

THE CHILD AS DRAMATURG:

investigating dramaturgical frameworks steered by child-centric sensibilities

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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Abstract

This dissertation questions how it is possible for a child to be considered the dramaturg of a theatrical production specifically catering for early year audiences. The research begins with an investigation of secondary source materials to obtain a working definition of the concepts of child/hood and dramaturg/y in relation to how other artists and art forms have used and presented work to children. The research then incorporates the use of interviews held with professionally trained theatre practitioners involved in producing and promoting Theatre for Early Years (TEY), in order to contextualise the theatre scene for early years in South Africa at present. The majority of the research is then dedicated to analysing, through my own artistic practice, the means by which children participated in the process of developing a TEY production in 2015. Whereby dramaturgy is understood to be a political practice that addresses the inequality of power relations between the audience and the performance, the main outcome of the dissertation addresses the value of including the child as a dramaturg/quasi-dramaturg in the practice of devising theatre for young audiences.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

If we do not pay careful attention to the experiences of actual child audiences, not only is theatre for children produced by adults, its meanings, values and reception processes are additionally defined by adults as the knowing subject who enunciates for the absent child.

(Matthew Reason 2012:26)

a. Rationale

Currently Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) is greatly developing and expanding as a reputable genre in South Africa, predominantly through the advocacy of *the Association International du Theatre pour l' Enfance et la Jeunesse South Africa (ASSITEJ SA)*. As a theatre practitioner, in the last four years, I have become primarily interested in devising and making work for young audiences. While South African theatre practitioners, like myself, are in the early stages of discovering the wealth of possibilities TYA holds, we are heavily reliant on looking towards European and Western aesthetics and sensibilities in approaching devising and developing theatre for these young audiences. This is mainly because there have been more decades of research, approach and application in the TYA sector abroad.

Through my involvement in the MA Dramaturgy exchange between the Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies at the University of Cape Town and the Theatre Studies department at the University of Amsterdam, it became apparent to me that dramaturgy itself is currently being redefined by an ever changing international theatre landscape, so then why the need to revert to European dramaturgical structures for devising TYA in South Africa? At the same time I have been grappling with understanding the function of the dramaturg. One of the functions of the dramaturg that is most evident to me

is the need for the dramaturg to act on behalf of the 'first audience', to watch the theatre performance by placing themselves in the role of its intended audience. I wonder, however, if perhaps a more significant theatrical experience for the audience could be produced, by cutting out the professionally trained dramaturg and directly using the 'first audience' as the feedback source to provide dramaturgical or partial dramaturgical support. This is how I came towards my dissertation question, investigating dramaturgical frameworks steered by child-centric sensibilities, to see if different dramaturgies in South African TYA may exist if we were to introduce the child into the process of theatre-making as the dramaturg or, at least, to provide a quasi-dramaturgical function.

It is therefore my intention to explore what dramaturgical frameworks may emerge through analysing and being attentive to the inherent sensibilities of young children. There are wonderfully exciting developing trends in other creative art sectors, such as visual art and dance, whereby industry professionals use direct inspiration out of the world of children to create professional artistic or commercial products¹. In this approach, the child expresses their interior worlds to the adults through spoken language, drawings and/or movement, and the professionally trained adults interpret and translate the self-expressions of the child. I am very interested in investigating how working closely alongside the child in consultations and creative exchanges during the theatre-making process, from conception to realisation, results in a theatre performance. Since I am particularly interested in Theatre for Early Years (TEY), which is a subcategory of TYA and one that I will further explain later in this dissertation, the intention of this research is to analyse children (between the ages of 4 - 6 years) during my own theatre-making process. Through my findings I hope for my research to evaluate the process by which the child could be conceived of as the dramaturg

¹ Examples include: *HiHo Kids*, *Budsies* and Alexandra Beller's *Milkdreams*. These will be further addressed in my Literary Review regarding 'Outsider Art'.

of a devised TEY performance by professionally trained theatre makers, or at least provide a quasi-dramaturgical function in such a process.

b. Research question

The main questions that will need to be answered in my research inquiry are: “How can a child be the dramaturg of a theatrical experience?”; “What is the value of having the child as dramaturg?” and “What dramaturgical structures may emerge as a result of the process?”

c. Importance of the research

As a theatre practitioner myself, I find it of importance to continue to push my own personal practice, by exploring and expanding on the forms of theatre that I am familiar and comfortable with. There are potentially very exciting ways to re-imagine the forms and structures that we are currently using for TEY, not simply through looking at international trends for inspiration but through our intended audiences themselves, the children. TEY caters for this audience that are essentially held invisible in society, from a political, anthropological and a historical perspective. Anthropologist Jane Baxter mirrors this in her research, commenting that: “Children are represented in historical documents largely by what was written about them by adults, not by their own discourse, making children somewhat removed from the historical record” (Baxter, 2005:34). Therefore the child’s own experiences and understanding of childhood have largely gone undocumented and those which have been documented have been through the perspective and reflexivity of an adult. I believe that the current overarching dramaturgical form of theatre for children is a direct transposition of how children have been viewed and researched through history, in that it is predominantly curated, documented and created by adults. In addition, very young

audience members rarely actively decide what theatre they want to partake in, as this decision is typically coordinated by their teacher/parent/guardian. Thus children are further disenfranchised in their agency, becoming captive audience members to the theatre catering specifically for them. This research seeks to acknowledge and value the voice of its captive audience, by pursuing a way in which to have theatre be a reflection of a lived childhood experience – through affording the child his/her status as a social actor in society.

d. Research methodology

The methodology of my research comprised of reviewing secondary source research in books, articles and dissertations addressing ‘childhood’, ‘new dramaturgies’, ‘theatre for young audiences’ and ‘outsider art’ to underpin the artistic considerations around my topic. In addition, engaging with literature concerning ‘child development’ provided greater context as to what could be expected when working with children between the ages of 4 - 6 years. Qualitative interviews were conducted with: Yvette Hardie, president of ASSITEJ SA; Jennie Reznick, Director and Trustee of Magnet Theatre², a Cape Town-based theatre company with a current focus on TEY and Theatre for Babies; and Barbara Kölling, Artistic Director for Helios³, a German-based theatre company creating work for children and youth over the last 14 years. I also made use of auto-ethnographic experiences of making my own work for early years audiences in 2015, entitled *What goes UP...*, for Cape Town based visual theatre company, From the Hip: Khulumakahle (FTH: K)⁴.

² Cape Town based independent physical theatre company and training institution promoting and developing South African performances and pedagogies. <https://magnettheatre.co.za/>

³ <https://www.helios-theater.de/>

⁴ Renowned Cape Town based visual theatre company, creating shows for integrated Deaf and hearing audiences with integrated casts. <http://www.fthk.co.za/>

The methodological approach for the interviews comprised of using a subjective quantitative form of data collection using a Q methodology-inspired technique together with a qualitative approach of using open, in-depth interviews. The Q methodology-inspired component of my interviews alongside the in-depth questions captured from each of the three theatre experts in Theatre for Early Years would then provide empirical data for a comparative analysis to be carried out later against my auto-ethnographic reflections.

The method of qualitative empirical research carried out through in-depth interviewing is a process of obtaining data through a conversation with the person being researched. The benefits of such a method address the complexity of the subject and the reflexive capabilities of respondents. It allows for picking up nuances in subtle communication and provides agency to those being interviewed. It creates a flexible interviewing structure that is cheap to implement. The weakness of this methodology is that it is not necessarily a reliable means for arriving at statistical descriptions to speak on behalf of the larger theatre industry sector. Another challenge may lie in its lack of objectivity, resulting in an analysis of the interviewers own reflexivity, affecting the way in which the data can be captured and indeed interpreted.

The Q methodology was “devised and developed by William Stephenson in the 1930s. The development emerged from his desire to bring a scientific framework to bear on the elusiveness of subjectivity” (Coogan & Herrington, 2011:24). This methodology allows for an individual to represent their own opinions and understandings through a pattern of responses, while still ensuring a consistency in rendering them comparable. The data captured by this approach offers an innovative approach to qualitative analysis through a "quantification of patterned subjectivities" (Shemmings, 2006:147). While the Q methodology comprises of 32 statements, known as the Q set, my approach made use of

only 13 statements, and asked for a simpler ranking of the statements from 1 through to 13. I asked respondents to rank the first statement as most important and the thirteenth statement as having least importance, though by no means suggesting that the lower ranking held less value. The statements were used to have a clearer understanding of what each TEY expert valued most when approaching the creation of theatre for young audiences.

e. Research procedures

Kölling and Hardie's interviews were conducted electronically over e-mail correspondence, due to physical distance and schedule constraints of both interviewees. The open-structured, orally conducted interview with Jennie Reznik was held in person at Magnet Theatre in Observatory, Cape Town. The interview questions were divided into three sections, the first was to gain a better understanding of the expert being interviewed as well as situating them within the field of TEY. The second section specifically addressed how the interviewee may or may not use children in their process of devising TEY. The third section was inspired by the Q methodological approach and asked the interviewee to rank corresponding statements in order of importance when devising new work for early year audiences.

Each interviewee was specifically chosen because of their expertise and experience within the field of TEY. However the questions focused on addressing matters particularly pertaining to the last five years. By interviewing Hardie, I hoped to gain a broader understanding of TEY in South Africa and the current dramaturgical trends in the international TEY circuit. I was also looking to gain insight into how she believes TEY had developed within the last five years in South Africa, as well as the dramaturgical influence

she feels that international artists have brought to TEY in South Africa. In respect to interviewing Reznek, I was particularly interested in how she developed Magnet Theatre's TEY productions and the approach to the collaborative work with international artists, especially working with Helios' pedagogy, which helped to guide the dramaturgical choices of their most recent TEY shows. This instigated my interview with Kölling, to have a deeper understanding of the origin point of the dramaturgy that had been developed by their company over the last 14 years.

f. Ethical considerations

All the participants I had chosen to interview for the purposes of this dissertation were initially approached to inquire if they would be comfortable being interviewed specifically for my MA research. I described my own research intentions to them, as well as how I would like to use the interview within my dissertation. I also approached Gabi dan Droste, a German dramaturg and choreographer for TYA who I collaborated with on *What goes UP...*, to request her permission to use quotes from our 2015 e-mail correspondences. All participants agreed to their involvement and signed a UCT Research Ethics Permission form granting their consent for the interview/e-mails and their full names to be used in my research.

The personal video archive I used to reflect on the process of developing my own work was filmed in 2015 by camera operator Jesse Stevenson, who was present during the filmed sessions with the children. At the time I had the written permission of Principal Jill Wilmot (Mary Kihn School for the Deaf) to work alongside the children in developing a new show. I had a verbal agreement that pictures and video footage could be taken, and that I would not publically publish these unless otherwise agreed upon. The archive was solely for

my own personal reference to use when making directorial decisions about the development of the production. At the point in which the archive was developed, the intention and purpose was not for academic research. Therefore the archival material of the theatre-making process was never analysed. Now that I am accessing this archive I am able to provide a detailed post-process reflection and analysis of working with the children⁵ during the theatre-making process.

g. Scope of the study

While this research is indeed acknowledging and engaging with a broader international perspective on the notions of new dramaturgies surrounding TEY, it is to all intents and purposes a means by which to contextualise and interrogate TEY within South Africa. While the South African theatre industry experts interviewed for this paper, as well as my own artistic practice, are based in Cape Town, the scope of this research question will look at addressing using the child as dramaturg for developing TEY on a national level within South Africa.

h. Structure of the thesis

The structure of this paper is divided into five overriding chapters. The first chapter engages with a comparative literary review of secondary source material within each of the four principal overarching themes of this research: Child and Childhood; New Dramaturgy; Outsider Art and Theatre for Young Audiences. The second chapter contextualises the theory from the previous chapter, by locating it within the context of TEY being developed

⁵ To provide anonymity the children are purposefully not mentioned by name in this dissertation. So as to uphold their full anonymity the video archive will not be made public or publically accessible without the express written consent of their parents/guardians. For more information on ethics, see p. 46.

in South Africa. The third chapter provides a comparative analysis of the three interviews captured with TEY experts, examining current TEY trends and practices both locally and globally. The fourth chapter is a detailed analysis of my own methodology of practice undertaken, further investigating how a professionally trained artist may work alongside children to develop theatre and in the process drawing comparisons as to the success and challenges of such research. The fifth chapter examines the results of the qualitative and practice-led research through a process of critical analysis and auto-ethnographic self-reflection, while simultaneously acknowledging the limitations as well as offering future recommendations in further pursuing the research. In this reflection of my personal practice I draw direct comparisons between the experience of working simultaneously with children and with professionally trained dramaturg, Dan Droste, to create the production. The final chapter presents itself as a summation of the research provided and how it attempts to engage the proposed research questions.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

a. Child and childhood

When I initially started thinking around my research questions, I began researching the psychological development of children in order to understand how a child behaves and what may be expected of working with young children. Through this research I believed that I might become better equipped with strategies to identify methods by which to work with and interpret the responses of the children. While I do believe that the psychological development of children is a useful indicator of understanding this intended audience better, and will indeed refer to it later in this section, by focusing immediately on the psychological development of the child, I presumed that the concept of the 'child' and

'childhood' was a fixed and agreed upon constant. In my research title, I propose the child as dramaturg, and while my dissertation will go to some lengths to understand and come to a working definition of the dramaturg, I neglected to initially give the same priority to analysing and understanding the definition of child. My research title also highlights my assumption of the definition of child by immediately positioning it as 'other' in relation to the adult dramaturg. But what is the difference between a child and an adult, do they merely exist on opposing ends of a binary scale? What constitutes child-centric approaches? Are they associated with experiencing childhood and can we assume childhood to be a fixed generational occurrence or belonging exclusively to a child? And what other assumptions may I have naively made around the constructs of childhood? In this chapter I will endeavour to find a working understanding of child and childhood before further exploring the psychological development of the child in order to find working strategies for analysing my approach of working with the children in developing TEY.

While it can be agreed upon that childhood may be defined "legally, organized socially, and experienced physiologically" (Smith, 2010:190), through various readings of different books and articles it was immediately apparent and agreed upon by varying experts (in history, psychology, sociology and anthropology) that the search for a standardised definition of a child and/or childhood is a very challenging prospect. Nonetheless, childhood can be understood to be a cultural universal construct in so much as it is "a phase in the life course of all people and a period marked by rapid and common physiological and psychological development" (Moletsane, 2012:250). However, each child and notion of childhood is unique and specific to social practices, socioeconomics, cultures and generations, as different communities and societies have different ways of identifying and treating their children. Therefore it is imperative to interrogate "which child am I talking

about?" when I refer to 'the child as dramaturg' among the diverse environmental influences present in South Africa. This is echoed by art educator and art therapist, Cathy Malchiodi (1998:20): "The experience of childhood is in some ways universal, but is also quite variable when one considers the many environmental influences such as culture, class, gender expectations, and parenting, and the genetic determinants that affect children". In this way it can be understood that there are a multitude of different 'childhoods' that exist concurrently to one another and no such thing as the 'universal' child exists. And it may be by looking through the differences rather than by seeking out the similarities that a working definition of child and childhood could be brought to a compelling place, irrespective of the research discipline. By means of such an approach, the multiple occurrences of childhood could come to "be understood as empirical effects of an open-ended process in which different elements ... have come into play" (Prout, 2005:144).

If we focus on an historical view-point of the notion of childhood, from its 'discovery' in the Middle Ages (Smith, 2010:29), we will see that childhood has been documented, archived and defined by adult perspectives, because "even in historical periods (where documentation is available) sources often theorize and idealize children, but rarely do they illuminate the lives of children as they actually lived" (Calvert 1992a cited in Baxter, 2005:2). As a result, the voice of the child as they lived in specific eras is omitted from an historical narrative. This idealisation of children has been mythicised as the 'golden age' (Smith, 2010:12) of childhood which is epitomised by innocence, fun and care-free existence. However in later historical discourses, childhood was likened "to a prison, whose constraints children should be encouraged to resist and escape from" (Smith, 2010:12). If childhood is portrayed through the lens of adults, it is of no surprise then that the concept of a 'child' is also defined in terms of the adult activities that they are excluded from or unable to

participate in. This is further reinforced by the importance that is placed on children receiving an education “in preparation for adult roles and tasks” (Smith, 2010:13). In this way children are constantly viewed as adults in the making, insinuating that childhood itself is a “fluid and unfinished” (Smith, 2010:24) state that the child must move through in order to reach adulthood⁶.

If we turn towards a sociological and anthropological framework to understand the notion of the child, there are two clearly distinguishable areas of inquiry: “the task of investigating and understanding children’s lives” and “identifying and analysing the process by which childhood itself is socially constructed” (Smith, 2010:23). Current modes of approaching theorising childhood are trying to give children agency by allowing them to be social actors and thereby acknowledged as “citizens in their own right” (Smith, 2010:17). This sentiment is echoed by Baxter (2005:32) when she calls for a repositioning of our thinking around children in that they “are not passive recipients of adult social input, but are themselves active social agents who interpret, select, and appropriate ideas and behaviours in particular ways.” It is also shared by Nigel Thomas (2000:17 cited in Smith, 2010:23) who argues that: “Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes.” In further understanding the way in which childhood is socially constructed there are three distinguishing categories to be taken into consideration: “the culture created when children interact with the environment, the culture transferred to children from adults, and the culture transferred among children” (Lillehammer, 1989:90 cited in Baxter, 2005:16). In light of this, I find it of great interest to shift the perspective of childhood from a mode of

⁶ The implications of such a statement obviously relies on the assumption that adulthood is understood to be a fixed and completed state.

impermanence moving towards adulthood to rather understanding it as its own contained and comprehensive culture. As such, childhood can be recognised not as “an epiphenomenon of biology but as a translation of it into culture” (Prout, 2005:111 cited in Smith, 2010:195).

Looking at childhood from an historical, sociological and anthropological perspective allows for a substantial understanding of the diverse phenomenon that is childhood across a range of contingent influences. Though it is evident that these definitions of childhood are still working relationally to the adult, in order to have a more nuanced and detailed understanding of childhood one must look at the “processes and characteristics operating *within* and between children individually and interpersonally” (Smith, 2010:63. Italics in original).

Within the scope of studying, contextualising and conceptualising the child, psychology has established itself to be the predominant mode of research, especially in regards to theorising child development through examining cognitive and physiological development. Though once again, this method of analysing childhood can be construed as “a body of knowledge constructed by adults for other adults to use in order to make sense of, regulate and promote children's lives and learning” (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000:11). While the biological and neurological indicators reflect the present physiological state of the child, it is once again the adults’ interpretation of these indicators that result in defining a state of childhood.

A leading pioneer in this field of developing theories around the cognitive development of children in the early 1900s was Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget (1896 – 1980). Piaget had a constructivist approach when analysing the way in which children would acquire their knowledge, and divided this process of learning and becoming into adulthood

into four stages: Sensorimotor, Preoperational, Concrete Operational and Formal Operational (Berk, 1997:220). Here again, defining such stages implies that there is a “distinction between the fluid and unfinished nature of childhood, and by contrast, a fixed and finished state of adulthood” (Smith, 2010:24).

For the purposes of my research I shall focus on the Preoperational stage as this phase focuses on the psychological development of children between the ages of 2 - 7 years. This stage is predominantly defined by “an extraordinary increase in representational activity” (Berk, 1997:225) and a “growing symbolic mastery” (Berk, 1997:226) that takes place in the child. This symbolic mastery can be seen within the development of make-believe play, pictorial representation and animistic thinking (Berk, 1997:230). While a number of Piaget’s theories surrounding cognitive development have been contested by contemporary research, including his notions surrounding centration in the preoperational stage (Berk, 1997:233), his theories surrounding play at this stage have been widely incorporated by other leading psychologists such as Lev Vygotsky⁷. Piaget’s theories of play suggest that it promotes the development of language and meaning-making through the imitation of adult behaviour (Stroud, Hardman & Harrison, 2012:140). This process allows for the child to acquire skills in self-regulation (Stroud, Hardman & Harrison, 2012:138) and socialisation, through internalising generalisations which help to regulate behaviour within socially accepted norms. Play can be manifested on one’s own or collectively with other children, through imagined play or the interaction with materials (toys). In fact according to

⁷ See for example his seminal works: Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Vygotsky, L. S, & Kozulin, A. (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press and Vygotsky, L. S. (1997) *Educational psychology*. Boca Raton, Fla: St. Lucie Press.

Baxter (2005:39), “one widely recognized aspect of socialization is the role that material culture plays in establishing and reinforcing social roles for children during childhood”.

While the predominant theories regarding the psychological development of children were developed in the 1920s by the likes of Piaget and Vygotsky, there is very little literature and longitudinal research available regarding how children growing up in the current age of globalisation and prevalent technology are developing. Given the pervasive reach of electronics and information technologies in our current climate, major concerns have been raised around the damage being done to children and notions of childhood notably around “an imputed erosion of the boundaries between adults and children and the loss of adolescence” (Smith, 2010:16). Malchiodi (1998:21) also references this point that while there is indeed a growing concern “that children’s preoccupation with television and video games has decreased their abilities to be imaginative through art expression,” there is “no quantifiable evidence” available to justify such claims. In regards to digital consumption and globalisation there are also concerns among African researchers, as offered by cultural anthropologists, Mwenda Ntarangwi and Guy Massart (2015:5), regarding:

relations of power in cultural production and consumption in contemporary Africa as they [children and youth] continue to witness the replacement of African cultural practices by foreign ones. Central to this notion of cultural imperialism are issues of power and inequality where values, practices, and even material products are not locally derived.

Because children are constantly influenced by their surrounding environments (both physically and electronically) these conditions directly influence the “formation, being, becoming, socialisation, and education, that make them [African children] cultural subjects ... on which global, neo-liberal and neo-colonial capitalism relations project” (Ntarangwi & Massart, 2015:7). Therefore children today cannot solely be understood by “locally-

generated sociocultural frames” (Ntarangwi & Massart, 2015:7). Just as theatre artists in an era of digital proliferation and technologies need to “negotiate between specific local and global identities” (Romanska, 2014:7) so too are children negotiating between these spaces constantly, in order to form their own identities.

Despite technological trends and global influences, the development of a child is still regarded to be rooted in play. With play often used as a means by which children understand themselves and their environments, it is easily understandable why the predominant means of researching early ages seems to be through mediums of artistic expression.

The process of drawing, painting or constructing is a complex one in which the child brings together diverse elements of his environment to make a meaningful whole. In the process of selecting, interpreting and reforming these elements, he has given us more than a picture, he has given us a part of himself. (Lowenfeld, 1947:1 cited in Malchiodi, 1998:15)

Children’s drawings in particular are a valuable resource for self-expression as they are an “important mode of symbolic expression” (Berk, 1997:228). Malchiodi expresses this similarly in her findings, “that drawings offer therapists a potent tool for understanding children’s thoughts, feelings, fantasies, conflicts, and worries, as well as perceptions and reflections of the world around them” (1998:xi) . She continues to articulate the importance of art making for children as:

a process that brings together many different experiences to create something new, personal, and unique. The process of making a drawing requires the child to choose, translate, and arrange lines, shapes, and colours to convey a thought, feeling, event, or observation, synthesizing numerous components involving content, style, form, and composition. (Malchiodi, 1998:19)

As a result of these explanations, it becomes evident that play and self-expression are exceedingly valuable tools for my research target group of children between the ages of 4 and 6. Not just in terms of their cognitive development and engagement with discovering their environment, but also in how they find form in expressing their thoughts and feelings. Along these lines, I contend that drawing and play can become indispensable tools in finding ways to give theatrical form and structure to the child's expression and engagement as dramaturg.

This review of existing literature acknowledges that there is a diverse and varied way in which a child experiences their childhood, and it is impossible as an adult to fully comprehend what a child is experiencing, as it is already far removed from our own understandings and comparisons to our own childhood. However when considering and thinking around children (outside of investigating modes of working with and trying to define and understand the way in which children interpret their experiences), it is essential to understand the concept of childhood as working within a political construction whereby "the shape and content of children's experience is at least partly determined according to prevailing power relationships" (Smith, 2010:201). This is especially so if we also take into account the way that children are being raised in an age of fast developing information technologies and that they "rely extensively on adult-produced media for their source material in constructing their roles and identities" (Smith, 2010:172). In fact, most spaces and objects that are intended to be used by children are where "adult agendas self-evidently predominate" (Smith, 2010:178). Understanding this construction of childhood allows the theatre practitioner to acknowledge that while they are interpreting the child's experiences, they must recognise the inherent predicament in which the child's capacity to make sense of and shape their world is determined according to how they have been and

are being positioned within inter-generational power dynamics. Returning to the need to provide agency to children by allowing them to be social actors, The United Nations recognises such rights of children, through acknowledging their “evolving capacities for autonomous learning and self-expression” (Smith, 2010:2014). And while play and even theatre can provide such a platform for enriching these notions of autonomous learning and self-expression, how may it actually be possible, if at all, within the theatre development process to balance out these heavily stacked power dynamics? What strategies may be implemented so that the theatre practitioner may work alongside the child in an unbiased fashion to give expression and theatrical form to the child’s own experiences?

b. Dramaturgy

The next most valuable step in being able to answer my research question and drawing up a comparison between the child and the adult as dramaturg, is to be able to clearly define what is understood to be the function and role of the dramaturg as well as the role that dramaturgy plays in developing new works. Dramaturgy and especially the dramaturg are relatively recent terms infiltrating the South African theatre industry, with posters and programme bills crediting the role of the dramaturg. And while in South African we are currently engaging with the concepts of defining the dramaturg, on the European and American front there are concurrent academic discussions being engaged with around the ideas of ‘new dramaturgy’ and the role of the dramaturg within it. Ironically, what may be defined as ‘new dramaturgy’ overseas, may indeed be what South Africans have been working with since the 1980s and the development of the workshop theatre process (I will refer to this in more detail later). In what follows, I will formulate a working definition of the dramaturg and the function the dramaturg plays within a theatrical production. This is

pertinent in order to later delineate if a child may indeed be able to hold the responsibilities of the dramaturg and to what extent they may comply with, transgress or interrupt its functions.

The literature I engaged with in regards to discussing dramaturgy, all immediately addressed within the introduction, preface or foreword the challenge of defining a standardised term for what dramaturgy or 'new' dramaturgy encompasses. Cathy Turner and Synne Behrndt begin their introduction acknowledging this challenge of writing about dramaturgy: "The terms 'dramaturgy' and 'performance' both cover such vast areas, demand such a comprehensive grasp of art practice, past and present, ... that it could seem like an act of hubris to even begin [writing about it]" (Turner & Behrndt, 2008:1). On the other hand, Katalin Trencsényi formulates a simple and concrete understanding in her foreword in order for the theme of the expansion of dramaturgy to be opened up in the collection of essays: "Dramaturgy is now considered to be the inner flow of a dynamic system" (Trencsényi & Cochrane, 2014:xi). Michael Chemers, although not struggling to define his understanding of what dramaturgy is, acknowledges it as a "multifaceted discipline" (Chemers, 2010:xii), and comments that not everyone will agree with his definitions and/or approaches to the practice, as they may well differ from their own practices. Chemers seems to enjoy and respond well to the challenge of defining the term concretely: "Dramaturgy is truly a world of limitless possibilities, and it is a great joy and privilege to share it" (Chemers, 2010:xii). The above variety of definitions and approaches speaks to the open-endedness of the subject, and while some practitioners, like myself, tend to become frustrated in the inability to arrive at a singular agreed upon working definition, others are freed up to expand and define their own understandings. This is perhaps why books such as *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy* (Romanska, 2014),

New Dramaturgy (Trencsényi & Cochrane, 2014) and *The Practice of Dramaturgy: Working on Actions in Performance* (Georgelou, Protopapa & Theodoridou, 2017) are written in the structure of collectives, allowing the space for each author/practitioner to share their own practice and thereby develop a more expansive understanding of the way in which dramaturgy functions today.

Numerous authors and practitioners reflecting around these collections in dramaturgy have also turned to the etymology of the word to base or inspire their working definitions. *Dramatourgos*, a Greek compound word referred to:

a play maker, play composer, that is a playwright. According to Aristotle, the root word “drama” came from the Attic verb that simply meant “action” [...]. The second morpheme, “tourgos,” was derived from the Greek word “ergo” [...], which meant “working together.” “Thus, originally, *dramatourgos* simply meant someone who was able to arrange various dramatic actions in a meaningful and comprehensive order. (Romanska, 2014:1)

Therefore, dramaturgy requires the “analytical skill of discerning and deconstructing all elements of dramatic structure” (Romanska, 2014:1). The elements that make up dramatic structure being: plot, character, theme, language, rhythm and aesthetic design. The dramaturgy also requires investigating the “political and historical as well as the aesthetic and formal aspects of a play” (Schechter, 1997:22 cited in Romanska, 2014:2).

The concept of dramaturgy as a separate theatrical function, which resided in the responsibility of an individual, was first established in Germany by Gotthald Ephraim Lessing (1729 – 1781), “whose collection of essays, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1769), introduced both the actual term and the figure of the ‘in-house critic,’ whose role was to assist a theatre in the process of play development” (Romanska, 2014:2. Italics in original). The concept of the dramaturg was then to be further developed by Bertolt Brecht (1898 – 1956)

who introduced the notion of 'production dramaturgy', comprising of the "entire conceptual preparation from its inception to its realization" (Schechter, 1997:21 cited in Romanska, 2014:2). The dramaturg in these contexts was situated within working in theatre institutions and with developed texts. However as theatre began to adapt, change and move away from its reliance on pre-existing and developed texts, so too did the role of the dramaturg shift. Postdramatic theatre (Lehmann, 2006) further liberated theatre from text based, linear narratives to favouring "non- dialogic, non-linear, and non-narrative" (Romanska, 2014:5) forms which required new dramaturgical structures to be considered. This was further propelled by the 21st Century's technological advancements, especially the way in which film editing was used as a means of altering the representation of time. According to Romanska (2014:5), the changes from the mid-1990s "have altered ... the very nature of the theatre-making process, which is increasingly moving towards a devised, collaborative, and globalized mode".

As I mentioned previously, South African theatre has been operating out of this collaborative space since the 1980s, with its approach of workshop theatre used to devise new works. In fact it was through this devised theatre approach In South Africa that the concept of "collective dramaturgy" (Coetzee & Munro, 2014:106) emerged. This collective dramaturgy also perhaps resulted in the absence of the role of the dramaturg as "in the South African context there is a strong conceptualization of the director [and even playwright] as the locus of control in the creative process" (Coetzee & Munro, 2014:106). So while the term of dramaturg may be relatively new to our shores, it is by no means to imply that dramaturgy as a function does not already inherently exist in our theatre. In postcolonial legacy countries, such as South Africa, "dominated by discourses of oppression and resistance" (Coetzee & Munro, 2014:106), dramaturgy has been inherently "developing

as an interdisciplinary tool of cultural transformation aiming to bridge the post-traumatic gaps in the socio-political fabric of the respective nations” (Romanska, 2014:6). The trajectory of the South African Theatre landscape can be divided into three strands of performance⁸. The first strand takes influence strongly from “the Western 'traditional' model of making theatre and performance, developing a 'canon of excellence', where the exemplar is in Europe” (Coetzee & Munro, 2014:106). The second strand draws on “performance styles, demands, and practices that may be seen to be indigenous to South Africa in shape and purpose” (Coetzee & Munro, 2014:106). The third strand creates an intersection between the first two “offering a strong notion of hybridity” (Coetzee & Munro, 2014:106).

At present both locally and globally, it seems that the roles of a dramaturg are becoming harder to delineate, as the forms and development of theatre are moving away from a locus of power, in the central directorial figure, and being distributed amongst the collective artistic team. Thus the responsibilities of the dramaturg truly vary from practitioner to practitioner and with regard to the differing contexts and styles in which they are working. Although there are a multitude of discrepancies I believe it is crucial, for my own framework of understanding, to determine a working definition of the role a dramaturg would play in developing devised TEY performances. Without this working definition, it will be unclear as to how the child can assume the role of dramaturg or if indeed they can fulfil the functions of the role. For this purpose I will focus on three key functions that are imperative in the role of the dramaturg that I have come across in the literature. I will discuss these below and will be using these three main aspects, as the benchmark to evaluate the realisation of the child as dramaturg in my research.

⁸ There is a fourth that looks at the influence of Applied Theatre, but is not further outlined in Coetzee and Munro (2014:105 – 110).

The first aspect assumes the function of the dramaturg as the 'outside eye/first spectator/ first audience', existing "as a liaison between the team and the audience" (Romanska, 2014:3) as well as being responsible for "structuring the emotional experience of the audience" (Romanska, 2014:12). The dramaturg may act in this capacity by keeping a degree of distance by not being present in all the rehearsals, so as to provide a more objective perspective from that of the fully immersed director. The reason why this function holds such importance is that the relationship between the audience and the performer/performance is central to the definition of theatre. In fact in the twentieth century there was "an explosion of interest in the audience's role among experimental theatre practitioners" (Freshwater, 2009:1) as practitioners started to recognise the connection "between audience participation and political empowerment" (Freshwater, 2009:3). Therefore it is obvious as to why the role of the spectator "in theatre has become the focus of new critical interrogations and academic debates" (Boenisch, 2014:225), and as such "with new theatre comes new dramaturgy" (Romanska, 2014:5). And this particular need to focus on the spectator became coined as "relational dramaturgy" (Boenisch, 2014:225) or "relational aesthetic practise" (Boenisch, 2014:227). These dramaturgical strategies "sought to 'liberate' the spectators from their role as (allegedly) passive consumers" (Boenisch, 2014:225) by allowing the audience to become involved "as an active participant in the process of analysing the narrative ... their voice becom[es] an essential part of the narrative development" (Ilgenfritz, 2014:215). Pedro Ilgenfritz suggests that the power imbalance of the previously passive spectator could be restored through allowing dialogue and engagement with the audience. He proposes a practical methodology with which to do so, by engaging in a series of feedback sessions which consists of presenting the developing work to different audiences, and then taking the feedback back

into the rehearsal space. The same methodological tool of shifting “the power that was limited to the dramaturg” (Ilgenfritz, 2014:215) is also broached by Turner and Behrndt (2008:36) in stating that both the theatre company collective and audience may have the ability to produce a dramaturgy “through a dialogue between the play and a particular community of people in a particular time and place.” This further touches on the notions of the emancipation of spectator⁹, which Susan Bennett insisted was the “ultimate goal of reception theory” (cited in Ilgenfritz, 2014:223). This liberation of the audience is an emancipation I am striving towards for the child audience, by opening up spaces for dialogue to occur between the child and the performance. This involvement in the dramaturgical process might allow for the emancipation of the ‘absent child’, allowing the child to become an active participant. Karian Schuitema (2012:69), in her reflections on engaging children in a globalised society through intercultural performances for young audiences, echoes this sentiment:

placing the child at the centre of the theatrical experience and, importantly, the creative process preceding the production can engage young spectators at both global and local levels and at the same time allow them to become active participants in a global cultural exchange.

My second understanding of the definition of the role of the dramaturg is that the dramaturg is responsible for the structuring of the time and shape of the text/performance, deciding which dramatic structure is best used to underpin the conceptual ideas. As most of the TEY I have seen has not been created from a script, but rather through a devised process, it has been productive to read literature regarding devised theatre and collective dramaturgies. There are interesting ideas surrounding new forms of dramaturgy that may exist in this context, as the dramaturgical possibilities begin to expand with the introduction

⁹ First labelled by Jacques Rancière in Rancière, J. 2011. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London: Verso.

of new theatrical forms. Turner and Behrndt (2008:171) note that, “If we could draw a map of a typical devising process, it might lead to a labyrinthine journey of blind alleys, dead ends, associative leaps, mysterious paths and links between passages”. Chemers (2010:134) also refers to Turner and Behrndt’s ideas regarding devised theatre to draw his conclusions that, “in a devised piece, the dramaturgy itself is the frame, and the script is a consequence of it”. This approach to devised dramaturgy, unhindered by the constraints of the script, opens up the space to place the younger child at the centre of the process, whereby the child is responsible for producing their own spontaneous creative self-expressions as the dramaturgical framework. I am specifically interested by Turner and Behrndt’s (2008:166) depiction of the production dramaturg as having the awareness “of the inner logic of the performance” and thus having the ability to take stock of whether the production then follows its own logic. When this comes to the child, how can they be held accountable for the overarching logic of the production, translating their own ideas into practice and thus shaping the performance?

And finally, the third aspect, as originating with Brecht, is the function of the dramaturg as “the director’s most important theoretical collaborator” (Schechter, 1997:21 cited in Romanska, 2014:2), with the dramaturg shouldering the responsibility of being “a director’s most intimate professional confidant, a sounding board for ideas, even an aesthetic conscience” (Chemers, 2010:152). The purpose of developing this trusting working relationship is to establish open dialogue that will provide challenging engagement and further questioning of the choices made by the director. With freelance dramaturgs there is even more focus placed on the importance of the relationship, as these collaborations are often chosen and therefore more thought has to be given to “how you broker relationships and why you’re there as a dramaturg” (Trencsényi & Cochrane, 2014:118). However it is

when Turner and Behrndt (2008:163) refer to the best director-dramaturg relationships as having a “strong artistic and personal investment”, that I wonder how this may be achieved with the child dramaturg? How can the child be made to have a personal investment in the project and how can the child’s involvement in the project not be through forced participation in the research? While young children are known for their candid approach to subjects, and inability to filter their natural responses, the function of them providing a sounding-board may prove most stimulating. Although how exactly can the child act as advisor and facilitator in further “enhance[ing] and deepen[ing] the conceptual and practical approach” (Turner & Behrndt, 2008:167) of the performance? In answering the above, once again, careful consideration will have to be given as to how to alleviate the potential power dynamics that may exist between the child dramaturg and the adult director, focusing particularly on the adult’s effect on the child’s authentic artistic expression.

There seems to be a constant and consistent tension throughout all of the literature of trying to define the term dramaturgy while acknowledging its indefinability. And at the same time there seems to be an attempt, within this tension, to expand the terms ‘dramaturg’ and ‘dramaturgy’ in order to facilitate the reflections and discussions surrounding the notion of ‘new dramaturgy’ in a current theatre landscape. There are indeed already numerous different existing dramaturgical frameworks that have been established for works for infants, early years, young audiences and adolescents. My research question suggests that there may be other dramaturgical possibilities present, which may have gone unrecognised due to the absence of the child in the theatre-making process and/or because of the inability of the professionally trained adult dramaturg to wholly understand its audience. This recognition of the self-imposed limitations set by

professional practitioners due to their technical training, has lead me to investigate further into the area of Outsider Art.

c. **Outsider Art**

My intention with introducing this topic into my research is to try and create an integrative comparison with which to explore the potential of the child as dramaturg alongside other contemporary artistic processes that situate the child at the centre of the art being produced.

In 1972, British writer Roger Cardinal was the first person to coin the phrase 'Outsider Art', although this was an English translation of the French term *Art Brut*, named by French painter Jean Dubuffet in the mid-1940s (Rhodes, 2000:4). *Art Brut* was never an organised and coordinated art movement, but rather found fruition in a search by modernist painters such as Pablo Picasso and Paul Klee for "new forms of art that offered an alternative to what they perceived as the dried-up academicism of the western tradition" (Rhodes, 2000:8). The term covers a broad spectrum of artists fundamentally understood or seen to be "different to their audience, often thought of as being dysfunctional in respect of the parameters for normality set by the dominant culture" (Rhodes, 2000:7). Of course there can be much debate today about what qualifies as 'dysfunctional', but the early definitions of Outsider Art placed psychiatric patients, self-taught visionaries and mediums at the centre of the movement. The movement also comprised of criminality, mental disability, cultural identity and religious beliefs that were labelled as being significantly different. It also included art made by children, as their work was regarded "as an innocent form of expression, where original, authentic forces of creation were at work" (Peiry, 2001:14). The established and trained visual modernist artists were drawn to these outsider

artists or 'primitive' work as they "seemed to be spontaneous expressive outpourings from the well-springs of creativity, unmuddied by artistic training or received knowledge" (Rhodes, 2000:8). And the child can be viewed as "the primitive par excellence in all evolutionist models of cultural development; the younger the child, the further he or she lies outside the complex social structures that govern the lives of most adults" (Rhodes, 2000:26). Bestowing "authentic esthetic status" (Peiry, 2001:14) to these 'primitive' marginal creations was a provocative way to present a radically new worth in the art and culture scene. *Art Brut* inspired the mid-twentieth century art practices "to see authenticity in what was perceived as 'primitive' rather than cultured, and in the amateur's supposed unselfconsciousness and lack of concern with professionalised art practice, as opposed to the learned perception of the trained artist" (Weiner & Peetz, 2017:6). Thus the need arose for highly technically trained artists to try and achieve the same 'naïve', authentic simplicity akin to that of a child. This required a vast amount of skill to allow the freedom of expression and spontaneous artistry to happen – dismantling years of technical training that has developed clear ways of representing the world on two dimensional planes. It is out of a similar impetus that I believe I'm approaching this research question. By turning to children as the source of the dramaturgy, I'm hoping preconceived theatrical cultured notions of TEY theatre forms may be dismantled in lieu of finding dramaturgical forms that can aptly articulate and represent the complex, self-contained and fleeting moments of childhood experiences from the child's perspective.

As I mentioned in the beginning of my rationale, there are already new and exciting forms of dance, art and social media being produced that are directly inspired by the internal worlds of children. *HiHo Kids*, for example, is a YouTube channel dedicated to showing the way children express themselves and their reactions to new experiences. A

wonderful series of the channel is called ‘Kids Describe’¹⁰, whereby children describe various predetermined themes in their own imaginative and creative ways, while professional illustrator Koji Minami depicts the children’s spoken worlds in visual representations.

Another artistically creative interpretation of children’s imaginations exists with the South Florida-based company, Budsies. First launched in August 2013, this company brings children’s drawings to life by sewing custom made stuffed animals as depicted in the actual drawings submitted by children.



Budsies [2018, May 11].

In 2015, American choreographer, Alexandra Beller, developed *Milkdreams*, a dance performance for adults using the everyday movements of babies and children to “access a physicality that relents to the imbalance of not knowing” (Alexandra Beller/Dances, 2016). Beller’s 14 month old son and 5 year old daughter were brought into rehearsals and the dancers copied their natural movements and then incorporated these into the final choreography of the professional dance show. The intention of the piece was not to represent children and toddlers on stage but rather to allow the process to “sift the habits and presentations of the trained dancer to recover a physicality that bypasses intellectual

¹⁰ YouTube video playlist, added by HiHo Kids. 2017. *Kids Describe/ Hiho Kids*. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0_T-Sb-Loc&list=PL2etPlnTb9sXzqjhznFk1UT2M20kQJdp [2018, May 5].

and neurological patterning; a physicality motivated entirely by sensation, desire, joy, curiosity, and, ultimately, love” (Alexandra Beller/Dances, 2016).

I am very inspired by these contemporary *ekphrastic*¹¹ forms using the imagination and everyday happenings of children to produce and curate new artistic products. Unlike in the movement of Outsider Art, the children in the above scenarios are not responsible for producing the final product to be viewed and interpreted. Rather, the final product is being curated, translated and produced by a trained professional, whether they are a choreographer, illustrator or seamstress. I am proposing a similar scenario in which the child, as dramaturg, works alongside a professionally trained theatre director, in order to produce a final TEY performance.

d. Theatre for Young Audiences

While TYA and TEY is relatively new within the historical context of theatre genres, there is a particularly developed scene within Italy, Germany, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom and the United States and the majority of the literature I read makes reference to these particular contexts. TYA is the blanket term that covers the array of different types of theatre sub-genres that exist for ‘non-adult’ audiences such as: Theatre for Babies¹², Theatre for Early Years, Theatre for Adolescents and Theatre in Education. Jeanne Klein, a researcher in TYA and reception studies, reflects on the creation of this classification structure, stating: “Since the children's theatre movement began, producers have sought to create artistic theatre experiences that best correspond to the adult-constructed aesthetic

¹¹ Derived from the noun ekphrasis; a new form of art, usually literary, which is created through a process of being inspired or stimulated by another work of art (Welsh, 2007).

¹² Theatre for Babies is categorised as performances aimed at infants aged 0 - 24 months. While TEY (especially TEY Festivals) can encompass Theatre for Babies within its umbrella term, it is predominantly targeted at children between the ages of 2 - 7 years of age.

"needs" of young audiences by categorizing common differences according to age groups" (Klein, 2005:40). While each country does vary slightly between defining exact ages of each category, and within the labelling of each category, there seems to be a general consensus and close alignment related to the various stages as outlined by "the Piagetian division of cognitive development in childhood" (Maguire, 2012:13). For example, TEY targets audiences between the ages of 2 - 5/6 years, as children between these ages are undergoing what Piaget defined as the preoperational stage (Berk, 1997:225). The reason behind this, as stated above by Klein, points to the belief that children of different ages, at varying levels of cognitive development, receive and interpret theatre differently, and therefore the dramaturgy of each age category should be treated accordingly to respond to the cognitive abilities of the children in the audience.

TYA is a sector of the arts whose wider public perception has often been associated with sub-standard and low quality reputation. This is a point that Matthew Reason, a researcher specialising in TYA reception studies, discusses at length in his chapter 'Quality in Theatre for Children', and he speculates that it may be a result of the fact that the work: "often straddles the worlds of subsidised, commercial and community theatre, often serving competing purposes of entertainment and education, often slipping between competing criteria of quality and utility" (2010:33). Nevertheless as audiences are becoming more attuned to the possibilities of high quality professional early years performances, so too are a multitude of varying forms within TYA developing such as: opera, immersive performances, multi-sensory performances and New Circus (Hardie, 2018, personal communication, 11 November). Alongside the use of more integrated technology in the form of virtual reality and 3D imaging, there is also a growing international trend with some of "the most cutting edge theatre companies, notably in Belgium, Netherlands and

Germany, experimenting with child actors who are used as naturally as possible, but in ways that are often highly controversial and experimental” (Hardie 2018, personal communication, 11 November). This being said, for the purposes of my own research, I will be focusing my literature review on professionally devised TYA that is being produced and performed by professionally trained adult theatre makers.

Most of the current literature surrounding TYA, as with Klein and Reason’s research, is focused towards understanding and analysing how children perceive and experience theatre and the importance and value of having children engage in TYA, rather than analysing and critiquing the theatre productions themselves. Researchers have employed a multitude of performance study theories such as semiotics, aesthetic distance and phenomenology (Maguire, 2012:143), alongside social science techniques of conducting interviews, in order to develop methodological frameworks for analysing the questions, responses, photographs, video footage and drawings of both individuals and groups. However, does this mean that the child is being placed at the centre of the understanding of experience or rather, as Klein suggests, do we “end up with an accumulated assortment of children’s responses to theatre productions that keep traditional dramatic theories and beliefs about children’s competences intact whilst having few consequential effects upon subsequent artistic and educational practises for future productions” (2012:143).

Klein goes on to suggest that “TYA artists around the world often create theatre from their speculations or implicit theories about childhood based in part on children’s observable behaviours enacted during performances” (2012:143). But these are merely speculations as translated by an adult lens of understanding and interpretation; they do not provide accurate insight into the way the child’s experiences and aesthetic sensibilities can be central to the theatrical experience. The following reflection, as provided by Reason

(2012:25), I believe speaks strongly to the research I'm hoping to undertake in positioning the child as dramaturg:

The impossibility of theatre for children asks us to explore how childhood itself is an adult construct that is constituted in part through art, literature and theatre. The impossibility of theatre for children requires us to acknowledge the unequal power relationship between adult and child, with children in our society largely constructed as powerless and vulnerable, in need of protection and needing to be spoken for. This speaking for children takes place in theatre for children, in literature for children and in other cultural products produced by adults for children.

Emerging out of this question relating to the unequal power dynamics inherent in theatre for children, are small glimpses in the literature that allow for reflection on the dramaturgical process of some artists/companies attempting to contest this inequality. Oily Cart is one such UK-based theatre company that expands more on their approach to placing children at the centre of their process. Director, writer and founder, Tim Webb, gives an in-depth insight into the way in which a child engages in his/her world, and how this engagement directly defines the mode, and in turn the dramaturgical forms, in which the performance is created to speak to that specific audience: "our shows used themes, language and characters accessible to the very young and employed a wide and regularly changing variety of theatrical languages, including strong visuals and live music" (Webb, 2012:94). This type of literature describing the actual process of devising TEY seems to be rare, and mainly to be found in dissertations that specifically use artistic directors' processes for devising theatre for young and early years audiences, as case studies. While the literature may be limited, it is indeed still more researched and documented than the approaches and practices of TEY and TYA within South Africa.

The knowledge I have accumulated surrounding South African TYA predominantly rests in the productions I have seen in and around Cape Town within the last five years, and are by no means extensive or exhaustive. This is why I believed it was necessary to interview current theatre practitioners working in and developing these fields in South Africa who have been instrumental in developing and advocating for TEY in South Africa. The following chapter will attempt to contextualise the current developing TYA scene in South Africa over the last five years.

Chapter 3. Contextualising TEY within South Africa

As we gradually move away from Western notions of humanity and dignity that are predicated on the individual as the most viable platform for defining children and youth and embrace one that promotes social relations and obligations often mobilised in many African contexts, we are becoming cognisant of the limited ways in which scholars record children's and youth's own perceptions and practices of self-definition.

(Ntarangwi & Massart 2015:3)

Within the last five years there has without a doubt been a surge in the creation of TEY, TYA and baby theatre in South Africa¹³. Indicators of this surge in TEY and TYA can be seen in the increase of newly devised productions in this field being produced and toured to crèches and schools, further funding resources being made available, a curated children's venue at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, the inclusion of categories that cover children's theatre in our South African Theatre Awards, and the hosting of the Cradle of Creativity

¹³ This does not negate the fact that there was already a practice of TEY and TYA present in South Africa. However, due to the scope of this dissertation and the limited research available in this field of study, it is not possible to delve further into discussing South African TEY and TYA prior to 2013.

2017, an international theatre Festival and conference for TYA held for the first time on the African continent. This driving force can be accredited to ASSITEJ SA, who have been strongly advocating, networking, upskilling and developing South African artists, by working with the vision to “improve the quality of theatre for young audiences in South Africa through international networking and exchange, in order to enrich the lives of children and young people” (ASSITEJ SA, 2013:18). In an Early Years Theatre project report, written up by ASSITEJ SA in 2013, it states: “In Europe, through the work of ASSITEJ-driven networks and projects like “Small Size Big Citizens”, theatre for the early years (0-6 years of age) has begun to flourish. The work is innovative, of high quality, and is reaching ever wider numbers of children” (2013:3). The report goes on to comment further on the disparity of TEY in South Africa, stating that:

In South Africa, there is virtually no quality theatre that reaches this age group (0-6). What there is, is largely very derivative, commercial in nature (and therefore only accessible to the already privileged), and often poorly executed [...]. This is largely because artistic and particularly theatrical knowledge is a “handcrafted” type of knowledge – concrete in form and expression that expresses itself through a unique act which cannot be exactly reproduced. As a result, theatre artists in South Africa do not experience the wealth of experience and learning that has happened in Europe (and other parts of the world) and are not inspired to shift the paradigm of what is possible in theatre for the very young. They simply replicate the commercial models of the past. (2013:3)

The above statement gives a clear and somewhat disparaging picture of what the TEY scene looked like pre-2013. Reznick supports this sentiment by making similar comments in her interview that “the canon of the work that was happening in South Africa at that time¹⁴, [was] sort of reworkings of you know *Noddy* and *Snow Queen*” (Reznick, 2018). The above

¹⁴ In reference to the year 2013, when Magnet Theatre first made work for Early Years.

statement also creates a binary between the poor quality and lack of work being created in South Africa and the more high quality produced European work. The report goes on to outline ASSITEJ SA's project objectives, making it clear that a three-year plan was to be undertaken, whereby ASSITEJ SA would engage "with some of the best international experts making theatre for young audiences and elicit their assistance, in order to be able to experiment more effectively in this field. We believe that this pilot project will inspire other artists, and will in time lead to SA artists nationally considering how best to make quality work for our very youngest children" (2013:3). Magnet Theatre was one of the theatre companies involved in the piloting of this project, which resulted in the creation of *Tree/Boom/Umthi* in 2013¹⁵, with the guidance and assistance of Roberto Frabetti from *La Baracca*, (the founder company of the European network of Art Organisations for Children and Young People). Another ASSITEJ SA initiative that functioned in achieving the project's goal was the 2010 established, *Inspiring a Generation Programme*¹⁶. This was a programme specifically developed by ASSITEJ SA "which would give South African artists access to international experiences of TYA in the hopes of inspiring them to make more and better work for children/young people" (Hardie, 2018, personal communication, 11 November). Hardie believes that the programme has been successful in so much as it "has been very influential in getting artists to take TYA more seriously" (Hardie, 2018, personal communication, 11 November). So while this may insinuate that not all of the work being made is of a high standard, the artists have more importantly shifted their perspectives and the importance they place on developing work for early year's audiences. Therefore

¹⁵ Though it is to be noted that Artistic Director, Rezek, had been involved earlier in her exposure to TEY through her involvement in performing at International Festivals for children/youth.

¹⁶ The Inspiring a Generation programme was an initiative started between ASSITEJ SA and Theatre Arts Admin Collective (TAAC) that aimed to inspire South African theatre practitioners to make innovative and contemporary theatre for young audiences in South Africa. Theatre Arts Admin Collective. *Programmes*. Available: <http://theatreartsadmincollective.weebly.com/programmes.html> [2018, May 27].

according to the approach of ASSITEJ SA, in order to inspire local artists in thinking of new ways to approach making TEY, the main method was to give them the opportunity for international exposure, with the particular focus on obtaining the international exposure coming from the leading countries in TEY and TYA such as “the Scandinavian countries, Germany, France and Italy” (Hardie, 2018, personal communication, 11 November). In this regard perhaps ASSITEJ SA’s objective to inspire artists followed a similar constructive method as the Piagetian theory of cognitive development for children. This theory reasons that a child’s learning is a constructivist approach that can only be expanded on and developed when there is a more knowledgeable person, who has already acquired the knowledge, assisting them (whether a teacher, guardian or older child). Perhaps with this approach, ASSITEJ SA were hoping that South African artists would be able to further develop their work locally, by acquiring assistance from their more knowledgeable international colleagues.

The influence of the international TYA practitioners on determining the dramaturgical decisions local practitioners are currently utilising is undeniable. Hardie’s current inclination is towards the idea that “we need more of this [international exposure and influence], working across more genres and styles of approach. [...] For example, there is no immersive work for babies presently, there is little in the way of music for babies, only one dance piece for very young children etc.”(Hardie, 2018, personal communication, 11 November). Even though South African practitioners have indeed moved forward in their global understanding of TEY, there are still dominant forms present that may be stunting the growth of the burgeoning field as a whole. Theatre companies, like Magnet Theatre, are unique, in so far as they are at the forefront of working towards expanding and diversifying their repertoire of TEY, however they have also had more exposure to and assistance from

international practitioners, such as Roberto Frabetti, Gabi dan Droste and Barbara Kölling. Does this mean that South African theatre practitioners may only develop their TEY through applying Western dramaturgies, or being inspired by South African artists and theatre companies who pull their inspiration directly from the same international resources? Hardie believes that: “as theatre makers in South Africa become more confident in making TEY they will rely less” (Hardie, 2018, personal communication, 11 November) on these international forms. My major concern with this approach sits in the issue of using these international dramaturgies, that have been tried and tested with children overseas, and placing more value on them and elevating their artistic authority and then simply superimposing them onto South African performers and expecting this to connect with South African children. What is at stake when we use the same dramaturgical models for different children in different contexts?

As I have already made clear the concept of a ‘universal’ child or ‘universal’ childhood experience does not exist. Within South Africa there are a multitude of childhood experiences being lived, defined, limited and/or guided by such circumstances as their gender, race, ethnicity, language, disability, displacement, HIV/AIDS status and socio-economic standing. Often, the African child is framed through an anthropological and sociological lens as understood and defined by the stereotypes of poverty, pain, disease, victim or perpetrator (Honwana & De Boeck, 2005). This is not to say that the South African child is entirely removed from Western influences but that most South African children have had to find a means to “create, re-invent, and domesticate global trends into local forms” (Honwana & De Boeck, 2005:1). As Ntarangwi and Massart (2015:7) state:

children and youth are in these fluid conditions of formation, being, becoming, socialisation, and education, that make them cultural subjects or even turn them into convenient cultural boards

on which global, neo-liberal and neo-colonial capitalism relations project, they can no longer be contained or understood by locally-generated sociocultural frames.

So if as South African theatre practitioners we continue to be solely inspired by European and Western TEY dramaturgical structures, that have had years of history catering for European children, what service are we ultimately providing the children in South Africa? Where are their voices and experiences considered in the practice of TEY? This is by no means stating that we should eradicate or omit Western and Eurocentric influences we have from our overseas practitioners. This would be an entirely naïve position and counterproductive recommendation. As Romanska (2014:7) argues, while “globalization can threaten local theatre ecosystems, it can also offer unprecedented opportunities for theatre to become part of global culture and political dialogue.” The below statement regarding how African children in particular are influenced by Western practices and images, perfectly addresses this question of how we could think around engaging with the South African child:

we can see youth and children not only as merely imbibing Western-derived cultural products, but rather as creating new cultural frames that may be inspired by Western sensibilities but which also reflect an ingenuity and risk-taking of their own that is unprecedented and often threatening to the status-quo. (Honwana, 2012 cited in Ntarangwi & Massart, 2015:7)

While many of the Western academics I read theorising around childhood have acknowledged the need for paying more attention “to the wider discourses of childhood, to the power relations, organizational structures and social inequalities which, in large part, shape children’s everyday lives” (Christensen & Allison, 2000:7), African scholars, such as Henderson, Honwana and Ntarangwi, have commented on the limited research being done around children on the African continent:

In relation to research in and concerning Africa, a small body of careful empirical work ... to do with the everyday life of children and youth exists. Little serious importance outside a small community of scholars seems to be given to the diversity in which children and youth live.

(Henderson, 2015:63)

There is therefore significant value to be had in further research with and concerning South African children, not just to make theatre but to understand the:

profound ways in which young people shape society through the invention of new forms of language; a plethora of creative and often critical repertoires; their contributions to economies, to popular culture; their generation of forms of mutuality and care, and of new ways of viewing the world and their circumstances. (Henderson, 2015:63)

This is why I propose that as theatre practitioners we need to develop a deeper understanding of the processes that currently govern the way in which childhood and children's realities in contemporary South Africa are formed. Not merely to re-imagine the current forms of TEY, but as a political act within and of itself to emancipate the South African child audience. In this way we may be able to "capture the dynamism that regards children and youth as producers, rather than mere consumers, of culture" (Ntarangwi & Massart, 2015:8).

In the following chapter I will analyse the interviews of the TEY theatre experts. I will also examine their placement of the Q-sort statements relative to my placement of the same statements. In this analysis I hope to garner a greater understanding of how contemporary and respected TEY theatre experts, both locally and internationally, view and approach their work towards developing theatre for early year audiences.

Chapter 4. Comparative Analysis of Interviews

I began my comparative analysis by colour coding the Q-sort statements¹⁷, in order to establish the common responses in the first three columns (placed as highest importance), the middle column and the final three columns (placed as the lowest importance). Through this colour coding, it was immediately apparent that the responses almost mirror one another, and there is most certainly a consensus amongst the interviewees about what holds more and less importance when devising TEY. Even though the exact placement of the first three columns was different, it is clear that value was placed on: the child/children being engaged in the show, the quality of the performers and the concept of the show. All three of these aspects directly speak to placing value on the child connecting with the performance. Hardie, Kölling and Reznek all strongly agreed on the immense value of the quality of the performer as “their relation to the audience is ultimately front and centre” (Hardie, 2018, personal communication, 11 November). Looking at the statements placed in the lower three columns, there was again agreement regarding: redeeming profit from ticket sales, ensuring children became future theatre audience members and working with well-known stories (again a feature to potentially increase marketability to parents and schools). These statements highlight the value placed on treating the child audience in the present moment as discerning audience members, not merely as marketable consumers and future theatre goers.

Across the interviews it was particularly interesting to note that all three experts believe in working with the child in the creative process. Hardie (2018, personal communication, 11 November) stated her concern in relation to artists “only concerned with their artistic quality without reference to their intended audiences”. Hardie continued

¹⁷ Refer to Appendix.

by acknowledging that while a child audience may seem “‘foreign’ in a sense from the adult audience” (2018, personal communication, 11 November), artists should be encouraged to better understand their intended child audience by engaging in “proper research, ideally working with a scientist (psychologist/early childhood development specialist etc.), as well as with the audience itself” (Hardie, 2018, personal communication, 11 November). Reznek (2018) echoed this sentiment by acknowledging that as an adult we do not know the child audience, “the children today have absolutely no relationship to your own childhood, and so you have to meet them. You have to know as much about them as possible”. While Hardie (2018, personal communication, 11 November) makes mention of the fact that while it is not always necessary to work with children, it is “highly desirable”, as it “encourages artists to really listen to children, it pushes the work forward, it affirms what can work and what can’t, and it provides new ideas which can be very stimulating for the creative process”. The same stands for Kölling (2018, personal communication, 19 November) who invites groups of children for the first time soon after the rehearsal process begins. However, “during the process of creating we [Helios] don’t talk a lot about the children and about our expectation how they will receive it”. For her it is of greater importance that the creative process be led by the theatre maker’s personal experiences, as the material generated on the rehearsal floor will be more profound if the artist is personally invested in it. Again, like Reznek and Hardie, Kölling refers to the fact that an adult artist can only generate material from their own experiences, for it is impossible to know how the children would feel or experience the material or theme for themselves.

While all three experts involve children in their creative theatre-making practice, the form and the frequency may vary according to time or resource factors. Sometimes the children come to the theatre, sometimes the artists visit the crèches, sometimes feedback

sessions happen weekly during the rehearsal process or only once at the end. The children participating in the feedback sessions are not individually selected but are rather chosen through a crèche that the artists have a good, long standing working relationship with. The reason that these experts believe in involving children in the creative process, is in a way closely related to developing the dramaturgy of the work. Reznik (2018) believes children define the dramaturgy of Magnet's work as they: "determine so much in how you shape that work. They determine the length of phrases because of their level of attention and boredom. They determine the degree of loudness or softness. So they determine shape of beats". Similarly Hardie reflected on the multitude of benefits to having children involved in the rehearsal period:

acknowledgement of the child's perspective, giving value to the child's voice, providing more imaginative and quirky possibilities than an adult would, understanding the limits of attention, the sense of humour, the moments of connection better; making the artists understand what modes of communication work best. (2018, personal communication, 11 November)

When speaking about the dramaturgy of Helios' work, Kölling described it as "associative and emotional dramaturgy" based on the methodological practice of Helios. Nevertheless she made a clear distinction between the dramaturgy and working with a dramaturg: "I work quite seldom with a dramaturg. It's me and the performers who create the storyline" (Kölling, 2018, personal communication, 19 November). She explained that Helios only hired the services of a dramaturg "when we work with words, stories, a theme. Or a performance, where we really have a lot of research" (Kölling, 2018, personal communication, 19 November). When further questioned around the use of the dramaturg in this classical sense she responded:

Theatre for the youngest is quite new in Germany and still a bit unknown in the way in which it works. Whenever I directed in one of the big state theatres for early years, I had to teach the dramaturgs about this audience, how they receive arts and so on. Maybe it's possible in the future, if more dramaturgs find an interest to think about this elementary art, that theatre for the youngest is, but right now they don't exist. (Kölling, 2018, personal communication, 19 November)

I find the above statement very thought-provoking, especially with regards to the notion of new dramaturgies that are emerging, and with self-proclaimed and publically recognised German dramaturgs for Early Years existing, such as Dan Droste. Nonetheless this statement does highlight the distinct division between the function of the dramaturgy and the role of the dramaturg. Thus raising the critical question, is a dramaturg required at all in the process of devising TEY?

In the following chapters I will look towards analysing my own practice to question the purpose and way in which I have worked with children to develop a theatre production, and to what extent this process may/may not have used children to fulfil the functions, or partial functions, of the dramaturg.

Chapter 5. Methodology of Practice

In his book *The Little Prince* (1945) Antoine de Saint-Exupery writes that grown ups cannot on their own understand the world from the child's point of view and therefore they need children to explain it to them.

(Christensen & Allison 2000:7)

a. Research procedures

In my research I made use of an auto-ethnographic, reflexive methodology by studying my own theatrical practice and interrogating my personal approach to making theatre for early years audiences. While reflecting on this personal practice, I focused on those aspects where the approach may be supporting the idea of the child as dramaturg, and on those aspects where it has its limitations and blind spots. This reflection on my practice made use of my personal memory archive, e-mail correspondence, as well as photographs and video footage captured during the research and rehearsal phase of creating *What goes UP...* Produced by From the Hip: Khulumakahle (FTH: K), the show was “a playful, gentle and explorative production devised to capture the imagination of young children aged 3 -7 years old. Through the art of gentle clowning and experiential children’s theatre, the show investigate[d] the physical and emotional scopes of all things Up and Down”¹⁸ . Created specifically for Deaf¹⁹ children, the show made use of South African Sign Language (SASL)²⁰. The show’s dramaturgical structure was surreal and abstract in its narrative through line, interspersed with autobiographical stories signed by the performers.

b. Ethical considerations

There are numerous ethical considerations to be taken into account when working with young children in research. One of the most prominent issues raised by social scientists is the need to address the inherent power relations that exist between adult and child. As in

¹⁸ Batzofin, J. 2017. *PennyJayne: Theatre for Children*. Available:

<http://pennyjayne.wixsite.com/portfolio/theatre-for-children#comp-ia6kyz6> [2018, September 19].

¹⁹ It is standard convention to use a capitalised "D" when referring to cultural communities that use Sign Language as their primary language, and a lowercase "d" when referring to individuals with an auditory disability.

²⁰ When invited to perform at the 2016 Cape Town Fringe Festival, *What goes UP...* added a musical soundtrack as well as an English audio track to accompany the South African Sign Language, in order to be accessible to English hearing audiences.

all research “the relations and contexts within which communication takes place fundamentally shape the nature and outcome of the research” (Christensen & Allison, 2000:6). If the power dynamics between the child and researcher are unequal or biased by the generational power dynamics, the data captured will be inaccurate. Therefore the greatest shift that is occurring in the field of research with children is in “repositioning children as the subjects, rather than objects of research” (Christensen & Allison, 2000:3).

It is important to have express permission of the parents/guardians of the participants involved. It would be equally valuable to make certain the way in which you seek the permission, both verbally and in documentation, is presented in the first language of the parent/ guardian, so that they entirely comprehend the reasons and implications of the research. At the time I was working with the children from Mary Kihn School for the Deaf (Cape Town, South Africa) in 2015, I did not have the intention to use the documented footage for academic research purposes. This raises pertinent ethical considerations about how artists initially document their work and how they may have the rights to access that work and archival footage for later academic use. I did not have the written permission of each parent/guardian for each child at the time when making my show, I merely had the agreement of the Principal at the time to work alongside the children. As my research does not name the children or make the archive publically accessible, the identities of the children remain secure, and thus I feel I am able to use the material for the purposes of this research.

At the time of working with the children, while I by no means did in-depth research about how to do research with children, I was naturally considering many of the ethical questions that are posed by those who do research with children, as can be found in *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices* (Christensen & Allison, 2000). These

questions I considered were centred around: where am I researching the child, what is my relationship status to the child and how is my physical presence affecting/altering the behaviour of the children. In my accounts to follow, of developing *What goes UP...* with children, I will reflect on the implications of these considerations.

c. Process of developing *What goes UP...*

I was first introduced to the idea of TYA and TEY in 2014, when I was selected, alongside three other South African participants, to participate in the ASSITEJ SA *Inspiring a Generation* programme. This programme included a three week exchange experience with ASSITEJ Denmark, consisting of shadowing well respected TEY/TYA Danish theatre companies²¹ the week prior to the country's biggest theatre festival for young audiences, the *April Festival*. Then we attended the reputable *April Festival*, and watched a variety of performances catering across different ages and genres. The final week was spent in an artistic exchange workshop with individual Danish artists working within the TEY/TYA sector. The experience was monumental in changing my perspective of making work for young audiences, both in terms of an aesthetic and conceptual approach. I was left questioning both the form and function of what I considered TYA to look like, as well as being highly influenced by the dramaturgical forms I witnessed.

The next phase of the *Inspiring a Generation* programme, offered a mentor to assist us in the process of creating our own work for young audiences. My mentor was Dutch/Danish theatre practitioner Jori Snell, who was to be the outside eye during the developmental phase of the new work. This was exceedingly necessary as I was performing in the work, as well as directing it, so I did not have the outside perspective that I usually do

²¹ Teatergruppen Batida, Teater Patraskat and Teater Zebu.

when directing. Snell was involved in the first two weeks, serving as this 'outside eye', providing guidance in terms of sharing what she was seeing coming out of our developed and improvised material on the rehearsal floor. Towards the end of the process, Gabi dan Droste approached me to offer her assistance, as she was interested in my approach to making theatre for Deaf children. She came on board in the final three weeks of the rehearsal phase, and would watch the Friday footage of the final week's showing and send questions and reflections in response, as feedback. We had an easy-going way of communicating over e-mail, and her feedback seemed to spark new ways of thinking and evaluating the decisions I was making on the floor. In one e-mail, early on in our correspondence, Dan Droste wrote: "I love this kind of working ... you know, in Germany we call it "Dramaturging" (2015, personal communication, 18 April). At this point I had not realised that this was the process of dramaturgy; I had simply been treating it as another 'outside eye'. Yet how was the feedback from Snell different from Dan Droste? How was Snell, understood by me, to be providing directorial feedback while Dan Droste was providing dramaturgical feedback? In retrospect, both Snell and Dan Droste were performing the same function of a dramaturg, but where Snell focused on how we performed movements, Dan Droste focused on the overall structure. This long distance working relationship with Dan Droste was a first for me, both in terms of it being a long distance creative collaboration and it being the first time I had worked with someone who identified as a dramaturg, as opposed to what I, and numerous other South African theatre practitioners, call an 'outside eye'. This was the very reason I became interested in the art of dramaturgy, as I was being posed questions in a particular manner no 'outside eye' had quite yet managed to formulate and vocalise for me. Perhaps it was the fact that previously 'outside eyes' had focused on commenting solely on the performative moments, wanting to

refine, question and/or challenge the directorial choices I had made with the actors. As was mentioned previously in my literary review around new dramaturgy, the boundaries between a dramaturg and how South African practitioners have been trained to direct through a workshop theatre methodology are difficult to concisely distinguish and delineate. In this research I will be referring to Dan Droste's dramaturgical feedback, as it is documented across our e-mail correspondence. Unfortunately I did not archive the written notes I took from Snell during the post-rehearsal session, and that is why her voice will be absent from the research. The greatest value in working with Dan Droste's archived e-mails is that it serves as a concrete counterpoint in relation to how I was working with the children to receive their feedback, and thereby aiding in ascertaining whether the children's involvement could be considered in the capacity of dramaturg and/or aiding the dramaturgy of the performance.

The development of my first production for young audiences spanned a period of ten weeks. The process can be divided up into four different stages: i) Individual research, ii) Research in the school, iii) Play sessions and iv) Rehearsal process. With an additional fifth phase v) Touring the production, used as another platform to garner feedback from the children.

i) Individual research

The individual research stage of the process took three weeks and comprised of researching academic databases for articles and information pertaining to language acquisition in early years, how the Deaf child acquires language and teaching Sign Language for early years. I had an initial meeting with Kirsty Maclons, Head of Education at SLED (Sign Language Education Development), to discuss different ideas and approaches to working with the

child. I had initial ideas of how I wanted to work with music and vibrations and raised wooden platforms, however Maclons was disapproving of this theme, stating that when Deaf children receive theatre so rarely, why focus on a theme such as music that emphasises a lack in their abilities. In her opinion, I should rather create a theme that works to their strengths and promotes the thing most lacking in their current education: the encouragement of imagination. She also provided the South African Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for both the Life Skills and SASL curriculum for Foundation Phase learners. This initial meeting was exceedingly valuable, as it made me question how a Deaf child might experience their world and how I could potentially enhance those experiences. It also was a way for me to engage with the curriculum being taught to these children, thus ensuring the themes and topics would be recognisable and familiar to them. This was also a strategy that meant that principals and teachers could approve using time to have theatre at their schools as it aligned with the mandated CAPS outline.

ii) Research in the school

The stage of conducting research in the school began with approaching Principal Jill Wilmot at Mary Kihn School for the Deaf and requesting permission to work with the Foundation Phase Deaf children, who use SASL as their primary means of communication²². I was to be present in four classes (two classes with Grade 00 – Grade 1 and two classes with Grade 2 – 3) for the first week in a purely observational capacity, watching how the children were learning, as well as allowing the children to familiarise themselves with me in their space. I did not want to enter as a complete stranger and therefore wanted to garner their trust

²² Mary Kihn School for the Deaf caters for children from Grade 00 – Grade 7. They have two separate teaching streams, one caters for SASL users and the other caters for deaf or hard of hearing children learning to communicate through hearing devices and oral training (lip reading).

before working with them creatively. I would sit at the back of the classroom, so as to be out of the sightline of the children, and took notes as to how the children concentrated and behaved in class. The first two classes I attended, I absolutely pulled the focus of the children and they would turn around often to see my reaction and thus my presence disrupted the regular way in which they behaved in class. However after the initial encounters, I quickly became a familiar face and was not given the same focus by the children. This was an instinctual choice, but in retrospect after researching observational practices in research with children, it was actually a standard working practice whereby:

observers can minimize their influence by mingling with the children in their natural habitats before the actual conduct of the study. In this way, children become accustomed to the observers' presence and therefore are less likely to 'perform' for them or alter their behaviour in any significant way. (Shaffer 1993:19 cited in Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000:16)

One of the most important observations I made in this class was how a Deaf child reacted to no longer wanting to participate in the class. They simply kept their head down at their desk when the teacher was giving instructions. When they were sitting on the mat on the floor, they would sometimes even curl into a small ball with their head curled into their lap. Unless the teacher physically corrected their position, this meant that the child had control over the visual input and stimulus they were willing or capable of receiving. This made me understand how Deaf children have the ability to manipulate their physical surrounding space by simply closing their eyes.

iii) Play sessions

The third stage of the process spanned over two weeks. During this stage I was leading my own 30 minute play sessions and having the children partake in them. I held two of these

play sessions each week. I had purchased items (soft rubber balls, feathers, balloons and colourful plastic sheeting) that I had selected based on their potential to promote 'fun' among the children. I brought these items into the classroom, without any clear intention other than to have a free-form play session led by the children. There was one play session that particularly stood out for me with the younger children in the lower grade. I brought feathers into the classroom, and for 30 minutes the children delighted in just blowing the feathers up in the air. They were entirely engaged and did not need for another object to be introduced into the free-form play session. This particular play session unintentionally, determined the theme of what the show would ultimately become as well as the working title of the play.

The second and the third stage of this process truly directed the concept and the design of the production. As the concept had been defined by things going up and coming down, I would source physical objects for our rehearsals that fed into this theme: umbrellas, kites, bubbles, balloons, a trampoline, and feathers. I also structured our rehearsals to further unpack the themes on an emotional level, exploring what would make one feel sad (down) or what would make someone feel happy (up). Then I went on to align these concepts within the CAPS outline, looking at further exploring the themes of up and down with how they related to: celebrating being different; celebrating the difference in others; similar and different; and learning to express yourself²³.

At the same time I was developing the design of the production. I had decided, based on my individual research, that more muted colours would be easier on the eye and had decided on blue, as blue relates to both the sky (up) and the ocean (down). I then had

²³ As outlined in the course material of the South African Life Skills English. Foundation Phase, Grades R-3. National Curriculum Statement (NCS): Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). South Africa: Department of Basic Education, 2012.

an accent colour of bright red to draw in and direct the focus of the child. I knew the production would be touring to different schools, so I wanted to also create a design that would transform the everyday school space into a more magical and theatrical experience. I was also aware that the school spaces had various objects in the room that could potentially pose as distractions to the children. I wanted to create a backdrop to the action that would help to eliminate the distractions and direct the focus of the child. I also knew from my observations and play sessions with the children, that they enjoyed engaging with their environment through their tactile senses, to understand it better. Having seen the various productions in Denmark, I learnt about different ways of seating children, one of which was by providing your own seating, either in the form of raised benches or cushions. From my experience of working in South African schools, the children would usually just sit on the school hall floor, which is often a cold and hard surface. For this reason I decided on using AstroTurf as the seated area, and chose to directly connect it with the raised stage area. I was, thus, designating where the children would sit, but also inviting them to be part of the production with the performers on stage. I spent hours sourcing the AstroTurf because I needed it to feel soft to the touch and enjoyable for little hands to experience. I then paid detailed attention to choosing fabrics and creating lush textures for the stage itself, making it resemble an enormous soft mattress.

While I was using the training I had acquired as a theatre designer to create the stage area, I was heavily influenced in all my decisions by thinking of how the Deaf child would engage and experience the visual world. Because their visual surroundings hold considerable value in their everyday experiences, I placed close attention to the visual details throughout the development of the aesthetics of the production. So even though the children weren't directly asking me the questions that led me to my final design choices,

they were entirely responsible for shaping the aesthetic choices because I was paying attention to how they were engaging with their environment. If I were not creating specifically with the Foundation Phase Deaf learners in the forefront of the process, I would not have developed *What goes UP...* in the way that I did.

iv) Rehearsal process

After the play sessions I moved into the fourth phase of this process, the four week rehearsal stage. Working alongside actor, Matthew Patrick Baldwin, we worked for two weeks with the same materials I had presented to the children in the play-based sessions. We developed our own theatrical vocabulary around the same objects as well as objects that we felt incorporated the aforementioned theme chosen. It was in these two weeks, that Snell would be present for a few sessions to provide an 'outside eye' and give her feedback. After these two weeks of our own exploration with the objects and themes, we would take portions of this developed material back to the same children and gauge their feedback to the material. We presented this new developed material to the children at Mary Kihn School for the Deaf²⁴. The feedback session with the children lasted roughly 40 minutes and was a mixture of presenting our ideas discovered on the rehearsal floor and improvising further from suggestions of the children. This created a constant feedback loop for the final two weeks of the rehearsal process; taking the work to the children, having them respond to it, allowing it to create moments of further improvisation, which then led to new or more in-depth discoveries on the rehearsal floor. It was unfortunately in these final two weeks of the rehearsal stage that Baldwin had to resign due to medical related issues, and was to be replaced by actress Iman Isaacs.

²⁴ Their class teacher was present during all of the feedback sessions.

Three feedback sessions were held, which were all filmed by camera operator, Jesse Stevenson, on the 21st, 23rd and 28th April 2015. In the first feedback session on the 21st April, as I could not transport the set with me to the school, I simply used a children's plastic school table and placed it upright on its side to provide a place for me to hide behind, and also a space to keep the props and items as surprises (the same way we would present them in the performance from behind the raised stage area.) I performed in their classroom, so it was a familiar space filled with many pictures and teaching materials on the walls. We had moved tables and chairs and I was performing on the classroom mat that the children were used to sitting on for some of their classroom activities. When I performed²⁵, I did so in front of them and asked them to sit in a semi-circle in front of the plastic upright table. At this point I had two costume pieces, in the form of a tutu styled skirt and a furry blue aviator styled hat, other than this I was wearing a black top and pants. In the second session, we had been moved to the small-sized school hall. The walls were brown and bare and the flooring was vinyl. For this session we used a wooden table to hide behind, but we also brought a single piece of AstroTurf for the children to sit on while watching. In this session both performers had their blue costume tops, and final costume hats but were wearing black pants. The final session held the following week, was once again presented in the school hall, with the same wooden table but with the school's gym mats used for the seating area. Both Isaacs and I were wearing our final full costumes.

We would always present the material to the same core group of nine children from the same class. However the size of the group would shift slightly depending on absenteeism or if the teachers brought additional children from another class. On average the feedback group was relatively small, and there were three children in particular that

²⁵ Matthew Patrick Baldwin was absent from this session as he was ill.

tended to dominate with their comments and opinions. They were comfortable in sharing what they saw, or informing us what we should be doing with the objects. Often these more dominant children had opposing opinions to one another. The more reserved children however were quietly observing the actions in front of them and making more subtle facial or body responses. Sometimes when the children started to lose focus they would look at the camera operator or start to talk with their teacher.

As was already discussed in my interviews with Hardie, Kölling and Reznek, these feedback sessions are already implemented by theatre makers developing methodologies of participatory response in postdramatic theatre. However, it was Kristin Leahey (2014:322) who would locate this method within the TYA sector, coining the process as the “youth respondent method.” This method comprises of artists and theatre practitioners who “involve children and/or young adults through planned theatre activities or discussions, with the objective of answering specific questions about the development of the work and collect feedback to improve the text or further the production” (Leahey, 2014:322). However, in her proposed method there is a dramaturg present as a mediator to the process, and the youth are merely seen as collaborators to the creative process. In the same way as Bennett spoke to the emancipation of her audience through participation, the youth respondent method equally:

complicates a traditional power dynamic in which the audience strictly receives the theatrical event as spectators; instead they contribute to the creation process. As a result of this method, the audience becomes a stronger voice within the production. Youth serve as active producers, who no longer are the next generation of artists and future spectators but the “it” generation of artists and audience. (Leahey, 2014:324)

While my own process, like Reznek's, only involved watching the children in a group to gauge their immediate feedback, Kölling's approach involves observation in addition to inviting the children to play with the chosen performance material. She would also ask the children questions in response to what they saw, however, she comments that "when they are 2 or 3 they don't answer questions, they receive art on another level, more emotionally" (Kölling, 2018, personal communication, 19 November). I am also left to consider why the youth respondent method predominantly happens with a group as opposed to an individual child. Would a different response be elicited if the child were to engage with the work individually as opposed to being surrounded by their peers? And would this be a more or less effective method to capture a child's response? Working with a group is indeed easier in terms of what artists have access to when approaching crèches. However, Reznek (2018) comments further, that outside of mere logistics, "the work is created for an audience that is a collective, and I think that ... you skew your results if you direct it all to one child". So with younger children, is it enough to consider the child a dramaturg to the process through merely ascertaining and gauging their responses as part of a collective through observation alone? And what different methods of capturing young children's responses may exist, if any, outside of merely observing them react?

v) Touring the production

The fifth and final stage of touring the production may be considered contentious as it lies outside of the designated rehearsal and development process. However there is a consensus in the interviews I held regarding the touring being a continuation of the development process. Both Reznek and Kölling referred to this phase of touring the production as being an active process of continued editing on the production, based on the

audiences' responses. *What goes UP...* toured for a month, in 2015, through the Western Cape, Free State and Kwa-Zulu Natal region. We presented predominantly to Deaf schools using SASL as their primary mode of communication, as well as presenting to orphanages that comprised of hearing and exceedingly vulnerable children. Both teachers and children at the Deaf schools, loved the show and responded with excitement, awe and wonder. On the other hand, the guardians and children at the orphanages were less than enthusiastic about the production, and in fact were disappointed by it. This detail is noteworthy as it may go some way towards showing that there are indeed certain elements that can be dramaturgically constructed specifically catering for the experience of particular children. In this case, I had made a show specifically for Deaf children, because I had worked with Deaf children.

While we accrued many feedback responses in the forms of reactions during the show and drawings from the children showing what their 'favourite part of the show was' – this part of the development process indeed felt like we were merely gauging the children's implicit responses as opposed to them being an integral part of the development of the show.

Chapter 6. Research Results

a. Analysis of children's response

Looking over captured film footage from the very first feedback session with the children, when I presented some of the developed rehearsal material to the group, there were interesting observations I noted about how the children responded and reacted, as well as how I presented the material to the children. In one particular instance, while behind the plastic table, I placed a blue furry aviator styled hat on my head and then revealed the hat

from behind the table, while flapping the two large earflaps on either side. The children up until this moment had never seen this hat before. On the rehearsal floor we had played with the idea of this hat being bird-like with its long side flaps, or dog-like because of its shaggy fur like material. When I asked the children “What is this?” they had varying yet similar responses: “it’s swimming”, “it’s a fish”, “it’s a dolphin” and “it’s a whale”. I then interjected, asking them “What about a bird? What about a dog?” One girl was adamant that it was a fish and her signs became larger in communicating this to me, as if I had overlooked her. However, I noticed that I continued to guide the children and started to play a dog, and asked the children to pet the furry hat as if I were a dog. They happily did so and enjoyed this interaction. However, it was overtly evident that I was projecting what I wanted the children to see and did not stop to reflect how perhaps the children, whilst clearly seeing the same animalistic associations, were identifying more with the blue colour of the hat and animals that are blue or in water, as opposed to the texture of the material or the movement of the hat that I had been inspired by. What would have happened if I had listened more carefully in these moments? If I had stopped projecting the discoveries I had made and enjoyed on the rehearsal floor? In the final version of the production, the hat was used in a scene to represent a comical bird type creature, and the children particularly loved this scene. However, I had not been honest to what the children saw in this moment. This points to the fact that it is entirely feasible for an artist to make strong theatrical choices for young audiences by projecting their own desires as an adult theatre practitioner, without having a child in the development of the production or even consulting with them. So then the question remains as to why should we involve the child in the theatre-making process? And how can the artist value the child’s views without projecting their own theatrical training and desires?

To speak to this point of making TEY from the creative desires and perspectives of the adult practitioner, I would like to focus on an anecdote regarding one particular prop I was artistically invested in. An old fashioned brown school suitcase with little puppet legs I had fashioned out of cloth with little shoes on²⁶. I presented this to the children at the first feedback session, and they looked at me perplexed. They signed to each other: “what is that?” and one child responded with: “I don’t know”²⁷. I then placed two large white buttons on the body of the suitcase to represent its eyes. I then drew a face on the suitcase with chalk, thinking this would clarify the object and its anthropomorphism. They understood that I was drawing a nose and a mouth, however this object’s overall image was still unsuccessful with the children, as they still did not read it as a person (perhaps because the material for the legs was different from the body of the suitcase, so they thought a doll was trapped in the suitcase?). However in the next instance I showed them an object and asked: “what is this?” They all responded, “It’s a button!”. I then placed the two same buttons on the same blue hat and without any hesitation and without prompting, from myself, the children responded “they are eyes!”. This was also interesting considering, from the above example, how quickly the children understood the white buttons to be eyes and how they created a living creature from an inanimate object. Yet with this suitcase prop, the children simply did not understand what it was meant to be. I then tried animating the suitcase in different ways and drawing different expressions on it; I was determined to make it translate. I even brought it back to the second feedback session. I tried placing the blue hat on it and Isaacs used her hands at either end as if they were the suitcase’s hands. A girl did wave back the moment hands were established, but the interest did not remain after

²⁶ In 2013, I was hired as a stage and costume designer for the professional adult theatre show, *Crazy in Love*, produced by the Conspiracy of Clowns. I had fashioned similar suitcase puppets that garnered much praise for their design in the production.

²⁷ Quotes taken from captured footage as filmed on 21 April 2015.

that fleeting encounter. I even brought a ball attached to a stick, which I manipulated to look like the suitcase was throwing and catching a ball. At this point the children instructed me to go and fetch a toy rabbit. I then manipulated the ball to be thrown between the soft toy rabbit and the suitcase man, but they were only focused on the rabbit. In all my desperate attempts, the children never connected or related to the object (even after they had a better understanding of how to read it as a humanoid image), and ultimately I removed it from the show.

This moment was an interesting point in the process whereby I recalled the internal battle I faced between what I understood to be a strong inventive application of theatrical design and the complete disinterest the children were expressing. What was the divide in opinion? Should it have mattered, should I have ultimately placed the prop in my show despite their response as I did with the blue hat? If I had worked with a different group of children, might the object have survived and found a place in the show? Looking back at the development of the production and thinking of the dramaturgy of the work, the brown suitcase did not ultimately fit into the theme or aesthetic of the world, as it was the only brown object amongst the muted blues and reds. It was also an object that did not speak back to the theme of up and down. I had chosen the brown suitcase, as this was a suitcase that reminded me of my own childhood and my early experiences of school. But it was not an object that was relatable to this group of children, perhaps because it was not a part of their childhood experience. Although the children could not articulate what exactly about the brown suitcase creature they did not enjoy, it was clear that it did not fit into the world of the play for them.

In opposition to my stubborn perseverance with including certain objects, which did not make it into the final performance, there were entirely unplanned, spontaneous

moments that would later be placed into the performance. These moments garnered such significance simply because of how positively the children reacted to them. An example of one such moment happened during the first feedback session. Seated behind the plastic table, I revealed a red ball by throwing it in the air and then catching it. Then in quick succession once I had caught the ball from behind the table, I presented a second ball, with one ball in each hand, arms outstretched on either side of the table. The children began to make strong verbal responses of delight; one boy even began to clap. As I threw the balls in the air, the same boy opened his palms together face up, as if to ask for me to pass the ball to him. Two other girls were mimicking my movement of throwing the ball up and catching it. This moment had not been planned, but because it garnered such a viscerally strong response from the children, I integrated it into the performance.

Looking back at all the feedback session footage, an interesting observation I noted was how the children engaged in the spaces. In the classroom that was familiar to them, even though I asked the children to sit, they would inevitably tend to creep closer towards me when they were excited by particular objects or activities I was doing. I often had to pause and ask them to sit down again or I asked them to move backwards to allow for more space between the performance area and them. But why was I doing this? Was it because of safety reasons, or was it because of my knowledge of theatre proxemics, or was it because I have come to understand that children must sit still when you want to show them something? Whatever my subconscious reasoning was for doing this, it was apparent that I was controlling the behaviour of the children in the space. As is echoed in Baxter's (2005:79) writing:

adults shape children's experiences with their environment through restricting, encouraging, allowing, and disallowing certain experiences in particular places. Children enter into a world

where spaces are named, are filled with meaning, and are considered appropriate or inappropriate for certain activities and behaviours.

I have seen many children's shows where teachers, parents or guardians tell their children to calm down, sit down or to keep quiet. But why make theatre for children where we are constraining the child, where we are asking them to fight against their instincts. Is this part of their training and development to become future theatre goers, by teaching them how adult audiences behave?

In the second and third feedback sessions with the children, they were placed in their small school hall. Perhaps this space had different rules of how to behave in it and perhaps it was a slightly more formal place than their colourful and stimulating classroom? But there was also the addition of the AstroTurf/gym mats, visually demarcating a specified seating area. I gave the same instruction to take a seat once the children entered the space. All the children took a seat in the demarcated seating area. In the second session, despite the moments of heightened engagement, the children never left the AstroTurf. Eventually as the session progressed, they all began to navigate their way to the very front edge of the AstroTurf, making certain they were at the very closest possible point they could be to the performance area, but they never left that area. In the third feedback session, at the very beginning of the session, there were bubbles being produced from behind the table in a constant upwards stream. Without a second's hesitation three children bolted forward to catch the bubbles. I am not certain why in this particular instance the boundaries of the demarcated area were no longer of consequence, but it was clear that the image of the bubbles had presented itself as an invitation for the children to enter the performance space. According to Baxter (2005:60): "the use of space is heavily influenced by cultural factors, and as children's relationships with their environment are regulated as an integral

part of their social development, it should be expected that children would not use space in a random fashion". In this regard the way in which children engage with a space is not a random act, but rather a learned form of socialisation. And while a school is heavily prescribed with such regulated behaviours, it is understood that traditional theatre spaces are equally culturally coded in the ways of regulating the behaviours of the audience.

In Shifra Schonmann's chapter, *Theatre for young people as a school event: Advantages and disadvantages of children attending a play en masse*, she reflects on such aspects of how a child may be potentially limited by the theatrical space: "usually the seats are fixed, the stage is permanently raised, and the child faces a space that he cannot control and sometimes cannot manage at all" (Schonmann, 2006:147). With the consideration that the "architectural character of the theatrical venue and its interior design are central in determining the quality of the theatrical experience" (Schonmann, 2006:147), why is this matter not given more attention when devising TEY? With the postdramatic turn in theatre during the 1990s, focusing specifically on addressing and questioning the relationship between the performance and the audience, how and why has the dramaturgy of space in TEY, with particular focus on how it addresses the relationship between the performance and its child audience, not been interrogated in the same manner? In Schonmann's (2006:147) writing regarding theatre for children, she is decisive that "the relationship between the audience and the stage is vital, and the children play a crucial role in determining the ultimate success of the play." This is also clearly evident in Reznik's view on developing work for young children, when she placed the Q-sort statement referring to 'quality of the performers' as her most important aspect when developing work for early years. Reznik emphasises how important the quality of the performers are, to her practice,

in terms of their ability to connect with the children, and in turn “create spaces where a meeting” (Reznek, 2018) between performers and the children can take place.

Some theatre for young audiences has dramaturgically addressed this very concern by allowing and permitting the children (and their guardians) to move freely in the theatre space while they perform. Such a performance was made by Norwegian Theatre Company, Teater Fot, titled *Sparrow*. The cast informed the children and adults at the beginning of the show, before entering the theatre space, that the children are welcome to move freely in the theatre. The performance itself was presented in a proscenium arch fashion, with a demarcated zone for the audience. There was a clear structure and narrative to the story being told, however it had the flexibility to accommodate the children if they wanted to move around on stage. The performance’s structure would not alter, as it might do in an improvisation, but it rather allowed the space to acknowledge the presence of the children while moving forward with the narrative. Most of the children were content to stay with their guardians, however there were a few curious and explorative children, who excitedly went on to stage to take the eggs or play with the nest material. This in itself became its own performance, as the adult audience members tended to then become more drawn into the reactions and ‘performance’ of the child.

Another dramaturgical choice in structuring the production to allow for children’s inquisitive nature can be seen in Magnet Theatre’s early years production *KNOCK!* The majority of the performance is played to the children, who remain seated. The performers engage with and explore the elements of different pieces of wood. Then towards the end of the production the performers invite the children to come and play on the stage and offer the children two small blocks of wood. The children are given time to play on stage with the wooden sticks, and this is understood to still be part of the performance. Once the allotted

time has passed, the performers give a cue to ask the children to assist with packing away the objects and then ask them to take up their seats once again. The performers close off with a final musical phrase before bowing and concluding the performance.

Both of these forms are dramaturgical choices that have been steered by the inherent inclination of some children to move around and to explore the environment and objects that intrigue them. From the above examples I think it becomes evident that closely analysing how children engage (both passively and actively) in the performance space, suggests different dramaturgical possibilities for presenting the TEY performance space and how children are permitted to engage in/with it.

Over the three feedback sessions of developing *What goes UP...* with the children, there was a clear trajectory in terms of how the performance material was progressing. The first session, merely had the proposed objects and props to be used in the production; the second placed those objects/props into mini play-out scenarios; while the final session presented more structured and finalised scenes. However, what I noticed is that in all three of the sessions, I never shared or presented any of the autobiographical signed stories I had developed for the production. Only noticing this decision now in revisiting the footage, leads me to further question whether I was really seeking the guidance of the children by working alongside the children or whether I was seeking their approval to justify the choices I was making. This leads me to reflect on the process in which I worked with Dan Droste as a professional dramaturg and the potential differences and similarities to how I worked with the children.

b. Children versus dramaturg

Over the span of three weeks, every Friday I would film the footage of the whole performance in progress and upload it via WeTransfer and send it to Dan Droste. The feedback between myself and Dan Droste, albeit in different countries and across e-mail correspondence, involved a personal one-on-one communication that happened after she had watched the filmed material of the developing performance in the rehearsal space and had been given time for reflection. While Dan Droste was watching the film footage of the developing show, she was not provided with the filmed feedback sessions with the children. Without watching the children's responses and also admitting to never having worked with Deaf children before, Dan Droste was solely basing her feedback on her own theatrical, choreographic and dramaturgical expertise. She highlighted aspects of the work that she found to be successful, and posed questions about areas that she thought needed more clarity and intention in their play and purpose. However it was only in her final feedback notes, when the performance had begun touring, that she requested: "Please write to me which kind of reactions you get from the children. I like to have a look at the performance having the children's reactions in my mind" (Dan Droste, 2015, personal communication, 8 May). The response of the children was obviously an essential factor for her to obtain a more rounded understanding as to how the work was being received by the audience it was intended for.

It is easy to note the immediate differences between the children and Dan Droste when providing feedback. The first noticeable difference is that although the children were responding individually, they were doing so within a collective. While this did not completely remove the children's capacity to individually respond, their responses were most certainly influenced by their peers. The other noticeable difference is the form in

which I presented the information to them. With Dan Droste, I provided all the elements that were to be present in the performance including the stage design (in its varying development stages.) Though it is to be noted that sometimes, Dan Droste would not see certain elements of the development of the ideas, like the suitcase man, as it was not successful in the children feedback session and thus did not make it into the developing scenes. When presenting the images and ideas to the children I had chosen specific scenes or ideas to present, but I never presented all of the material or design elements to them. I would also be far more inclined to guide the children in what the images were. In a lot of the footage with the children I am signing an explanation of what is happening. At moments, I am doing this as a pedagogical tool to encourage the children to sign back to me and thus promoting the development of their sign literacy. But sometimes you can see that I was worried that the image was not clear, and instead of asking the children what they saw, I indicated what it was. I did not do the same pre-emptive guiding with Dan Droste. She would watch the video I sent and then send her feedback and question things that were unclear. On the rehearsal floor, I would then try and further clarify or fix the moments that were unclear. The children were also responding in real time to the work being presented, as opposed to Dan Droste who gave her feedback after having space for reflection. Herein lies a fundamental difference in working with the dramaturg, allowing the dramaturg to have the space for reflection and analysis in order to pose questions. As the children's responses were immediate, they did not have this time for reflexivity. This is perhaps at the core of what may differentiate general feedback through implicit response versus dramaturgical assistance: allowing time for reflexivity.

It was clear when observing the children's focus and attention which moments engaged the children and which moments they were lost or disinterested in. So although

not structured in verbal/written feedback of which moments were working and which were unsuccessful, they responded in a phenomenological manner to the aspects they engaged in. Did they pose questions however? While by no means on the same theatrical analytical level as Dan Droste, there were absolutely moments of questions being posed, when their puzzled expressions and reactions communicated: “what’s that?”. They wanted to make sense of the world being presented to them, and in moments in which ideas were not communicated clearly, the child would disengage, look puzzled or even sign their confusion.

An interesting moment to compare Dan Droste’s professional dramaturgical support with the response of the children is to look back at the moment with the red balls being thrown into the air, hidden from behind a structure. As I mentioned, this moment caused a very strong and positive response from the children, however Dan Droste would state: “The play afterwards with the balls from behind is very nice but: I do not understand why you do that and it is quite short. What task has this part of your play in the whole performance? Is it an introduction?” (Dan Droste, 2015, personal communication, 18 April). The children would obviously not be able to communicate this, because they have not undergone the same theatrical training or might not even have the vocabulary to encapsulate what they are experiencing. But this is another way to differentiate the input of a professional dramaturg, the ability to articulate and identify the moments of the performance as they are feeding back into the broader structure. While I would propose that a 4 to 6 year old would not be able to reflect on the overriding structure/ narrative of the theatre performance, I most certainly do believe they have the right tools to identify moments that work and those that don’t. Although this is best ascertained in phenomenological and immediate implicit responses, it may be worthwhile to try and find out if there may be other methods of developing a way to receive their feedback after their immediate responses. This could

perhaps be in spoken/signed language or in a drawing or perhaps any other creative form of expression, but this idea of a period of feedback after the implicit response is crucial in pursuing future research in this field.

However I am left questioning again as to why it may be of such importance for a TEY performance to be entirely congruent with its audience. Every theatre maker, when making performances for adult audiences, is faced with the decision of whether they want the reception of their work to be congruent with their audience or to force their audience out of their comfort zone. In *Theatre as a medium for children and young people: images and observations*, Schonmann raises an interesting query, concerning being entirely bound to the child audience's sensibilities and ideas of 'taste':

Conclusions resulting from observing audiences comprised of same-age children could be very helpful in learning more about what is suitable for this or that age group. But here lies a serious problem. We know of many cases in which the young audience enjoys the play very much – but for the wrong reasons. [...] For example, actors who thumb their noses at their audience, so to speak, by resorting to slapstick. (2006:63)

Reznek in her interview reflected on this similar question of audience congruency, noting as an example that Italian theatre company, *Piccoli Principi*, did not pander in any way to their young audiences, to the point where there was “no attempt to make the children feel comfortable at all” (Reznek, 2018). She went on to raise the consequence of work being congruent with its young audiences, especially in South Africa:

it's quite important in Magnet's work to really make the children comfortable. I think that their experience in South Africa is one [in which], they are on the margins of delivery of everything, that it's really important that the theatrical experience doesn't put them in any uncomfortable sort of space. (Reznek, 2018)

While Hardie (2018, personal communication, 11 November) agrees to the extent that “children are naturally curious so there is no reason not to push their interest in directions that they may not yet have encountered” and believes that TEY “can and should push children out of their comfort zones”. She simultaneously acknowledges the need to be discerning about the safety of young audiences: “we need to work with children with a level of responsibility and respect which ensures that there are safety mechanisms in place for children who want or need to respond in different ways” (Hardie, 2018, personal communication, 11 November).

c. Limitations

As my research makes use of material that was documented four years ago, it is difficult to ask further questions of the children or follow a line of enquiry that may have been raised by the literature I have been engaging with. Therefore my research is limited by the existing archival footage I have and the knowledge I possessed at the time of making the production. I was also reliant on my memory of working with the children, and while relying on memory offers an avenue for a phenomenological approach to an archive, it by no means serves as an objective or reliable source.

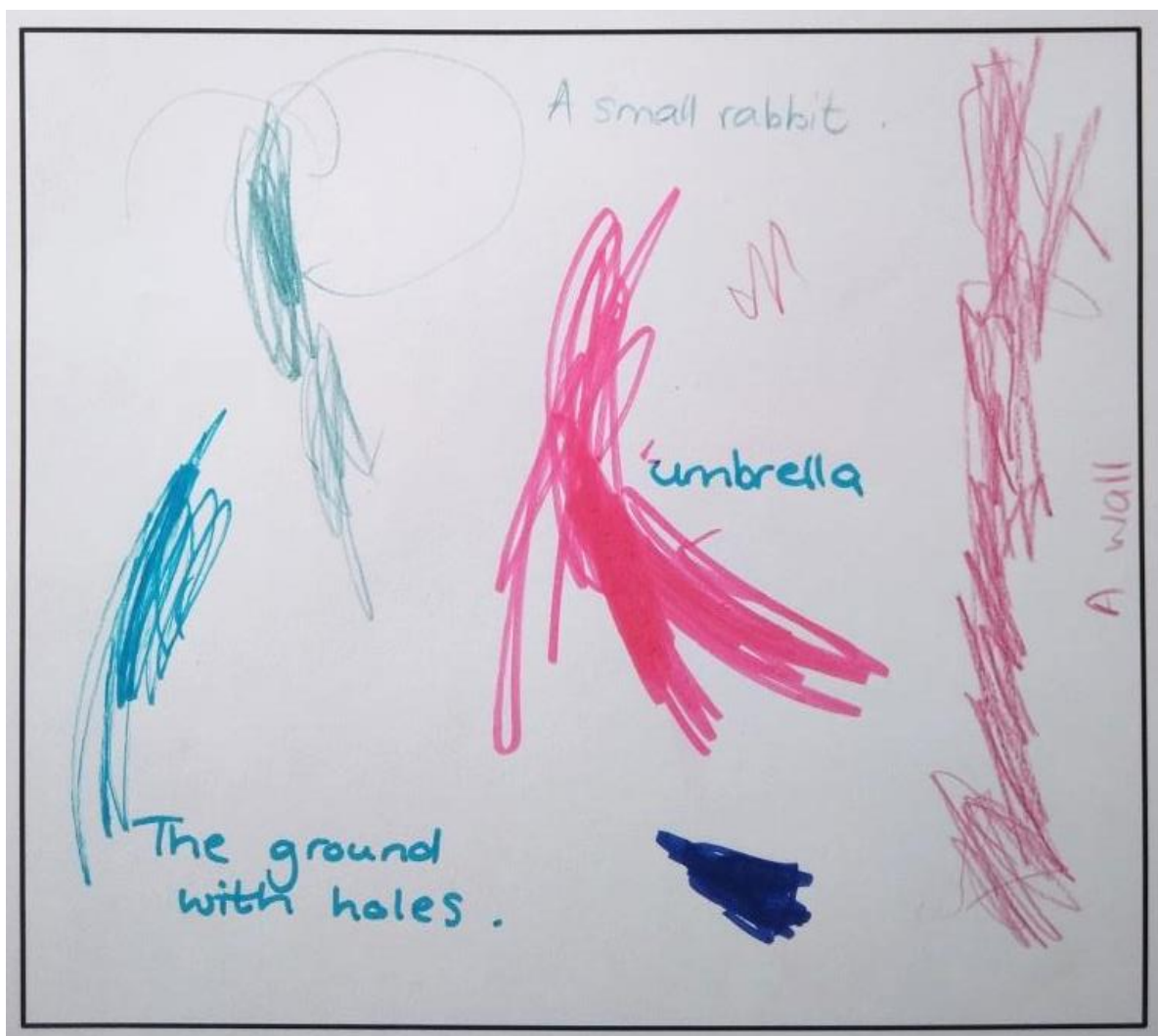
One of the most apparent limitations in my research is in capturing the responses of the children in one form only, through the camera filming their responses. While I was asking questions of the children during the feedback sessions about what they enjoyed or disliked, this was also only captured on film, and was rather fleeting and improvised. It might have been beneficial to also work with children’s drawings to ascertain even further insight into particular moments or understanding of what held importance for the children. We did ask for such feedback drawings while this production was on tour, asking the

children to “Draw your favourite part of the play?” as inspired by the research in Reason’s ‘Drawing the Theatrical Experience: How children watch theatre’ (2008:1-16). The drawings did indeed provide a different way of viewing and acknowledging the voice of the child, as well as having a clearer visual representation of how they received the images in the performance. While on tour, the much younger children struggled to comprehend the phrase: “what is your favourite moment in the play/ what did you enjoy the most?”. This could be for a multitude of reasons, one of which is the lack of the Deaf child developing their primary language before the age of five years old. Most of the children I worked with on the process and performed the show to, were either diagnosed late in life, or were simply not given the tools of (sign) language. This obviously creates a further limitation when trying to communicate and understand the inner workings of the child audience, but should very much be taken into account when working on such a process.

Despite this concern, finding numerous ways to document a child’s response may provide different avenues in which to work alongside the child. Perhaps one may find that one method is more successful than another with a particular child, depending of course on the way the child finds it easiest to communicate their thoughts. However, no matter what the method of collecting the responses, all of the information will ultimately need to be interpreted and translated by the adult theatre maker in order for them to extrapolate, understand and integrate the feedback into the developing theatre piece. This process of interpretation will need to be carefully considered for future research, as it could be a particular weak point in the development of the theatre process whereby the adult theatre maker starts placing their own logic and sense into the creation of the work.

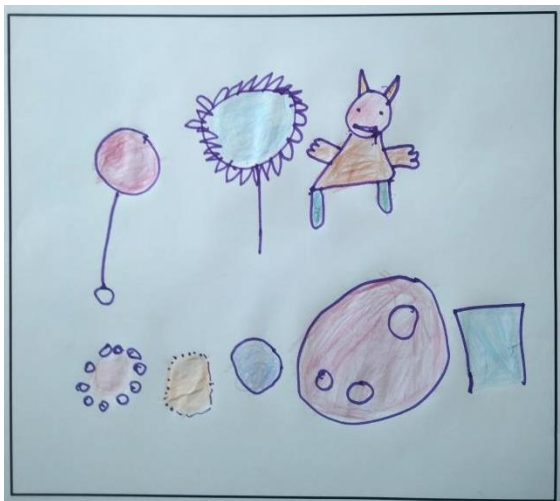
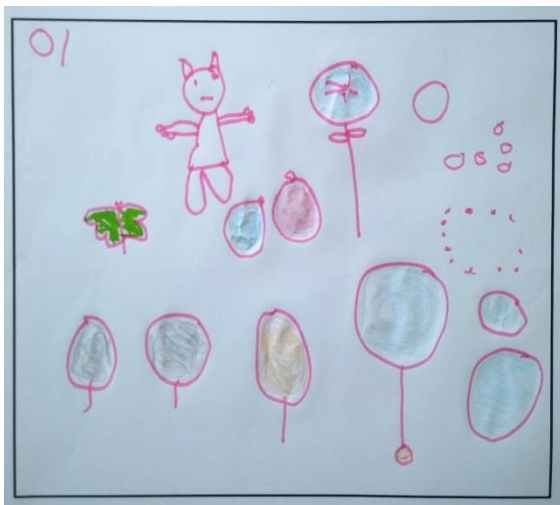
To follow is an example of a drawing made by a 3-year old the day after watching *What goes UP....* A teacher sat with them while they drew, and felt it was necessary to ask

and notate on the drawing what the markings on the page meant. All the markings indicated an aspect from the production, but how the teacher asked or guided the interpretation is not known to me as I was working with other children at the time. What can be ascertained though is that without an interpretation present from the teacher, the markings may have denoted a multitude of things. If a theatre practitioner were just to receive this drawing (without the interpretation) as feedback, it could move the production in a multitude of ways, all dependent on the translation of that image.



A drawing by a three-year old Deaf child from Fulton School for the Deaf

The research was also limited by the fact that all the responses garnered from the children were done so while they were in a group. Having worked with Deaf children now for numerous years, I have seen the tendency for the children to copy each other. Below you can see a simple example of this in the feedback drawings from a group of children who were sitting next to each other, which often resulted in the replication of one child's drawing.



Drawings by children aged 6 - 7 years in the same class at Kwa Thintwa school for the Deaf

However, the capability of this research to establish more nuanced understandings of the workings of a child in developing theatre was predominantly limited by working solely with retrospective archival footage, in lieu of developing a new show that deliberately and intentionally engaged with the ideas that presented themselves in the theorising of the concept. Unfortunately it was just not financially viable (in regards to time and resources) to undertake the creation of a new production for the express purposes of this research. Although, I do believe that analysing *What goes UP...* has provided much reflection and a greater understanding of how I would approach this research in the future. Therefore in the following section I will provide recommendations of how the research may be approached for future consideration, taking into account its current limitations.

d. Recommendations for future research

According to Romanska, "Theatre-making demands new tools, which, in turn, affect dramaturgical practice" (2014:8), and accordingly I believe my methodology towards working with the child as dramaturg would need to be further interrogated, especially to deduce the potential for new dramaturgical forms to present themselves for early years audiences. What if the dramaturgical treatment of space, form and content for a TEY experience could be artistically and conceptually aligned with how a child actually experiences their perceptions of time and space?

My first recommendation would be to begin by working on a one-to-one basis with a carefully selected child. This child would be between the ages 4 to 6 years, and would need to speak the same primary language as the director, so that miscommunication could be ruled out as a variable factor. Reflecting on my methodology of working with the children from Mary Kihn and contextualising it against the collective resource book, *Research with*

Children: Perspectives and Practices (Christensen & Allison, 2000), I am affirmed, that it is of vital importance to first develop a trusting relationship with the child, as walking in as a complete stranger would potentially lead to inaccurate data collection. Deciding to also work with only one particular child will obviously result in a very particular viewpoint in the work, and I understand that it by no means represents the view of every child (although even a group of children cannot represent the multitude of childhoods that concurrently exist). However, the same can also be said of working with the adult dramaturg – and their singular voice that is supported by their particular background, with their particular viewpoint on life, albeit with a far greater propensity to be theatrically ‘objective’ to the needs of the production versus making decisions based on personal preference.

After the selection of the designated child dramaturg, the next step in moving forward in this research is in developing a new theatre production for early years audiences. Taking into account the findings of this current research, the process may deliver more intentional methodologies to develop new dramaturgical forms for professional South African practitioners undertaking TEY. The subsequent steps within the evolution of this research would involve a longitudinal study across varying groups of children within South Africa. This would require selecting various directors to work with different test groups and individuals, using the same methodology to develop their early year’s theatre work. The work should then be tested by presenting it to other children in the neighbouring area who are considered to be within the same socio-economic standing. Then the production should be removed from the context in which it was created and presented to children from a different geographical, socio-economic and /or linguistic background. The cross longitudinal study will allow for a greater understanding of whether there are any ‘universal’ tropes present when making work for early years audiences. Future research should also involve a

more systematic approach to capturing the responses of the children, both as a group but also as individuals, thus allowing more spaces for collective and individual reflexivity. The same participants' responses and interactions should be filmed throughout the various stages of the process, including pre-production, rehearsals and post-production.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

From the analysis of the secondary source material, interviews and my own artistic practice I would like to come back to the three questions I posed at the beginning of my research investigation in order to formulate the results of my findings. I would like to begin with reflecting on the dramaturgical structures that emerged out of the process of developing *What goes UP....* From my auto-ethnographic research I think it is clear that definite dramaturgical choices were made based on the children I was working with, choices that made the work relevant to Deaf children in the time in which it was created. However, the overarching dramaturgical structure of presenting the work was defined ultimately by the professional adult theatre makers, and was strongly inspired and influenced by the TEY performances I had seen in Denmark at the 2014 *April Festival*. These postdramatic dramaturgical decisions indeed have had their own line of enquiry through the decades that Danish artists have been developing their TEY. They have developed a detailed understanding of the way that a child, between the ages of 3 - 6 years old, is developing cognitively and thus they take into consideration the length of time, performance quality and the propensity for non-narrative story that would appeal to this audience. I believe that my artistic practice allowed me to have a meaningful engagement with Deaf South African children and how they experience aspects of their world. This engagement presented itself most clearly in the aesthetic envisioning and development of the production.

Four years after developing *What goes UP...* I am indeed left questioning this process, and my own assumptions, about how I felt I was letting the process be guided entirely by children. At points, yes indeed, the process was guided by the children's reactions and responses. However there was also evidently a battle with my own theatrically trained sensibilities, and my coercion (however subtle or overt it might have been) of the way I wanted to present the images or objects to the children. It is now my contention that if professionally trained theatre makers wants to search for new dramaturgical structures for TEY, they need to do so by making themselves more responsive and available to creating a conversation with the children and develop their ability to hear what the children are communicating. Communication is one of the most valuable resources between the director and dramaturg, and while communication can happen in a multitude of ways such as drawings, poems, e-mails, chats over tea or more formal feedback sessions, it is important that there is an equal power balance in this communication. How can one enter into a balanced, empowered working relationship that not only values the voice of the child as a possible dramaturg but also allows for the child's voice to be unedited or persuaded by the professional theatre maker?

This leads me into reflecting on how the child may be considered the dramaturg of a theatrical experience. If we are to accept that childhood is a contained and whole experience within itself, and not simply a stage of becoming adult, then we need to acknowledge that childhood is encompassing of its own culture. When looking at South African communities and their indigenous rituals and performances, Coetzee and Munro suggest that the community acts as the dramaturg in these moments of indigenous practices. Here the dramaturg's "function of ordering, structuring, and directing the performance is embedded in the history and traditions of a community" (Coetzee & Munro,

2014:107). If we look towards cultures, and their practices, as holding intrinsic forms of dramaturgy, we should be considering how children naturally define rules of time, space and form in their play with other children. If we can see children through this cultural lens we may be able to understand that children are already acting as dramaturgs in the structuring of their own play. In this regard, my research shows that it is entirely possible for the child to be considered a dramaturg of a professionally devised theatrical experience. However it is entirely dependent on how the professionally trained artist chooses to engage and communicate with the child (the extent to which the adult artist is conscious of and questioning the inherent power inequities) that will determine the success of such an artistic partnership and whether the child fulfils dramaturgical or perhaps quasi-dramaturgical functions.

I save the question of asking the value of having a child as dramaturg for last, as I believe it is this question that holds greatest precedence in this research. I begin with an anecdote in order to open up this question for reflection. On 12th October 2018 I revisited Mary Kihn School for the Deaf, to present the children with books and DVDs of the second TEY production I devised called *Measure UP*. This production was also developed with the children of Mary Kihn in 2017, however the engagement was far less frequent and I had already predetermined the concept of the show without the involvement of the children. At this point three years had passed since some of these children had seen the production of *What goes UP...* at the Cape Town Fringe Festival in September 2015. One of the children who was present in the core class group from 2015, stood up in front of the class to explain the play to the other children who had not seen it. She explained in detail what she remembered, recalling the performer's names, the emotional journey of the characters, the props, the use of the props as well as recounting full sections of the performance. I was

simply astounded by the detail that her memory had recalled three years after seeing the production. It was also starkly contrasted by the fact that only a year prior she had seen *Measure UP* performed and yet struggled to recall simple components of that production. Did this have something to do with the invested engagement the child had in *What goes UP...* and perhaps having a sense of ownership in the production? Perhaps *What goes UP...* was a better production that made a more lasting impression, and perhaps this was achieved as a direct result of being so closely inspired and supported by the logic of the children? Either way, it was evidently clear through the detailed recalling of *What goes UP...* that the production had made a clear impact on this child who had been closely involved in the process of developing it.

If we are to believe that drama is at its core political, because it reflects the time and mind-sets of the people living in that period, then so too is dramaturgy “a political practice” (Corrêa, 2014:308). It is a contemporary practice that “should address the micropolitics of power or the ways normative values and institutionalized modes of production permeate personal relationships and individual desires” (Corrêa, 2014:308). TEY should be no different, and can and should act as a political platform, for the liberation of an emancipated notion of childhood. And these politics, just as they do within adult theatre, would render themselves in the dramaturgical approach and decisions made within the performance. But this political act of dramaturging may only be successful if it is led and guided by the voice of the child, and not merely used as a collection of responses to validate the professionally trained artists’ agendas. If this can be achieved then TEY would also have the ability to become an historical form of documentation, archiving the experience of childhood as understood by a child in their moment of history. In this notion there is immense value, not for the individual child necessarily, but for the culture of children trying

to rectify the way in which children and childhood have been researched and documented in history. By giving children the ability to reclaim their power in history, by having their voices documented and archived, this is the political act of the child as dramaturg.

Would one actually be able to shift these existing unequal power dynamics between adult and child by placing the child as dramaturg and valuing their voice and views on the production's process, as one would do when hiring an adult dramaturg? If the theatre maker's desire is to create a final marketable product, then one would need to navigate how the child is functioning within this consumer culture exchange, as there is a discernible difference between the "'exploited or exploitable child' and the 'empowered child'" (Cook, 2005:156 as cited in Smith, 2010:110). If part of the dramaturg's role in the creative team, within a collective dramaturgy, is indeed dedicated to helping theatre makers find their own artistic journey through which to fulfil their artistic vision (Trencsényi, 2013), then to what degree can the locus of control "be dissolved or to what extent is democracy in collective artistic processes possible" (Coetzee & Munro, 2014:107)? Therefore, extra precaution needs to be taken so as not to use the child as a means to an end for the theatre maker's own artistic purposes. In this regard perhaps there should be less focus placed on the quality of the final product produced and more on the process of collaboration and engagement with the child during the development of the performance.

If, according to the proposal of Coetzee and Munro (2014:110), "the role of the dramaturg in South Africa is located not in the people operating in the theatre collective but in the power of discourse itself," then the process of development is itself the political act, while the final product is merely the documentation of it. Smith ends his book, *The Universal Child?*, on a very intriguing note, one that recognises "the implications of 'growth' and 'learning' as central and immutable features of children's lives" (2010:204). He

encourages more reflection on how to create the most suitable environments and conditions for promoting these two aspects. If we can come to acknowledge and understand that children indeed have an inherent ability for “autonomous learning and self-expression” (Smith, 2010:204), then perhaps the act of dramaturging a TEY production may be one step closer towards achieving this social justice for children. The youth respondent method, as proposed by Leahey (2014:326), has the ability to strengthen “TYA plays while it gives children the agency to learn, exchange ideas, and address subjects that are important to them”. With this sentiment, we are reinforcing the political agenda of the dramaturgical process, that it may hold more precedent in the value of the process of making the product rather than the finished product itself.

If we look at other areas of vulnerable and disadvantaged social communities according to the gauges of disability, ethnicity, sexuality, gender or culture, it would be highly questionable if we allowed another more privileged or different group to speak on behalf of one of the above groups. As echoed by Smith (2010:143): “If we consider other areas of social life, the idea that one group can both properly appreciate and speak for another is highly questionable”. This speaking on behalf of another more vulnerable community simply perpetuates the expectation that the community is unable to speak on their own behalf, thus rendering them powerless through the mere act of denying them their own voice and agency. Though it is most certainly a well-held principle in terms of the constitution, education institutions and cultural normative practices, that children are represented by adults in most respects, “this traditional conception does not recognize the important roles that children play in their own socialization, and it marginalizes their importance as social actors” (Baxter, 2005:27). We need only look at how young children in crisis situations have managed to not be dependent on adults, such as street children,

guerrilla warfare child soldiers or children working in factories. While these conditions are by no means ideal it demonstrates the agency a child may possess, and “the need to be open to the possibilities of children as social actors in all aspects of life” (Baxter, 2005:21).

So, again, if drama is believed to be a political practice, why would it perpetuate the unequal power dynamic between child and adult by rendering the child’s voice absent, while claiming the creative product is designed specifically for them? Theatre has the capability to be a creative and powerful medium and platform, on which unequal power relations and unjust political and social practices can be presented, questioned and exposed (this is not to negate the fact that there is theatre that also upholds such injustices as well.) I strongly believe, through both the research I have undertaken and from reflecting on my own personal practice, that TEY should be focused on empowering children by engaging with their reflections, perceptions and experiences. Not through the adult theatre practitioners’ perceptions, reflections and experiences of children or their own childhoods, but indeed through the perceptions, reflections and experiences of their intended audience members, children.

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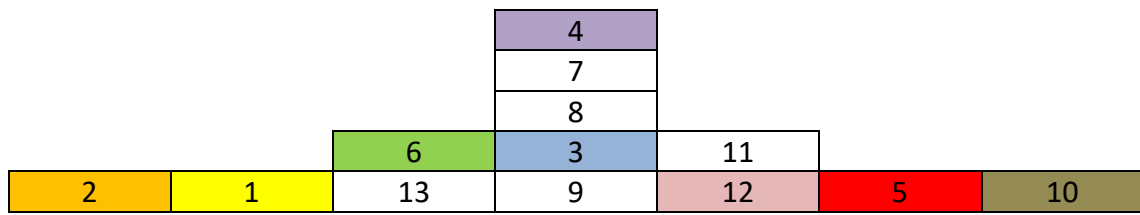
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Appendix

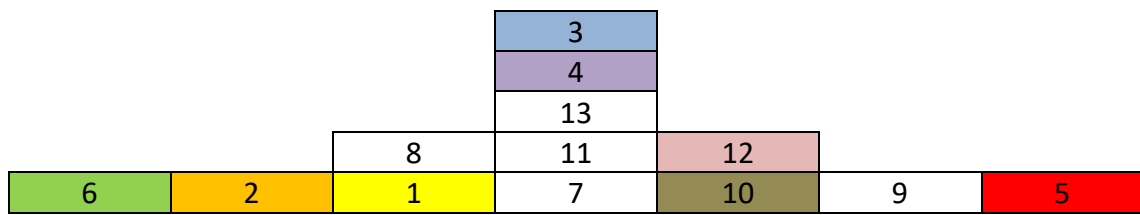
a. Q-sort Statements

1. The children/child being engaged in the show
2. The quality of the performers
3. The quality of the design / plastic aesthetics of the show
4. Pushing your own creative/personal practice
5. Working with a well-known story for children
6. The concept of the show
7. Devising a new work
8. The quality of the direction (by the director) of the performance/performers
9. The children/child understanding the show
10. Turning a profit
11. Inspiring children to have a love of theatre
12. Developing theatre audiences for the future
13. Providing a space/moment to allow for healing/transformation of the children

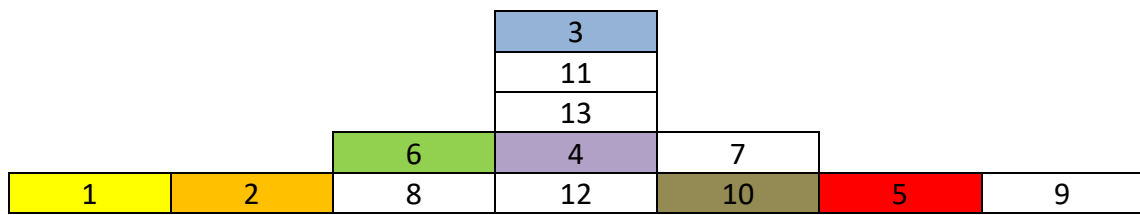
b. Comparative Q-sort



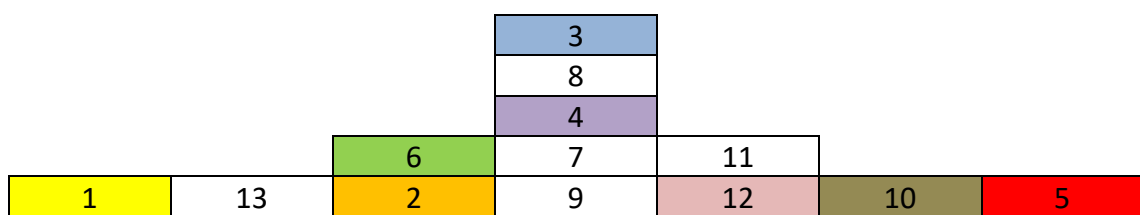
Jennie Reznek



Barbara Kölling



Yvette Hardie



Jayne Batzofin