot get there much before 15h00 and, seeing that they will be having 2 late nights during a school week, I decide not to work later than 21h00.

I start moving into the theatre at 14h30 – the children start arriving at 15h00. They are totally in awe of the theatre – they wander around, exploring every nook and cranny. I look like the Pied Piper with a long line of children following me from the basement into each dressing room and backstage area. It takes about half an hour for them to start settling down. I allocate dressing rooms and leave them in charge of the big pile of costumes and props. They have to sort out personal props and costumes and put them on the rails in their dressing rooms. They do this with great concentration while I get on with more technical explorations.

The ballet children start arriving accompanied by a horde of mothers and siblings. I start feeling very agitated and chase everyone off the stage into their dressingrooms. I have decided against my initial plan to remain in the lighting box with the lighting and sound technicians. I will rather remain backstage to somehow try and shield the drama children from the overwhelming presence of the dance troupe. A senior student who is extremely reliable and capable will instead be standing in for me in the lighting box.

The ballet teacher starts to place her dances on stage while I start working with the sound and lighting technicians. I give them – and my senior pupil - the technical script with the basic cues written in and discuss the effects I wish to obtain on the different lighting cues. They set up sound and lighting equipment whilst I check on my cast. They have set out the costumes perfectly. I discuss the importance of looking after costumes and props with them and show them

the props table etc. They start to dress. Even though this is a dress rehearsal I have decided against the use of makeup to save time. We just do a few basic faces as some photos will be taken during the run.

This is going to be a rather strange final dress rehearsal as we will have to stop and start where necessary for the sake of technical cues.

I have also brought along one senior male pupil who will be our stage hand – flying in curtains and so on. I give him a brief outline of his duties and show him how to operate the flies etc.

I wanted to do some basic placing on the stage but time is catching up with us and we need to start the run. The stage has a very large apron and I only really have time to point this out to everyone and tell them to remember to use the apron as much as possible – this should aid projection even though the sound man has put up some loose standing microphones in front of the stage.

We start the run. As the opening sequence is complicated as far as sound and lighting is concerned, I decide to stay in the lighting box cueing and deciding on the effects I desire. To my greatest relief the sound and lighting man are very competent and seem to sense what I require immediately. My senior pupil is also completely competent and uses her own initiative and judgement to great effect. My mind is totally at ease as far as this aspect is concerned. I leave them to it in the lighting box and spend the rest of the rehearsal moving around between the backstage area, the auditorium and the lighting box - commenting, adjusting, even moving objects and flying curtains in and out. I do not get time to really sit down and evaluate the play properly. This is a pity, but of greater importance now is to ensure that everyone knows what he/she should be doing – and I have to show everyone! Under the circumstances the rehearsal is progressing very favourably. We obviously have to interrupt the action a lot, make adjustments, move objects, redo dances but I knew beforehand that this was going to be a rather unusual final dress rehearsal. To an outsider this would probably look like total chaos but I feel quite sure that the final product will gel.

I suddenly realize how chaotic it must seem to an outsider when, halfway through the rehearsal, I realize that all the mummies had moved into the auditorium and are watching the rehearsal in total horror. This is a serious oversight – no-one should have been allowed at this kind of rehearsal. They do not have the expertise to judge whether a production will work or not based on this rehearsal. It seems that the mummies are near mutiny. One offers to buy up all the tickets to save everyone the embarrassment, another one has gone off to go and tell all the family friends not to come! I am livid – mostly with myself. I had sensed from the start that we would have problems in this department and I should have acted on my instincts and insisted on working in the way I normally do – with no parents in attendance unless invited. But for the sake of peace between the two studios I have adapted my normal working method and allowed the ballet mothers in. What a mistake! To top it all one of the accompanying siblings has opened up all the taps in the bathrooms in the foyer and flooded the foyer!! I feel as if the production is beginning to spin out of control. I stop the rehearsal and demand that all the mothers clean up the foyer. Now we have reached an all time low. I am very cross because the drama children are looking pale and upset. This is so totally unnecessary. It takes enormous effort to calm them down (as I am feeling anything but calm) and continue with the rehearsal. We finally complete the rehearsal. Once again the drama pupils have proved themselves exceptional. They persevered, kept their concentration, helped each other under the most trying circumstances. They could not have done better. I am angered that adults could have come so close to spoiling what has been months of hard work and dedication for these children. I end off the rehearsal with a pep talk to the children even though I am feeling extremely put out.

PERFORMANCE 1

I set up props and costumes etc well in advance before any children arrive. The children all arrive promptly for their very early makeup call. The last thing I want to do is rush anyone. The senior pupils who were going to come and help me had to withdraw because of a school function. I basically do all the makeup

with the help of my one senior/technical pupil. It is a bit difficult but I prefer to do it this way as the dressing rooms remain quite calm. The ballet dressing rooms are overflowing but fortunately they are one floor up and out of the way. I use the time when I'm doing a child's face to also check costume and give last minute notes so that I'm having a relatively quiet and personal moment with each child.

With about 10 minutes to curtain up I've finished all the faces! We do not really have time for a proper warmup but I gather them all together in a quiet corner in the wings and have a last minute pep talk. I'm basically stressing the importance of the ensemble – how they have to look out for each other, help each other and focus on the play and not become distracted by the dancing or technical effects. My biggest concern is that they will lose their focus.

Suddenly the opening is upon us. The first half is absolutely perfect. The technical effects are on time (my senior pupil in the lighting box is doing a wonderful job of cueing the technicians and has taken that responsibility completely off my shoulders. When I try and cue them a few times from the lighting box she tells me to stop intruding!). The ballet teacher and I remain backstage – she is cueing the dancers (who, thank goodness all arrive on time for their dances and are whisked away to the dressing rooms afterwards) and I am cueing curtains, set etc. We actually manage to get through the first half with no technical mistakes – that has been my biggest concern seeing that we had so few technical rehearsals. The children are performing splendidly and faultlessly – I am quite touched by the way the older ones are helping the little ones with costume, hair etc and even the little ones helping each other. I am moved by one 7 year old carefully trying to touch up another 7 year old mouse's smudged makeup. The most important performance as far as I am concerned is happening backstage. They are taking such responsibility – no-one is cueing them, yet they are right there where they should be. They remember props, bits of costume, they're managing costume changes, replacing props on the props table.

This is what I set out to achieve, I realize – not the performance on stage – but this! This is what everything boils down to.

I tell the children to stay focused during interval but then I don't practise what I preach as I get distracted by a stream of people (more dance parents) coming backstage. In the process I do not take enough care setting up for the second act and when the curtain goes up I realize that the ballet teacher has placed the witch's pot in the wrong place – right where a curtain should come down. The rest of the 2nd act becomes a technical runaround for me at the back as I try and compensate for the backdrop which should be up when its down and down when it's up! I have only myself to blame. We manage to finish the play without anyone, I think, noticing from the front (although we lost some lovely effects on the cyclorama). In the process of running around, however, I suddenly realize to my horror that I should be at the other side of the stage because I have to do a live sound cue from a drum on the other side. Just when I realize that I will never make it in time, the drum cue comes on – right on time. When I get to the other side I find one of the seven year olds with the drum stick in hand and two very big eyes. She had realised there should be a cue, saw no-one else around and decided that she had better do it!

PERFORMANCE 2

The second performance is successful and certainly runs with much more technical smoothness backstage. I was scared that the children might lose their concentration on the second night but I need not have worried – they remain alert and focused throughout. As before, they take great care in being on time, placing props in the right places, etc. They are so adept that at times I feel that I might as well go and sit inside. When I remind someone about a prop they know exactly where it is and assure me that it has been set up ages ago!

I actually wish that I could have had the opportunity to watch the play from the front because I still find it virtually impossible to form a concept of the play as a whole. I cannot really judge whether the script works but from where I'm standing everything certainly seems to be flowing well. Even the gloomiest of parents are now raving about the play!

In conclusion I feel that the production has been a success. I am overwhelmed by the degree of responsibility the children showed towards each other and the production. I feel that they have developed the most wonderful ensemble work – quite amazing for such young children.

I do regret not acting firmer towards the ballet parents at an earlier stage – it would have saved me much last minute aggravation. I would have preferred to direct the play as a whole more – I only really directed the drama sections whereas some of the dance sections needed more directing. In future, if I should use something like another dance studio again, I would not do it as a combined production but rather clearly, from the outset, insist that it is my production and merely ask the choreographer to choreograph according to my vision. Then one can also run the whole production and rehearsal process according to your own style and method.

I also regret not really being able to see the production as a whole because I still am unsure about the script – I do think it needs some editing but I never really had the chance to view the production as a whole finished product.

As I feel that there is still some unfinished work, I decide to restage the production – two months after the first production.

It will in a sense be a completely new production, however, because we are moving to a much smaller venue. As a result moves have to be adapted and a lot of the dance has to go. I have approached the dance teacher in a different fashion – asking to only use some of her dancers in my production. This time I will therefore be directing the dance as well. I will probably have to cut and

edit the script as well as we are doing it for a different kind of audience – a matinee for children.

All the children are excited about the prospect and after a two week break we start rehearsals again!

REHEARSAL 1 & 2

It is very difficult to refocus the children. They decide that they know what to do and see no sense in rehearsing again. I tape off the much smaller stage area which they will be using in the new venue and this grabs their attention! There is a lot of shoving and purposeful tripping up of each other whilst they try to fit into the smaller space. They think this is extremely funny! It takes two rehearsal just to get through the script once – some movements have to be changed drastically, and of course, new links need to be established where the dances are being taken out. After the second rehearsal the novelty has worn off and they become bored with the rehearsal process again.

REHEARSALS 3-6

I give up on trying to run the play. The interest level is very low. A lot of children are also now writing school examinations and we therefore have many absentees. I instead elect to do different drama activities and only run short sections from the play at the end of each class. I am hoping that we will somehow be able to get it flowing again.

REHEARSAL 7

This is our final runthrough before the run in the new venue. Even now the children are finding it hard to focus. All the words and movements are thankfully, still there though.

REHEARSAL 8

Unfortunately our rehearsal time is very limited as a result of a double booking. We barely have an hour to sort out the technical detail and run. We obviously cannot run the whole play, so I instead jump from snippet to snippet focusing mainly on the crowd scenes where our space is most limited. It is rather chaotic!. There is about 40 cm of wing space on either side. The children are crawling through each other's legs to get to the other side of the stage! I am worried about the stairs leading to the one (!) dressing room which leads directly off the stage. Knowing children, I am sure that one of them will dash off stage, forget about the stairs and plunge down. I take some time calling them around to see the danger and give them an illustration of how they will tumble down the stairs! They think it's very funny and rather exciting that someone might break a leg. I decide to somehow do the sound from this area so that I can keep an eye on them as they exit. (A good decision as I did end up catching one in mid-fall!). The lack of space is really very desperate. However, I tell them that this is an adventure and that seems to make up for all discomfort! I do worry, however, that our rehearsal time has been so limited – many technical problems are really still unresolved.

PERFORMANCE 1

The first performance is a marathon! On stage it is not going too badly – the children are adapting wonderfully. They change movements where needs be and make allowances for each other on stage. It is actually quite encouraging to see them being so aware of sightlines, masking etc under these circumstances. Backstage, however, it is a total circus!. Children are crawling over each other, tripping up, landing on the wrong side of the stage. Fortunately I had lined the whole backstage area with small touchlights so that they can at least vaguely see where they are going! We somehow manage to get through the show without any major disasters.

PERFORMANCE 2

Amazingly yesterday's backstage chaos has been resolved. The show flows without a hitch. I am again amazed by the children's amazing adaptability. I think we often underestimate them – they have quietly sorted out a lot of the technical problems amongst themselves (“You must line up first, then I'll put my arms here and you pass on the bucket“, etc).

I come away from this project feeling truly enriched by the experience. Truly, children's theatre when it works, can be amazingly rewarding for all concerned.

CONCLUSION

After the second performance the children went on holiday for their annual six week holiday and did not come to class again until February.

The OZ project was over and we never redid it again. The after effects of this project, however, could clearly be seen in their class work. I decided to let them do a lot of free improvisation drama activities. Firstly, to counteract the long, quite formal rehearsal period we had had with OZ and secondly, to see whether this project had in any way enriched their spontaneous improvisational drama. And it certainly had – in a number of ways:

1. The group functioned very well together. Less time was spent on bickering when planning a project and they co-operated with each other very well
2. The standard of the improvised scenes was much higher than before. The little playlets were well structured with a lot of attention paid to resolution, strong endings, clear introductions etc.
3. Characterisation was well thought through. Much less use was made of stock character.

4. They were much more aware of the presentation of their scenes, They paid attention to upstaging, masking and focus.
5. The overall tone of the work was much more committed. Each project was undertaken with great energy.
6. Dialogue was spoken with much greater clarity and purpose.

These effects lasted for about a term (10 weeks). At the end of that period the work started deteriorating. Group cohesion did not last, focus and energy lagged and the overall standard of the presentations fell.

It became clear that the group needed direction which seems to underline Fleming's (1994:3) notion that

left to their own devices, children are unlikely to create drama of any depth which will further their understanding of human conditions.

This is possibly age related as well – the younger the child the more they may have to be guided in the process.

APPENDIX 6

SCHOOL PLAY

DESCRIPTION OF A SCHOOL PLAY STAGED BY DE KUILEN PRIMARY SCHOOL, KUILSRIVER.

The production included virtually every child in school from Grades 1 to 7. The production was a slightly unusual project in that the normal teaching staff was aided by a number of outside practitioners.

The musical score was composed by an outside music specialist who was on hand to make changes and adapt wherever necessary. The music staff of the school, however, was responsible for teaching and rehearsing the musical score. As they consisted of three staff members, they divided the duties between them – one being responsible for training the choir and the other two sharing the training of the soloists.

The choreography was done by an outside practitioner who taught all dance steps to groups of children. The school teachers were responsible for rehearsals thereafter with the choreographer doing regular checks on progress.

Costume and set designs were done by outside practitioners but the staff and parents were responsible for the execution.

Makeup was designed by an outside practitioner. Staff and parents helped with the application.

The music and lighting effects were executed by professionals who were employed for the duration of the run.

The directing responsibilities were divided – the main drama director (a member of staff with considerable theatre training and experience) directed the sections

of dialogue whilst two assistants (teachers) helped with the rehearsing of these sections. Once the play was put together a team consisting of the drama director, the choreographer and the music staff led the rehearsals in unison. Even though this might seem like a recipe for disaster in professional theatre, in this instance it worked remarkably well – possibly because of school teachers' general willingness to work together as a team.

Rehearsals were done over 12 weeks. The daily school timetable was adjusted : 5 minutes were taken from each period to form an additional daily rehearsal period of one hour. The groups rotated – either rehearsing with the choreographer or rehearsal teachers. The choir rotated between the choir teacher and choreographer. The lead parts rotated between the drama director and the music staff responsible for the solo singing. The main acting parts also rehearsed with the drama director approximately two hours per week after school hours. The choir also rehearsed for two hours per week after hours (but in their normal after hour choir rehearsal time slot). During the last week of rehearsals, the whole school day was spent in rehearsal. No after hour rehearsals were ever held which involved the whole school.

The play ran for 4 nights.

What made the project remarkable was the fact that not only was a high standard of performance achieved, but the children, as well as the staff, actually enjoyed the enterprise (see questionnaire below). I believe that both of the above can be ascribed to the success of the rehearsal period.

QUESTIONNAIRE AND RESULTS

The following questionnaire was given to a group of children aged between the ages of 10 and 13 after the completion of the school production in which they had all participated.

	YES	NO	UNCERTAIN
1. Did you enjoy participating in the play?	89%	11%	0%
2. Did you like your part?	85%	15%	0%
3. Would you have liked a bigger part?	30%	70%	0%
4. Did you feel pressurized to take part?	37%	63%	0%
5. Were you unhappy about the play?	19%	81%	0%
6. Did you struggle to keep up with school work?	30%	70%	0%
7. Did you enjoy the rehearsals?	85%	11%	4%
8. Did you enjoy the performances?	85%	15%	0%
9. Were there too many performances?	7%	93%	0%
10. Did you like your costume?	75%	26%	0%

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11. Do you like school productions?	89%	11%	0%
12. Was it boring to wait backstage?	52%	41%	7%
13. Were you satisfied with the coaching you received?	78%	18%	4%
14. What are your feelings concerning the following:	LIKE	DISLIKE	UNSURE
A) Singing	78%	18%	4%
B) Dancing	70%	23%	7%
C) Speaking lines	26%	63%	11%
15. What type of production do you like?	YES	NO	UNSURE
a) Musical ?	78%	18%	4%
b) Variety show?	70%	23%	7%
c) A play	26%	63%	3%
d) Dance programme	33%	56%	11%

From the above results it seems that the production was a great success as far as the children were concerned. The only area of uncertainty seems to be the waiting period backstage! It is quite remarkable that so many children actually enjoyed the rehearsal period. The method in which this school executed this project seems to be very effective - a relatively short, yet intense rehearsal period with minimum disruption.

The following questionnaire was given to the staff of the school involved in the same production:

	YES	NO	UNSURE
1. What is your attitude towards school productions in general?			
a) It serves no purpose	12%	76%	12%
b) It helps with fundraising	47%	18%	35%
c) It develops team spirit	100%	0%	0%
d) It advertises the school	100%	0%	0%
e) It teaches the learners certain values	82%	0%	18%
f) It develops talent	94%	6%	0%
g) It gives cultural enrichment	94%	6%	0%
h) It wastes class time	47%	18%	35%
i) It gives the educators extra unnecessary work	29%	59%	12%
j) It disrupts the school routine unnecessarily	18%	53%	29%
k) It leads to problems with discipline	76%	12%	12%
l) It creates happy memories	100%	0%	0%

m) It wastes money	6%	47%	47%
n) It wastes educators' private spare time	12%	53%	35%
o) It unfairly benefits some pupils more than others	12%	65%	23%
	YES	NO	UNSURE

What are your feelings concerning the productions methods followed, i.e. being given a completed product where script, music, choreography, design, etc were done by outsiders – the staff only had to help with rehearsals?

a) It saved time	100%	0%	0%
b) I felt uninvolved	0%	82%	18%
c) I would have preferred being more involved	12%	70%	18%
d) I was unsure of what to do	12%	76%	12%
e) I would have preferred the staff doing everything	0%	88%	12%

f) I would have preferred outsiders doing the whole production	0%	82%	18%
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According to your experience, what kind of productions succeeds at Primary School level?

a) Musical	70%	0%	30%
b) Variety concert	70%	12%	18%
c) Children`s Play	41%	24%	35%

Do you think that the learners would have had sufficient exposure to culture had they merely attended a production?	6%	76%	18%
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Do you think that the production was worth the effort?	82%	0%	18%
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Once again, a remarkably positive response from the school staff. Again, the method in which it was done possibly contributed to this attitude: Rehearsals were done during the school day so that no staff members had to spend hours after school. Competent individuals were identified in different fields who

helped other staff members without excluding them. All staff members were included in whatever area they felt most comfortable with – from coaching children to set building, lighting, supervision of groups, etc. It is interesting to note that all staff still wanted to remain part of the production process instead of outsiders being in complete control of the event. Outside consultants are, however, welcomed if they can share their expertise without alienating the staff.

The format used for this production, as far as rehearsals were concerned, seems most effective. The completed package of script (with basic blocking ideas), music score and backtrack, set, make-up and costume design seems to have helped the staff – only a few individuals felt that they would have liked to contribute more. Possibly the uncertainty of having to stage a school play without the necessary training is the reason why so many other educators intensely dislike the idea of a schoolplay. The guidance given might have dispelled doubt and uncertainty and contributed to the success of the enterprise.

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