Chapter 13 in *Theatre for Young Audiences: A Critical Handbook*. Eds. Tom Maguire and Karian Schuitema. Stoke on Trent, UK: Trentham, 2012. 143-155.

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13

Interviewing children after performances

Jeanne Klein

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. For instance, David Wood writes plays based on some arguable assumptions regarding ‘The Nature of the Beasts’ (1997: 13-61) in a wry reference that associates children with wild animals. In contrast, artists, such as David Holman and Tony Graham in the UK (Bennett, 2005), consult directly with young people before they dramatise and stage their stories to ensure optimal communication of their artistic intentions. As with other disciplinary rifts between theory and practice, these common artistic practices remain divorced from the theories and evidence of child audiences as published by academic investigators.

Since the 1980s, international researchers have conducted reception studies for many different reasons; for example: to discover what theatrical elements remain in long-term memories (Deldime and Pigeon, 1988:18); to determine how frequent drama and theatre experiences affect children’s interpretations of productions over time in comparison to those with no drama experiences (Saldaña, 1996:67); to compare differences between expert and novice judgements of theatre (Schonmann, 2006:126-27); and to explore how children remember and respond to theatrical experiences (Reason, 2010:47-9). In such cases, investigators employ dramatic theories, such as semiotics (Deldime and Pigeon), aesthetic distance (Schonmann), and phenomenology (Reason), as methodological frameworks for analysing the evidence inductively using various tools and methods, such as questions, photographs, and drawings in individual and group interviews or behavioural workshops. As a result, we end up with an accumulated assortment of children’s responses to theatre productions that keep traditional dramatic theories and beliefs about children’s competencies intact whilst having few consequential effects upon subsequent artistic and educational practices for future productions (Winston, 2003).

In addition to using similar dramatic theories, I have employed a more critically reasoned process that involves both the inductive and deductive separation and coordination of cognitive developmental theories and evidence (eg. Kuhn, 2011). Unlike many artists and researchers who respectively create theatre and studies from scratch, I first review all previous child development evidence on a given topic to particularise new and yet-to-be-answered research questions and then operationalise these questions by wording more specific interview questions to ask children. Where subsequently analysed evidence contradicts a given theory or artistic belief, I attempt to revise such theoretical beliefs deductively to better explain the particular evidence. For example, presentational or Brechtian forms of theatre do not necessarily induce children to distance their emotions and think more critically about dramatised concepts by applying thematic metaphors to their own lives. Under age 8 or 9, children tend to regard both presentational and representational performances objectively by recounting explicit images and dialogue until they recognise the need to infer, connect and apply the causes and consequences of dramatised actions as metaphoric expressions of their lives (Klein, 1995:62-4).

Without summarising all of the evidence of child development from cognitive theories in this limited space, The purpose of this chapter is to detail the interview questions I have used to offer researchers and artists additional strategic ideas on the art of questioning children after performances. Artists and researchers alike need to consider particular questioning methods conducive to the nature and nurturing of children’s minds and emotions from their developmental perspectives. During post-performance interviews, children’s aesthetic responses to theatre depend largely upon the specific questions they are asked to answer and whether they are asked to articulate their appreciations or criticisms of productions created by adult artists. Appreciation involves questions that explore whether children appreciated adults’ artistic intentions to please them according to their aesthetic preferences and criterial values. In such cases, children may not ~~criticise~~ express whether or not artists succeeded or failed to communicate their intended meanings for fear of hurting adults’ feelings regarding all their hard work.

In contrast, questions of criticism ask children to infer artists’ intentions based on the meanings they perceived and comprehended from staged actions. By asking children to interpret what artists were trying to do when expressing various metaphors and main thematic ideas, researchers can compare their speculative interpretations against artists’ known intentions to determine degrees of artistic success and thereby place the public obligation and ethical responsibility of criticism on adults (Klein and Schonmann, 2009:64-6).

From 1986 to 2003, I conducted six reception studies with 340 children, ages 6 to 13. With girls making up 55 per cent of the participating group, the children were from all socioeconomic neighborhoods in Lawrence, a predominately white city located in Kansas in the central United States. Employing methods adapted from research into the reception of television, each study focused on particular areas of cognitive and affective understanding. Specific objectives were based on the unique characteristics of each realised play. The first three studies used the plays *Don Quixote of La Mancha* (1986), *Monkey, Monkey* (1988) and *Noodle Doodle Box* (1989) to explore national curricular standards or basic comprehension of plot structures, characters’ actions, and themes with one grade [year] level each to compare results against developmental findings in television studies (Klein, 1987; Klein and Fitch, 1989; 1990). The last three studies (Klein, 1993; 1995; 2003) plumbed fantasy and reality conventions, empathy constructs and computer-animated conventions among three grade [year] levels to compare developmental differences across age groups in relation to the following plays: *This Is Not a Pipe Dream* (1990), *Crying to Laugh* (1992), and *Dinosaurus* (2001). Throughout this research, questions emphasised the extent to which children rely upon visual, verbal and psychological modes of perception when interpreting meanings from respective plays in performance.

The combined results of these studies culminated in a model of aesthetic processing in theatre that coordinates and integrates multiple factors involved in perceiving, interpreting, and evaluating live performances (Klein, 2005). Subsequent to this work, I have considered how four recursive stages of personal epistemology apply to performance criticism as another means of analysing child and adult spectators’ critical responses to theatre (Klein, 2009). I have also explained how and why actors’ mockeries of childhood in humorous entertainment deceive child and adult spectators surreptitiously, based on how children interpret humour and evaluate actors’ bodies on stage and screen (Klein, 2010).

Procedures

A description of basic procedures is necessary to contextualise this work. Before the children attend the theatrical production, teachers are asked not to use study guides to assure that all responses come from performances only and not from any educational preparation. Children are bussed from their schools to attend weekday matinees of productions performed by university students in a large proscenium auditorium on campus. Participating children in each study, whose parents have signed permissions, are seated with their classmates in the centre front orchestra with the youngest class groups in front and successively older class groups behind.

One day after attendance, fifteen minute interviews (as limited by the school district) are conducted and audio-recorded with individual children in quiet spaces at their schools. Interviewers include undergraduate and graduate students who have been trained in protocols, as well as myself. Interviewing individuals, rather than pairs or small groups, frees children from answering questions based on peer pressures (~~cf.~~ Saldaña 1996:68). One-day delayed recall also evokes those most salient images and conceptual ideas that remain in the short-term memories of young people.

After transcribing interviews, responses to all questions are analysed and coded by myself and two independent evaluators to assure at least 85 per cent reliability among three interpreters. Data are coded in both qualitative and quantitative ways based on respective measures. Likert-scale measures are assigned high to low numbers or zero for ‘don’t know.’ For instance, understanding is coded as (4) hard, (3) sort of hard, (2) sort of easy, and (1) easy.

Responses to open-ended questions are analysed repeatedly for emerging patterns of concrete to abstract categories before assigning ordinal numbers to each sub-category by the presence (1) or absence (0) of specific variables. In other words, translating qualitative ideas into quantitative variables provides descriptive frequencies of responses for respective questions. Using statistical software, frequencies, chi-squares, Pearson correlations and one-way analyses of variances (ANOVAs) are tabulated to interpret descriptive means, relationships and age and gender variations. Further details regarding coding and data analyses are available in respective technical reports for each study through the Education Resources Information Center at [www.eric.ed.gov](http://www.eric.ed.gov).

Rating enjoyment, understanding, and motivation

After obtaining a child’s verbal assent to be interviewed and audio-recorded, the interviewer first stresses that ‘When people see plays, they have lots of different ideas and feelings about the story and the way it was done. So I’d like to know what *you* think and feel about the play you saw yesterday.’ To rate general enjoyment or appreciation, we ask ‘Do you think (the same) graders in another city would like this play a lot, a little, or not at all?’ Few children are willing to admit ‘not at all,’ but asking how much their peers may have enjoyed the play lessens the social desirability factor to some extent. ~~Six~~ 6 to 8 year olds are more likely to report high enjoyment than 9 to 12 year olds, especially when attendance at theatre offers them a novel experience not provided by their parents.

To rate general comprehension, we ask ‘Was this play easy or hard to understand?’ and if both, then ‘Was it real or sort of (easy or hard)?’ followed by ‘What made it (answer) to understand?’ Plays intended for 6 to 8 year olds have been rated on the ‘easy’ end, whilst plays for 9 to 12 year olds have garnered more mixed ratings. Children tend to rate plays easier to understand when they recall more visual and especially verbal cues and when they make more psychological inferences from implicit information.

~~Plays are reportedly blamed for being~~ Children found plays ‘hard’ to understand for three main reasons. The first was where not knowing the stories, events, characters and vocabulary in advance created anxiety. When unpredictable events turn out other than expected, a natural feeling of surprise is translated into an uncomfortable sense of confusion. Secondly, unrealistic objects and actions, such as painting a canvas without using actual paint, befuddles literal thinkers who expect all physical realities to be visualised on stage. When employing minimalist scenery, such as one large box to represent a home and a school, children may know when locales change by actors’ movements but still feel annoyed when settings do not materially differentiate between separate fictional locations.

Thirdly, children often report confusion when they want to know particular reasons and underlying motivations for characters’ surprising actions that remain unspecified. For example, why would Don Quixote return to his escapades a second time after failing the first? The dialogue in *This Is Not a Pipe Dream* does not tell why René Magritte’s mother killed herself, how she died and why his father didn’t want him be an artist. ~~Whilst playwrights often intend to raise compelling questions for spectators to answer for themselves~~ Leaving such curious questions unanswered leaves some children feeling dissatisfied until they recognise their responsibilities as imaginative interpreters by trusting their self-efficacious cognitive abilities.

Given that spectators’ motivations for viewing suggest the amount of mental effort they are willing to invest, we sometimes ask ‘Did you watch this play for fun or to learn something?’ Responses here tend to be evenly divided between fun entertainment and educational learning, or less often, both. Six year olds tend to report educational motives more than eleven and twelve year olds who consider theatre ‘necessary’ primarily for entertainment purposes (Saldaña 1995: 23-24).

Comparing theatre and television

To explore children’s perceptions of a medium’s cognitive demands, we asked 6, 8 and 11 year olds to compare media differences between theatre and television by asking the following questions: ‘Would you rather go to see (play title) as a play on a stage like you did yesterday, or watch a production of it on television at home?’ followed by ‘What’s the difference?’ For the computer-animated version of *Dinosaurus*, we asked, ‘Have you ever seen a movie, TV, or puppet show and/or played a video or computer game about dinosaurs?’ and if so, ‘How was this different from the play you saw yesterday?’ During the late 1980s, a majority reported preferring theatre over television about three to one, primarily for its live qualities. Virtually identical media distinctions reported in 2001. It appears that for each child who prefers television, three children prefer live theatre.

Those who prefer theatre rate their peers’ enjoyment of productions significantly higher than those who prefer television, and they are also more likely to perceive an educational purpose to theatre, perhaps as a function of their school’s field trip. As these viewers search for information relevant to their lives, they pay closer attention to visual and verbal cues and integrate these cues to make more metaphoric applications regarding play themes. This attention is significantly more than for those children who prefer to watch television as habitual viewers. These findings suggest that children perceive the greater cognitive demands of live theatre over commercial television programs by investing sufficient mental effort (Klein, 2005:44-6).

Recalling the story and characters’ actions and emotions

Following well-established procedures in the field of developmental psychology, the next set of questions are ordered from the most to least difficult to remember: from free story recall, to cued recall, to recognition tasks. Free story recall proves most advantageous for non-realistic plays structured episodically by situational relationships among three characters. To assist working memory, 6 and 7 year olds use character dolls, front and back photos of actors pasted on thin wood and small scenic reconstructions to re-dramatise the play’s story. After clarifying the names of each character, we say, ‘Let’s pretend you have a friend who didn’t see the play yesterday. Use these toys to show and tell your friend what happened in the play’ or ‘what the play was about.’ This is prompted by ‘What else happened?’ or ‘What else was the play about?’ Even when provided with such props, older children prefer to recall the play verbally ‘to a friend who didn’t see the play.’ Inducing third-person perspectives encourages more elaborations than possibly skipping some information for the interviewer who has presumably seen the play.

Free story recall provides the most detailed data for analysing interpretations of episodic plot events or the causes and consequences of characters’ central actions and incidental activities, as well as word choices. For example, in *Crying to Laugh*, surprisingly few children recalled that ‘the play was about’ ‘feelings’ or ‘emotions,’ whilst older children were more likely to use emotion labels, behaviours and internal states to recount the story (Klein, 1995:56-7).

Plot-sequencing tasks offer another behavioural method for discerning visual and verbal memories of dramatised structures. Children aged 8 and up are assigned randomly to sequence the play in its proper chronological order, using cards which have either photographed scenes or pieces of scripted dialogue on the back. They use the same mixed array of five or seven central scenes and turn the cards over in their own time. Most children prefer to sequence scenes more quickly and efficiently by using photographs and reading dialogue only when needed to reinforce their recall of visualised actions. As predicted by mnemonic studies, beginnings and endings are recalled best, regardless of visual or verbal conditions, with middles more muddled, especially when episodic plays lack causal connections between scenes (eg. van den Broek 1997:335).

Cued recall involves more specific questions, with or without photographed prompts, that require inferences concerning anything of pertinent interest to each study, such as recalling a play’s main thematic ideas. We found that rather than asking ‘What do you think was the main idea or lesson of the play?’ children offer a broader range of conceptual ideas when asked ‘What do you think (the protagonist) learned at the end of the play?’ Responses for main ideas are coded from emergent categories ranging from abstract to concrete ideas. The majority of children interpret thematic concepts simply by recounting what characters did and said ~~within~~ during performances, whilst a minority go beyond performance confines by abstracting ~~universal~~ themes about human conditions (Klein, 2005:50-2). Asking what a character meant when he or she said a line of dialogue that expresses a play’s main idea offers another way of discovering whether intended ideas were communicated. For instance, when asked what René Magritte meant by ‘If everything is possible, there are no pipe dreams,’ responses depended in part on whether children grasped the term ‘pipe dream,’ as defined by the Interlocutor earlier in the performance (Klein, 1993:15).

To gather interpretations of characters’ goal-directed actions and motives, we ask: ‘During the whole play, what did (the protagonist) do or want to do’ or ‘decide to do by end of story?’ ‘How do you know?’ and ‘What did (he or she) do that for?’ or ‘Why did (he or she) want to do or decide to do that?’ In regard to the Monkey King and Don Quixote, 9 and 11 year olds interpreted respective characters’ objectives and motives more from their own third-person perspectives than from actors’ first-person intentions (Klein 1987: 11; Klein and Fitch 1989: 11).

Recognition tasks involve asking respondents to recognise particular images or abstract concepts and to choose from amongst multiple- or forced-choice responses. To gather inferences with regards to characters’ emotions during particular situations, we prompt memories using photographs taken during dress rehearsals that depict long-shot views of the scene from where respondents sat with actors’ faces blanked out so that children do not rely on photographed facial expressions to name emotions. We ask, ‘When (this situation happened), how did (a character) feel?’ by having children verbalise or point to respective schematic drawings of facial expressions labelled as happy, sad, mad, surprised, scared, disgusted, and OK or neutral as references. Using a graphically worded strip of paper, we then ask, ‘Did (she or he) feel a little bit, pretty, or VERY VERY (named emotion)?’ or ‘How much did (the character) feel that? A little or A LOT?’ We then ask, ‘How do you know (the character) felt that way?’ or ‘How did you decide (the character) felt (named emotion)? Was it something you saw, heard, or felt?’ and ‘What did you see, hear, or feel?’

Children’s recollections of characters’ emotions reflect those meanings they find most personally significant. When seated within twenty feet from a proscenium stage, they rely rather evenly on explicit visual and verbal-aural images and implicit psychological cues to infer characters’ emotions, largely in accordance with actors’ intentions. Regardless of age, they naturally rely on recalling actors’ facial expressions, when they can be seen clearly, and their emotionally embodied actions, behaviours, and gestures. They also listen closely for contrasting vocal qualities, especially for puppets or masked faces, and they paraphrase encoded lines of dialogue that inform them about characters’ internal states, knowledge, objectives, motives, beliefs, and attitudes. In concert with developmental evidence, 11 and 12 year olds, like adults, consider the causes and consequences of situated actions more than 6 to 10 year olds to recognise basic emotions (*eg* Bourg and Stephenson 1997: 312-17). When actors intend to express anger, fear, or negative surprise, 6 and 7 year olds may infer sadness unless they recognise the causes and consequences of actions that give rise to these respective emotions. Until they firmly recognise that another person’s perspective may diverge from their own, they may fall back on projecting their own emotions, needs, wants, and desires in similar situations.

Interpreting constructs of perceived reality and empathy

The multidimensional and interconnected constructs of perceived reality and empathy depend on how researchers interpret theories regarding willing suspensions of disbelief and aesthetic distance before wording specific questions and coding emergent categories. By age 4, young spectators know full well various distinctions between fantasy-reality and false beliefs. They also decide how metaphorically near or far they want to empathise with, sympathise for, and distance themselves from actors and characters in varying situations, based on subjective and objective stances that continually change during performances (Klein, 2005:48-50; Klein and Schonmann, 2009:68-71).

For the *Pipe Dream* study, when asked what was ‘make-believe’ or ‘not real,’ ‘actually real,’ or ‘realistic’ or ‘seemed like it was real’ in the play, responses reflected individuals’ meanings of these words and the theatrical frames of this play-within-a-play production. Children did not necessarily suspend their disbelief willingly because the Interlocutor deluded audiences with numerous examples of theatrical reality and broke aesthetic distance by interrupting Magritte’s story frequently; for instance, by stopping to define ‘pipe dream’ for spectators. Given these delusional framing conventions, children searched for and found illogical actions, inauthentic objects, fantastical characters, and unbelievable events that countered their literal rules of physical and social reality (Klein, 1993:14; Klein and Schonmann, 2009:70-1).

In the *Dinosaurus* study, whether children labelled the computer-animated dinosaurs as ‘make-believe’ or ‘realistic,’ the majority projected human emotions onto these screen images within the play’s fictional frame as artists intended. While most perceived the human dinosaur chorus as ‘actually real’ or ‘realistic,’ they did not ascribe emotions to the actors until asked directly what these people felt. During the questioning, whilst many children noted character emotions from actors’ behaviours within the fictional or representational frame, almost half focused on the actors’ pretence within a theatrical or presentational context (Klein, 2003: 43-4).

The *Crying to Laugh* study probed more deeply into constructs of empathy, sympathy, and distancing. Before asking how characters felt in each of six situations, we asked, ‘How did you feel (when this situation happened)?’ ‘How much did you feel that?’ and ‘What made you feel that way?’ After much discussion between myself and two interpreters, we defined and coded reported reasons for various emotions by three emergent categories from actors’ subjective or spectators’ objective perspectives and no attributions. Empathy is defined as identical matches with actors’ subjective emotions and actor-characters’ spoken reasons. Sympathy is defined as plausible emotions with objective reasons different from actor-characters’ reasons.

Whilst empathy and sympathy refer to emotions reported within fictional or representational frameworks, distancing is defined as personal opinions made outside the fiction or inside a theatrical or presentational framework. Based on these definitions, most children sympathised and distanced themselves from objective perspectives, and half empathised from actors’ subjective perspectives with several significant age and gender differences (Klein, 1995: 55-62).

Vicarious identifications with characters also depend on whether spectators perceive actor-characters as first-person subjects or third-person objects of themselves. To gather such perspectives regarding specific characters, we ask, ‘How much are you like (this character)? A little, a lot, or not at all?’ and ‘How are you (a little or a lot) like (this character)?’ or ‘How are you different from (this character)?’ Six to 8 year olds tend to perceive similarities and differences objectively, on the basis of physical appearances and active or behavioural traits, whilst older children rely more on comparing characters’ emotional, social and moral traits in relation to themselves from their subjective viewpoints (Klein, 2005:49-50).

Inferring artistic intentions for conventions

Artists may presume that children understand many taken-for-granted theatre conventions, such as onstage costume changes for doubled roles. However, asking children to interpret artists’ intended meanings of various conventions may offer surprising reasoning. For the *Pipe Dream* study, we posed several open-ended questions with photographed prompts regarding conventional expressions of various visual, verbal, and kinesthetic metaphors. For instance, when asked, ‘Why were Magritte’s paintings or pictures projected on the screen during the whole play?’ most children thought they were intended simply to show his artwork or to add general beauty, and fewer interpreted them as visualisations of René’s imagination during specific moments in the performance (Klein, 1993: 15-6). When asked why artists included both screen and human dinosaurs on stage in *Dinosaurus* and what difference it made, reasons reflected artists’ intentions as well as children’s own pragmatic speculations (Klein, 2003: 44-5).

How do you know?

Asking ‘How do you know?’ after each cued recall or recognition question evokes deeper, more critical and self-reflective awareness of knowing about knowing. Responses to this classic metacognitive question reveal not only what images children select for attention purposes but the primary sources of knowledge they rely upon most to encode, decode and recall dramatised stories. Multiple categories of metacognition from explicit and implicit sources within and outside productions emerge from coding all evidence. The following sources of evidence allow artists to know which perceptual and conceptual modes communicated intended ideas best.

Within productions, explicit images refer to semiotic categories used to analyse how performances generate and communicate meanings to spectators. Explicit visual images include what actor-characters do physically or their dramatised actions; how they act or their general acting behaviours, gestures and facial expressions; and their physical appearances, as well as the physical realism of costumes, props and scenic and lighting environments. Explicit verbal images include what actor-characters actually say and communicate in their dialogue and tones of voice, as well as sound effects and music. Psychological inferences refer to what actor-characters think and feel implicitly, or their unstated motives, thoughts, feelings, opinions, traits, and sensory perceptions based on analyses of respective scripts that spectators must construct from available explicit cues. Outside production sources include general life knowledge about the world at large, theatre knowledge and expectations regarding dramatised stories and general performance factors, recollections of personal associations and children’s abiding criteria regarding social realism.

In general, results from each study reveal that the more young spectators report using visual cues, primarily characters’ dramatic actions, or, in the case of 6 year olds, the actors’ behaviour, the more they also report using verbal-aural cues and making inferences about actors’ internalised thoughts. The more they integrate available visual, verbal-aural, and psychological cues, the more they report learning major thematic concepts in plays. Explicit dialogue concerning a protagonist’s primary goal also increases opportunities for inferring abstract ideas about a play’s theme.

Future challenges

While the evidence from these and other international studies may or may not surprise theatre researchers and artists, their findings affirm common cognitive-affective principles that developmental psychologists take for granted. Nevertheless, I hope that these recommended questioning and coding methods may assist UK researchers in their future reception studies, as well as theatre producers who seek to express their intended meanings with optimal success. Whilst such methods merely serve as tools toward understanding and appreciating how children’s minds function and transition around age 8, I believe we need to challenge our current artistic and institutional practices by revising and integrating our long-cherished dramatic theories and beliefs about childhood more in concert with the evidence from cognitive development.

Given an accumulation of research discoveries from international reception studies over the past thirty years, it appears to me that the evidence from such studies has not made any discernible difference on the profession of theatre for young audiences. Whilst reception studies provide invaluable opportunities for children to reflect upon performances and deepen their critical appreciations, once researchers and artists know what, how and why they responded to particular productions as they did, artists and researchers seldom apply such discoveries to their future work in order to address and resolve ongoing and larger problems within and outside the profession. For example, all too many TYA companies continue to produce trivial entertainment without considering its long-term consequences on the viability of live theatre in this digital age. In addition, all too many people still believe in the myth of future audiences; that is, that providing children with quality theatre today will create future adult patrons of tomorrow, despite contradictory evidence that theatre attendance is decreasing around the world (Klein and Schonmann 2011). Thus, UK researchers might explain why only 23% of UK spectators ages 16 and over attend theatre at least once annually, despite their educations in the arts (Chan *et al* 2008; *cf* Pitts 2007: 765-67).

From my vantage point in the United States, it appears to me that reception studies are treated as one-time past events having little to no future impact upon the profession as a whole, much like ephemeral and localised performances themselves. I find that most theatre people believe fervently that the singular contexts of different child spectators and different theatre productions render respective aesthetic and artistic sides of the communication equation unique, unrepeatable and non-generaliseable to other contexts. For these reasons, artists tend to disregard evidence from reception studies, opting instead to reproduce theatrical traditions or to create innovative experiments with as much risk-taking artistry as economic market conditions will allow. After all, artists are responsible only for creating art and not necessarily for applying research discoveries about children’s minds and emotions as psychologists.

For their part, many theatre researchers recreate reception studies primarily and simply by redefining theoretical and methodological constructs, unlike social science investigators who first conduct thorough literature reviews of past evidence in order to work on specific research questions that have yet to be answered. These investigators thereby build upon and change existing knowledge and practices.

If progressive, forward-thrusting change controls the dominant paradigm for determining and evaluating successful research and productions, I find that any evidence from children does not persuade adults that children’s formulations of theatre spectatorship hold significant and valuable implications for all generational ages in the present and in the future. In my experience, descriptive evidence of children’s appreciative criticisms of particular productions does not persuade artists to change their business-as-usual practices and institutional policies, even when such evidence contradicts their artistic intentions and romanticised beliefs regarding children’s mindful imaginations. Nor does this accumulated evidence persuade institutional administrators and cultural policy makers that children are entitled to more provocative and highly compelling theatre right here and now, as Reason (2010: 30) and others maintain. Proving that reception studies have changed the TYA profession artistically and educationally for the better appears to require alternative strategies of persuasion.

Based on the evidence of my own and others’ reception studies, I agree with Reason (2010:57) that inductive evidence does generalise to other child populations because the physiological nature and mediated nurturing of children’s minds depends on the neurologically maturing properties of their malleable brains. Yet we need more deductive arguments that move from redefining general dramatic theories and reinterpreting embedded beliefs about children’s competencies to particular propositions that apply directly to artistic practices.

Rather than reproduce interpretations of children’s interpretations of productions, researchers ~~need to~~ might synthesise and build upon the foundational evidence of children’s emotion-driven minds across multiple, context-dependent reception studies to advance the profession’s artistic knowledge. However, if the generalisable evidence of children’s competent minds was to be synthesised into one publication, I suspect that postmodern theorists and cultural critics would attack this cognitive and neurological evidence as being essentialist and positivist in opposition to their absolutist beliefs in unique individual differences and contextual contingencies. Likewise, if deductive artistic strategies were to be proposed based on the synthesised evidence of children’s actual rather than hypothetical imaginations, I suspect that artists would interpret and resist such strategies as formulaic prescriptions on how to create and evaluate their uniquely individualised art. These deductive and critically reasoned challenges to existing inductive and multi-relative beliefs in current artistic practices require more emotionally resonant arguments and a mutual willingness to move beyond debilitating fears of losing faith in our respective epistemological positions (Klein, 2009:93-5). Yet by overcoming these understandable fears and inherently dramatic conflicts we may also conjoin a multiplicity of theories and practices and thereby establish more direct connections with all generational aesthetic experiences to prove why theatre spectatorship matters to global cultures. References

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