

**DOKTORI (Ph.D.) ÉRTEKEZÉS TÉZISEI**

**A NÉZŐK RÉSZVÉTELÉNEK HATÁSA A BRIT  
PEDAGÓGIAI SZÍNJÁTSZÁS (TIE)  
ALKOTÓFOLYAMATÁRA**

**THE EFFECTS OF AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION ON THE  
CREATIVE PROCESS OF BRITISH  
THEATRE IN EDUCATION**

**SZ. PALLAI ÁGNES**

**Debrecen**

**2005**

## I. Aims

The dissertation aims to investigate, analyse and interpret the hitherto unexplored area of Theatre in Education which is the audience participation element as it affects the actors, the director and the dramatic entity. I intend to explore audience participation in the context of contemporary British educational theatre practice with a view to casting, the playwriting/ devising and the rehearsal process as well as the acting techniques and the changes in performance. The investigation attempts to answer the questions of how invited audience participation influences the creative process of educational theatre and how the actual contributions of the students modify the play, the performance and the acting process in the course of the TIE programmes.

As this research has not been undertaken by the British academic community, I anticipate that my investigation, being available to existing TIE companies in Britain, will provide analytical data which will support or question their rehearsal and performance practice. A bi-product of this research would be that it becomes available to the theatre community in Hungary. Children's theatre companies, regional theatre companies occasionally providing productions to young audiences as well as the existing Hungarian TIE companies would benefit from having available this platform of research should they ever consider widening their current remit or widening their current audience base. It would also form the platform for any new company which wished to specialise in this particular area of theatre.

## II. Research Area

Theatre in Education (also called TIE or educational theatre) is a theatre art form created for educational purposes that offers learning opportunities through an aesthetic medium inviting children and young people to participate actively in an artistic experience.

This specific genre of theatre, which is a characteristically British phenomenon, originated in Britain in the mid-1960s, developed and flourished for decades and spread all over the world as an artistic-educational movement.

Audience participation is a key constituent of educational theatre and its function is related to the total commitment to pedagogy and the clear educational philosophy which TIE has evolved during its forty-year-long history. Due to its incontestable pedagogic value, which derives from the audience's active intellectual, emotional and physical engagement with live theatre experience, most representatives consider TIE as an educational medium in the first place. The most frequently researched aspect of TIE is, therefore, the exploration of the learning outcomes of specific programmes in which the researchers focus on and evaluate how useful the learning opportunities, provided by educational theatre, are for the audience, in comparison with other teaching methods.

I interpret audience participation an integral artistic constituent of the theatre programme. I consider the members of audience both the recipients and the co-creators of the theatre event and it is of great concern to me how the TIE team (especially the actors, but also the director and the playwright) prepare for audience participation and incorporate the participants' creative contributions into the process of the performance.

### III. Methodology

I designed and carried out research applying a qualitative, interpretive approach suited to the particular circumstances of an educational theatre study. Qualitative inquiries are frequently applied to address complex Arts Education issues and the interpretive approach is claimed to be suitable to provide insights into artistic processes, especially in theatrical contexts. I collected data by studying documents, by formal and informal interviews with key informants to gain their interpretations, and by direct observation. These methods are compatible with an educational theatre study, in which the practitioners' subjective

viewpoints and reflections on their own particular experience can be compared with each other, with the data gained from the documents and with the performance analyses of participatory TIE programmes.

I selected the artistic policy documents of forty professional TIE companies, which all specify their work as educational theatre, for examination. The sample discussed is representative in every respect. There are both old and new companies among them that are quite evenly located all over Britain. As a result of their diverse organisational and financial backgrounds, the size and the operational fields of the companies vary significantly.

Since the necessary information on the creative process could only be gathered from the practitioners themselves, I designed a complex and quite flexible data collection method. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the artistic directors and actors of the sample TIE companies observed, whilst also sending out written questionnaires to a number of educational theatre companies, in order to broaden the scope of the inquiry. Some artistic directors provided information both by interview and by questionnaire; in such cases the questions were adjusted accordingly in order to be complementary. Other directors chose either the oral or the written format; while the actors preferred giving an interview. The collected information reflected the artistic processes as well as the attitudes and values of the practitioners, therefore, I did qualitative and interpretive data analysis. The method applied to interpret data gained from the documents, interviews and questionnaires is “key-word analysis” as described by David Nunan in *Research Methods*. The analysis started with the identification of the problem areas, issues and topics cropping up in the interviews and the documents, and then I grouped the information into main categories and sub-groups and, finally, selected the most relevant issues for comparison and further discussion.

Unlike any other kind of theatre event, educational theatre programmes are not publicly accessible. I gained access to observe and video-record the TIE programmes (strictly

for research purposes) by personal connections with the artistic directors of the companies. I selected programmes for analysis which contain some kind of audience participation and which most typically represent the participatory structures characteristic of educational theatre. The performance analyses focus on the actor-audience interactions from the actors' perspective and explore the effects of audience participation on play structures, performances, acting and the TIE actors' work.

#### IV. The Structure of the Dissertation

The Introduction provides the brief analytical summary of the extant research with special attention to the audience participation element as it is reflected in the educational philosophy and the history of British educational theatre. In order to indicate the broader context of my study, I briefly review the work of Drama in Education representatives most influential on the Theatre in Education methodology.

Chapter 1 contains the overview and the typology of contemporary British TIE. The analysis of the sample companies' artistic policy documents provides insight into the educational and artistic aims and objectives of these educational theatres, the underlying philosophy on which they base their services and also the content area types that their programmes cover. As opposed to the approaches which discuss participatory activities only from the audience's point of view or in respect of the dramaturgy of the play, I suggest a possible categorisation of actors-audience interactions from the actors' perspective and I create the models of audience participation structures as a framework for an in-detail TIE programme analysis.

Chapter 2 investigates the effects of invited audience participation on the creative process of participatory TIE deduced from the practitioners' reports on their practices, experiences and views. The analyses of the interviews and the questionnaires focus on how audience participation is interrelated with the actors' skills requirements, the auditions and

casting, the play devising as well as the actors' preparation and rehearsals for audience participation in contemporary TIE practice.

Chapter 3 explores the effects of invited audience participation on the play structures in the sample TIE programmes. The analyses illuminate how the dramaturgy of the plays is interlocked with the structures of audience participation in the four identified participatory models. A comparison of the junior and senior versions of a particular programme exemplifies the changes in the play caused by the altered participatory activities when the programmes are performed for different age groups of audiences.

Chapter 4 gathers evidence about the effects of actual audience participation on the performances. The analyses focus on the actor-audience interactions in which the actors take part in characters. Comparisons of recurring participatory activities reveal how the acting techniques in the interactions are modified according to the models. I suggest a model-centred approach to participatory TIE acting and also follow a particular programme through subsequent restructuring phases from the first to the last performances in order to demonstrate how the creative process of educational theatre continues parallel with the performances as a result of audience participation.

In Chapter 5, I draw theoretical and practical conclusions from the research in order to contribute to the typology of the genre and inform the development of contemporary TIE practice. I formulate the paradoxes of TIE, provide the summary of how contemporary practice responds to the artistic problems rooted in these paradoxes and also put forward a possible model-centred typology of the creative process considering the implications of audience participation for rehearsal time, for restructuring the programme and for actor training.

## V. Findings

1. Audience participation in TIE takes the form of verbal, physical and role-taking interventions in the theatre event insomuch that the artistic product of TIE is incomplete without the students' co-creative contributions. Paradoxically, the role of the audience is that of the co-creators, but the creative process takes place in their absence.
2. The companies generally solve the educational side of this problem: most of the devising and rehearsal procedures rightly focus on what the students will do in the participatory activities. However, contemporary practice lacks a consistent and coherent methodology for the actors' preparation for the interactions. The actors' skills requirements are very complex including in-character improvisation and facilitation as well as a range of personal and social skills in addition to acting but there is no standardised audition system to test these skills, nor elaborated preparation/rehearsal methods to improve them if necessary. The artistic directors have developed audition and rehearsal practices based on personal experience and the particular needs of the given project but the creative process is far too arbitrary and experimental.
3. Audience participation in educational theatre requires individual responsibility taking from the actors in the interactions as "playwrights", "dramaturges", "directors", "group-leaders" and "co-actors". Contemporary practice does not address this problem at all. TIE actors have to draw on their extant skills and instincts without any structured training or genuinely sufficient preparation. I would argue that the only efficient long-term resolution of the problem could be a specialist TIE training focusing on the actors' core skills: acting (characterisation), in-character improvisation, group-leading in and out of character, working with different age groups of children and young people, working as part of a team, group-devising and structuring participatory activities as well as understanding the artistic-educational nature of TIE – all vital for participatory TIE.

4. The classification the actor-audience interactions from the actors' perspective as well as the model-centred approach to the plays, the performances and the acting process which I proposed in Chapter 1, has proven to be a sufficient framework for the programme analyses in respect of the effects of invited and actual audience participation on the dramatic entity.
5. I have identified the post-show-workshop, the inserted activities, the merged participation and the Forum Theatre participatory models. I have demonstrated through analyses of TIE programmes that the degree of the influence which the students' contributions exert on the plays, the performances and the acting process varies in accordance with the "rules" of the particular model.
6. Based on the model-centred analyses of the programmes, I have provided the typology of the creative process model by model. The models differ in respect of the complexity of structuring the participation matched with the play structure; the complexity of the preparation/rehearsal requirements for the interactions; devising and rehearsal time required; minimal and optimum frequency of interaction types; the actors' skills requirements; devising and rehearsal methodology most efficient for the model; model-bound requirements of restructuring and monitoring the programmes; artistic advantages and disadvantages of the model; and the creative team's level of experience necessary to make the model work.
7. I would argue that model-awareness throughout the whole creative process can save a lot of artistic energy and rehearsal time. Actors' skills requirements coded in the model structure may inform model-conscious casting and auditioning; rehearsals adjusted to the demands of the particular participation model may facilitate actors' preparation for the interactions. Restructuring is necessary and should be seen as an extension of the creative process after the co-creators joining in; monitoring to keep the programme lively and to

maintain spontaneity is also vital in this genre. However, the restructuring required after the first performances is definitely model-bound.

8. Contemporary TIE practice faces a lot of artistic dilemmas which partly derive from the contradictory nature of the genre, and partly from the practicalities rooted in the present circumstances of TIE work in Britain. Some of these problems cannot be solved without essential changes in the funding system or in the organisational structure of educational theatre – both inevitably falling outside the competence of the present study. The model-approach to the creative process may contribute to a consistent creative methodology that can eventually lead to artistically more efficient devising and rehearsal periods within the realistic given situation of participatory TIE.

## VI. Publications

- — —. „BOLERÓ – Egy dráma-projekt műhelytitkai.” *Projekt módszer III*. Kecskemét: Kecskeméti Főiskola Tanítóképző Főiskolai Kar, 2002. 48-54.
- — —. „Drámapedagógiáról (nem csak) óvodapedagógusoknak.” *Óvodapedagógusok Konferenciája 2001*. Kecskemét: Kecskeméti Főiskola Tanítóképző Főiskolai Kar, 2002. 73-95.
- — —. “Dramaturgy of Forum Theatre.” *School and Theatre in the Past and Nowadays. School and Theatre CD-ROM*. Miskolc: Academia Ludi et Artis, 2002.
- — —. „A Fórum Színház dramaturgiája.” *Az iskolai színháztudás múltja és jelene. Iskola és színház CD-ROM*. Academia Ludi et Artis, Miskolc, 2002.
- — —. „A Fórum Színház dramaturgiája.” *Iskolakultúra*, 12 (2002): 92-97.
- — —. „Fórum Színház: ahol a nézők is játszhatnak.” *Várad*, 2 (2003): 80-92.
- — —. „A Fórum Színház dramaturgiája.” *Drámapedagógiai Magazin*, 1 (2003): 19-23.
- — —. „Mégiscsak színház?! – Az angol drámapedagógia történetéből.” *Iskolakultúra*, 11 (2003): 83-90.
- — —. “TIE: Midway between Theatre and Education.” *Proceedings of the HUSSDE 1 Conference Pécs, 25-26 January 2002*. Ed. Kurdi Mária and Szaffkó Péter. Pécs: U of Pécs, 2004. 140-48.