



Matthew Reason

The Young Audiences:

Exploring and Enhancing Children's Experience of Theatre

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THE YOUNG audience

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experiences of theatre

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Matthew Reason, Trentham/IOE Press 2010

Research Aims

- To provide a rich and experientially grounded description of young children's engagement with theatre *as* theatre.
- To use drawings, and talk mediated by drawings, to explore children's memories and experiences of theatre.
- To explore and develop practical tools for enhancing children's experiences of theatre.

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Why drawing?

- 1) Drawing is an **age appropriate** way of working with young children.
- 2) Drawing is immediate, yet also **allows time for reflection**. The time and effort required to finish a picture provides scope for new insights to emerge.
- 3) A drawing is a trace of an experience and assists in the **ordering of sensations**, feelings, ideas and **memory**.
- 4) Drawing requires that we really think about what we have seen and **aids observation and interpretation**.
- 5) Drawing develops ideas, from embryonic stage to form. Through drawing we have **the power to change and own** our experiences.

The Workshops

- Total of 13 x 90 minute workshops.
- Each comprising of total of over 100 participants.
- Children aged from five to nine.
- Drawn from four primary schools in Edinburgh and West Lothian (Scotland).
- Each school group attending a theatre performance shortly before the workshops.





The Analysis

- Relation of words to pictures.
- Stance of not knowing:
‘Taking a stance of ***not knowing*** allows the child’s experiences of creative and making art expression to be respected as individual and to have a variety of meanings.’
(Cathy Malchiodi 1998: 36)
- Content analysis of pictures.
- Thematic analysis.
- Relation back to the act of spectating (the doing of audiencing).

Themes

1. Active audience
2. Nature of engagement
3. A longer experience

Themes

1. Active audience – actively ‘doing’
(semiotically, emotionally, empathetically,
imaginatively, technically).

Theme 1: Active Audience

Semiotic doing

Researcher: And the sun is shining. How did you know it was a nice day?

Robbie: Well, I heard noises so I thought it was like a nice day.

Researcher: What kind of noises?

Robbie: Sort of seagulls and I heard a wee bit of sun. Because I hear some things a lot.



Theme 1: Active Audience

Emotional doing



Researcher: Why is the goose crying?

Karen: Because it is sad to leave, but is also happy... he's happy that he's going, and he's sad that he's leaving a friend.

Theme 1: Active Audience

Empathetic doing



Karen: Yeah... because, because it might help my brother and get some more friends. Because, because he is being bullied at the moment.

Theme 1: Active Audience

Imaginative (re)doing



Researcher: What are all these?

Alasdair: Five storey muscles. And he's got muscles on his eyes.

Ajay: There!

Alasdair: That's why they're green.

Theme 1: Active Audience

Imaginative (re)doing



The spectator 'composes her own poems with the elements of the poem before her.'

Ranciere 2008: 13

Theme 1: Active Audience

Technical doing



Themes

1. Active audience
2. Nature of engagement – responding to referential/imagined *and* material/real experience ('dual vision').
3. A longer experience





Theme 2: Nature of Engagement

Remembering and discussing both the referential/imagined *and* material/real experience

‘dual vision’

Themes

1. Active audience – actively ‘doing’ (semiotically, emotionally, empathetically, imaginatively, technically).
2. Nature of engagement – responding to referential/imagined *and* material/real experience (‘dual vision’).
3. A longer experience – the workshops actively and positively added to the experience.

by Robbie





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A Longer Experience

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- Required them to make decisions about what and how to draw: looking again, looking closer;
- Often required them to draw more than they had seen: adding, interpreting, imagining, playing;
- Produced a sense of ownership of the experience and of the value of their own responses and opinions.



Echoa, Compagnie Arcosm 2001

‘It’s hard to conceive of anyone – of any age – not loving *Echoa*. [...] Rarely is contemporary dance so instantly accessible and fun, eliciting peels of giggling laughter from young mouths alongside adult guffaws. Best of all, we’re all laughing at the same joke, on the same level. Without saying a single word, the performers draw us into their world and unite us as an audience.’

Kelly Apter, *The Scotsman* 2009

Dale: It was cruel to make us watch it.

Researcher: What was your favourite thing about the performance?

Rebecca: When it was over.

Researcher: Why was that?

Rebecca: Because then I didn't have to watch it anymore.

ALALA

boom boom

boom

ALALA



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- Consider and actively curate a 'longer experience', beginning before the performance and resonating afterwards.



These resources are designed ‘to facilitate discussion and debate, explore the creative process behind a performance and empower teachers and pupils to express their opinions confidently through a variety of means. Most importantly though we hope that through extending engagement with a performance, teachers’ and pupils’ imaginations are sparked and they feel open to exploring new possibilities.’

Evaluating the Performing Arts Online.
Imagine & Glow. 2011



