

Performance Factors that Inhibit Empathy and Trigger Distancing: *Crying to Laugh*

Jeanne Klein

While many theatre producers assume that child audiences empathize and identify with stage heroes and heroines during (and even after) performances (as observed from their emotionally contagious behaviors), some do not believe that children can or should verbalize their otherwise private empathetic or moralistic experiences (e.g., Davis and M. J. Evans 72; C. Evans and Zeder). Moreover, empathetic processes and aesthetic sensibilities may be subverted by the countless presentational plays in the Theatre for Young Audience (TYA) repertoire which seek to teach audiences explicit social and moral messages. While theatre art, entertainment, and education go hand in hand, artists and educators debate one emphasis over the other in inconclusive, semantic arguments (e.g., Courtney; Levy 7-12; Neelands; Swartzell). To clarify these debates as they relate to children, performance and reception theories may be analyzed in practice through systematic research with young audiences. Results from an empathy study conducted with 88 children in grades one, three, and five challenge theoretical assumptions about emotional, learning experiences by illuminating the nature of empathy in presentational theatre.

Empathy may be defined as sharing vicariously another's emotions and thoughts. This construct is most commonly measured by predispositional indices (Bryant 1982) and by matching viewers' self-reports of emotions ("How did you feel when . . . ?") and reasons ("What made you feel that way?") with characters' emotions after viewing a story (e.g., Strayer 1993). Empathy (feeling *with*) is distinguished from sympathy (feeling *for*), personal distress, and projective role-taking by the extent to which viewers focus on others more than on themselves (Eisenberg and Strayer 3-10), or the inner and outer frameworks from which audiences imagine characters' perspectives (Bruner 21). These structural differences are crucial because empathy, not sympathy, may generate subsequent cooperative and altruistic behaviors (Eisenberg 23-32).

In contrast, Carol Gilligan and her colleagues challenge these predominant theories by arguing that empathetic compassion or "co-feeling" should not be defined by disconnecting one's self from others (1988, 119-128). While they agree that, "The aesthetic sensibilities of children . . . demonstrate their

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ability to enter into the feelings of others and to imagine affectively how others feel" (124), such vicarious experiences connect viewers implicitly in relationship with characters. Gilligan's prolific work on the moral development of girls and women underscores how definitions of empathy and morality depend on understanding and *thinking from within* two gender-related perspectives—one based on subjective caring and the other based on objective justice (e.g., Brown and Gilligan 2–5; Levy 48; cf. Dolan). By testing these theories in contextualized performance practice, TYA producers may come to a more practical, less idealistic, and more conclusive understanding of how artistic factors affect the educational role of empathy in theatre for young audiences.

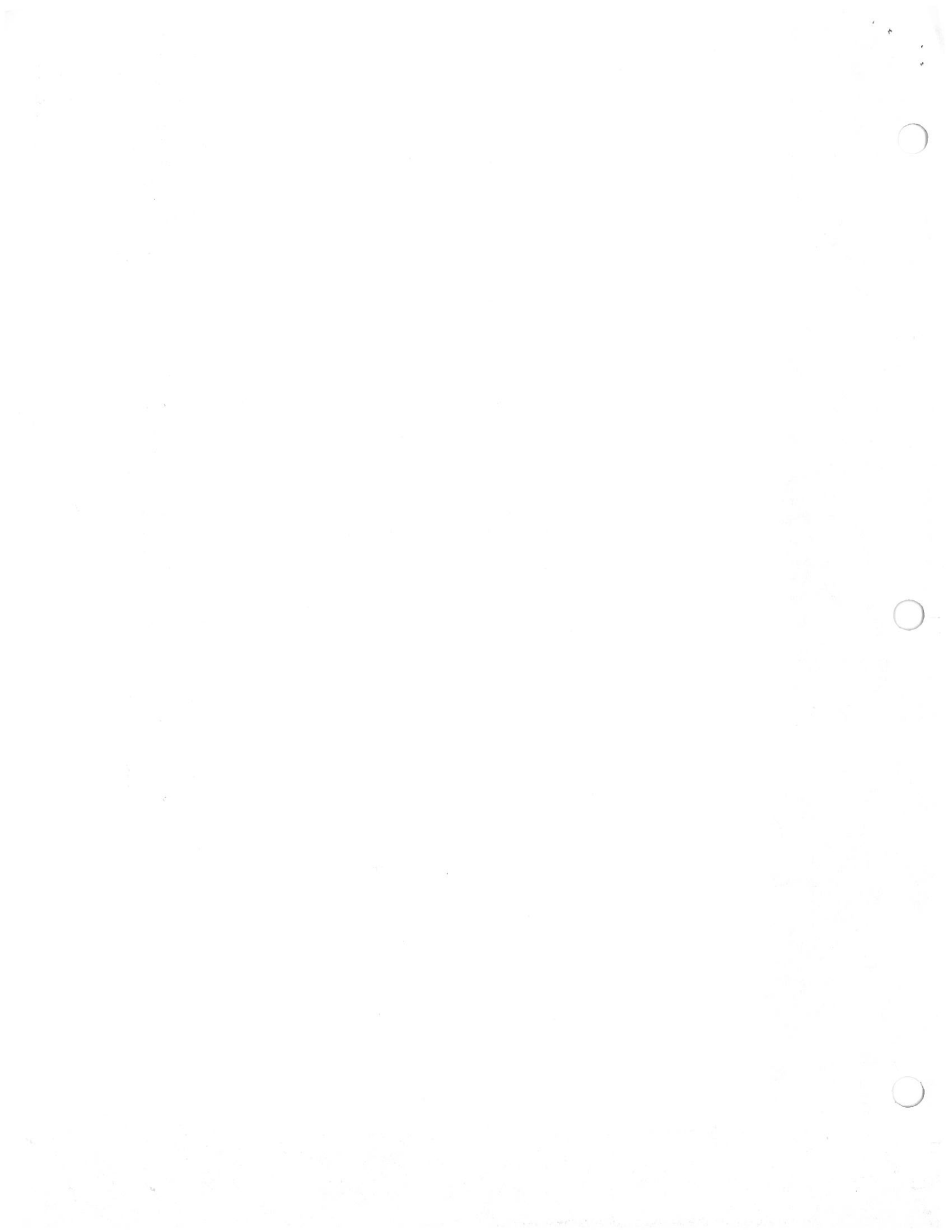
METHOD¹

Crying to Laugh, a presentational play for ages five to eight, explicitly demonstrates the value of healthy emotional expression. The story revolves around Mea (Me, the ego), who lives in a big adult world with its gigantic bed, mirror, and shower. When Mea's dog, Shado, accidentally drowns, Yua (You, the superego), her happy caretaker on stilts, admonishes Mea not to cry or she won't grow up big like him. But Mea suffers from physical aches until her Seluf (her Self, the id) enters from a mirror to teach her to cry. Seluf shows Mea how her physical stress is like balloons stuffed inside her body which must be popped. When Seluf removes Yua's stilts and exposes his hypocrisy, Mea unleashes her emotions and pops balloons that fall from above. She learns that it's alright to cry and to express her Self freely.

Eighty-eight children responded to the production in individual, 15-minute interviews at three schools one day after theatre attendance. There were 33 first graders (mean age 7), 28 third graders (mean age 9), and 27 fifth graders (mean age 11) (44 boys and 44 girls) from various socio-economic class neighborhoods. Two weeks before theatre attendance, they answered a 35-item questionnaire to test whether empathetic predispositions (Bryant 1982) and self-evaluations of drama skills (Wright) would relate to their emotional perspectives of the play.

Among other open-ended interview questions, they were asked to recall "what the play was about," and what Mea learned (the play's theme) and how they knew it. To measure emotional responses, they were asked how they felt (using facial diagrams of seven basic emotions) during six situations (from long-shot photo prompts), which actors had reported as their most intensely felt experiences during the play:

- 1) When Mea's dog drowned (conflict);
- 2) When Yua carried Shado to the trash can (reaction 1);
- 3) When Seluf saw Yua's stilts (discovery);
- 4) When Seluf couldn't come out of the mirror after Yua put a big X on it (crisis);
- 5) When Mea saw Yua's stilts (climax); and,
- 6) At the end of the play, when Mea jumped all over the bed (reaction 2).



They were also asked how they were similar to or different from each character, to compare perceived traits of identifications.

Responses were coded by the presence and frequency of emergent, qualitative categories or conceptual patterns of response. Attributions or reasons for emotions (i.e., "What made you feel that way?") for each situation were coded into one of four primary categories, which emerged from repeated analyses of all responses, and then added across situations to create four respective frequency scores. Conceptual terms from psychology guided categorical definitions as follows: *Empathy* was defined as *identical* matches with protagonists' subjective emotions and spoken reasons (e.g., When Mea's dog drowned, "I felt sad because she lost her best friend"; or, when Mea saw Yua's stilts, "[I felt] angry that Yua was cheating on her, making her believe something that she didn't really know, that wasn't really true"). *Sympathy* was defined as plausible emotions with objective reasons *different* from the targeted characters (i.e., personal distress, projection, emotional contagion, and role-taking) (e.g., "If someone threw my dog away, I would feel mad"). While empathy and sympathy referred to emotions experienced within the characters' fictive framework, *distancing* was defined as personal opinions made outside the fiction. In other words, children's emotions were triggered by performance cues (e.g., "I laughed at her funny face"), script expectations (e.g., "I felt surprised because I didn't think Mea would ever believe that Yua was on stilts"), personal associations or experiences (e.g., "I felt sad when my pet died"), or moral prescriptions (e.g., "I felt surprised because I don't like when someone just puts a X on someone else's property"). *No attributions* occurred when the child repeated the situation as given or did not state what made him or her feel an emotion. Reliability for coding among three raters ranged from 89% to 100%.

RESULTS

Results confirmed how the cognitive strategies, experiences, desires, and expectations that children brought with them to performances determined their emotional responses by age, gender, and socialization over artistic intentions to induce empathy (cf. Carlson 96-97). Most children (88%) sympathized and distanced themselves from objective perspectives and (poetic) justice orientations. Only half (53%) empathized from subjective perspectives and caring orientations, by not only feeling protagonists' same emotions, but by also *thinking* protagonists' thoughts made explicit in the dialogue.

As confirmed in other studies (e.g., Strayer 1989), empathy increased with age by gender as first grade girls empathized nearly as often as fifth grade boys. Third graders marked this developmental shift. Girls empathized and sympathized more often in that, more than boys, they:

- 1) reported imagining themselves as female characters;
- 2) perceived similarities with the ideal female heroine (because, like Seluf, "I express my feeling a lot" and "I teach people that it's okay to let out their emotions") (cf. M. Goldberg 92-95);

- 3) compared characters' emotional traits to themselves (e.g., "I like to cry when I have problems that can't be solved sometimes");
- 4) recalled the play's obstacle (not to cry) more frequently; and,
- 5) reported feeling sad "a lot" more than "a little" for half of the given situations.

Boys distanced themselves more often in that, more than girls, they associated characters' pleasurable activities with personal desires, and they judged theatrical props and dramatic situations from personal expectations, which were either met or thwarted by staged outcomes.

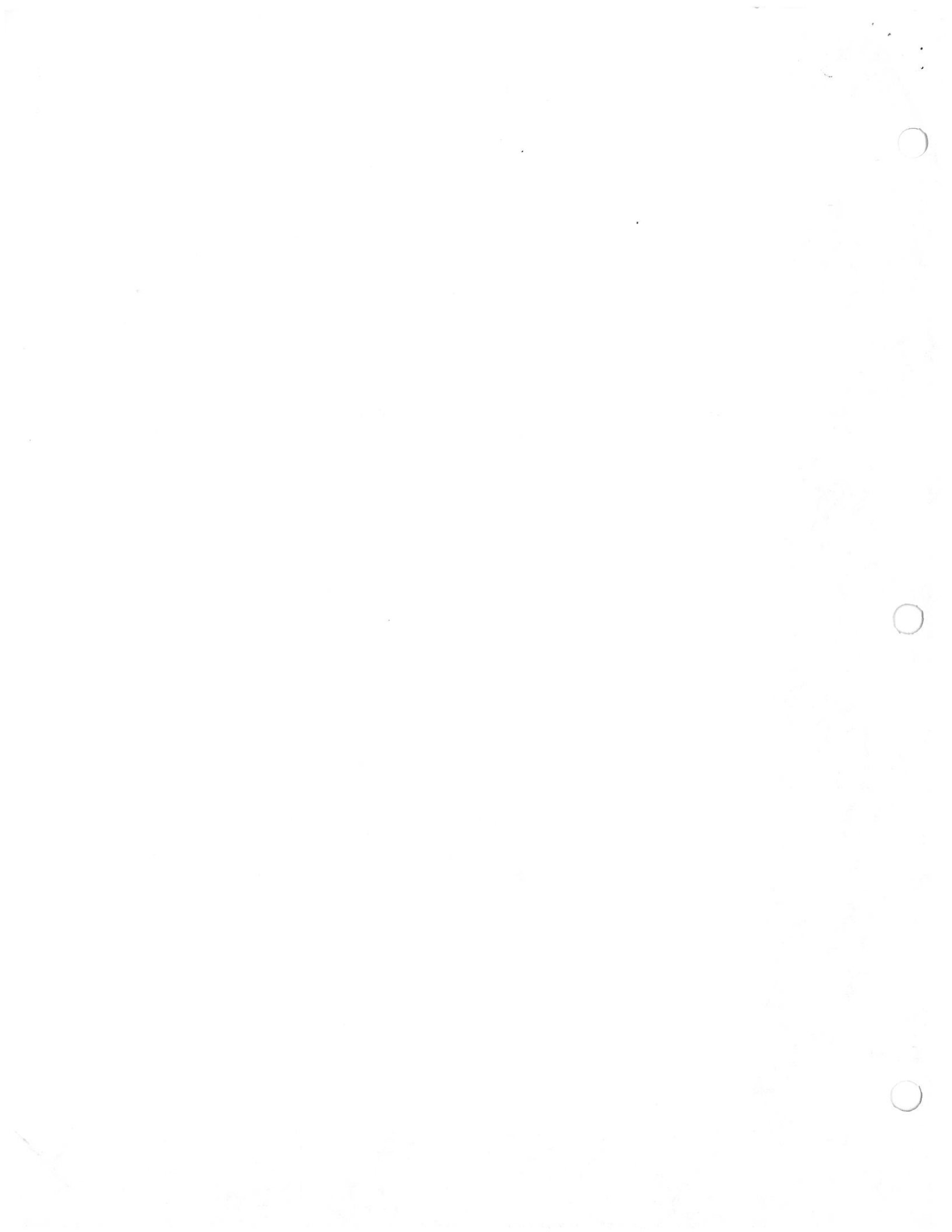
Older children empathized and sympathized more often in that, more than younger children, they:

- 1) sustained thinking from within characters' perspectives during interviews (and, potentially, during the performance);
- 2) compared characters' emotional behaviors and their social or moral traits to themselves (e.g., "Like when someone's crying and trying to hold it in, I tell them just go ahead and let it out," or "I try not to lie to my friends" (cf. Damon and Hart 61);
- 3) recalled more central scenes and themes; and,
- 4) applied the play's theme to themselves or society (i.e., "It's okay to cry" and "You should express your feelings").

First graders found themselves *dissimilar* from protagonists when they focused primarily on characters' physical appearances (i.e., human vs. inanimate, gender, age, physical height and weight, facial makeup, costumes, and props) (e.g., "I'm not a girl"). Although this play was directed at primary grade audiences, *Crying to Laugh* reverberated most strongly with fifth grade girls (and older audiences), who may have recognized the debilitating consequences of restricting their emotions and self-expression (e.g., "Sometimes I get told how my feelings should be and sometimes I feel sick when that happens, just like [Mea] did—sort of not sure what she should do") (cf. Brown and Gilligan).

Though girls began with higher empathetic and dramatic predispositions than boys, which correlated highly with imagination variables, such personal traits bore no significant relationships with their reasons for emotional responses. Similar personal experiences (e.g., the death of a pet) and dramatic role-taking (i.e., "If I were the character in this situation") were used infrequently as *tools* for understanding characters' emotions (Bryant 1987, 249–254), with no significant relationships to self-evaluations of drama skills.

Most children recalled the play's obstacle (Yua won't let Mea cry) (63%) more than its goal (Seluf teaches Mea to cry) (48%), conflict (Mea can't cry when her dog dies) (42%), solution (to cry) (36%), or thematic resolution (to express feelings) (44%) (see Figure 1). Recollections of the play's central events, or "what the play was about," superceded personal thematic applications and the actors' most intensely felt moments in the play (9% to 23%). In fact, few children (17%) reported that the play was even about "feelings"



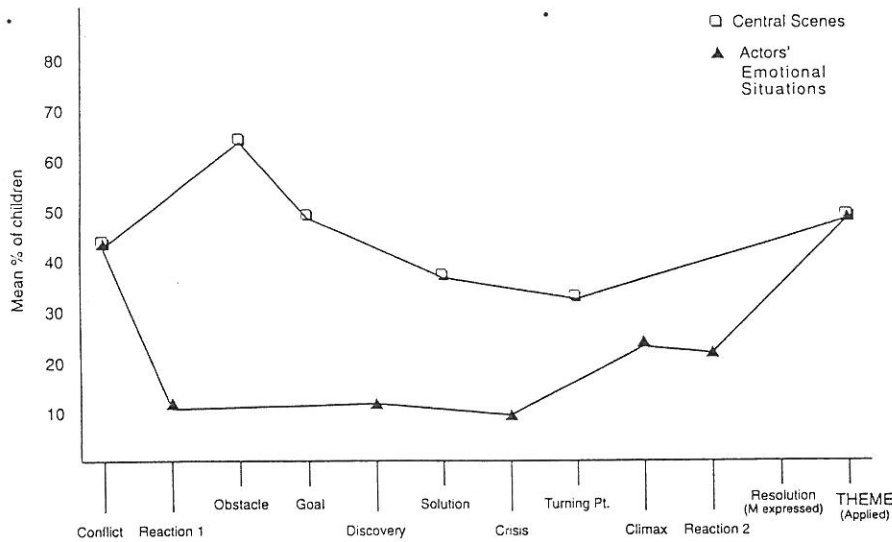


Figure 1. Mean percent of children who recalled play's events and theme.

or "emotions." These results confirm other story recall studies which find that children remember characters' actions far more than their emotions (Shantz 498-501; Hayes and Casey). Clearly, meaning-making, story comprehension is more memorable than experiences of actors' "emotional truths" (cf. Mikhailov 3-4).²

Nevertheless, cognitive and affective factors interacted interdependently during empathetic processes. The fact that children expressed more sympathy than empathy may be explained by theoretical models which propose that sympathy results from empathy both during and/or after viewing an emotional event (Strayer 1987, 226-228). While asking children to reflect upon their emotional experiences one day later allows more time for understanding, more sympathy than empathy may have resulted naturally because children were asked to recall their emotions objectively. On the other hand, those who empathized during the subsequent interview may have been those very audience members who cared, thought, and felt with protagonists most deeply during performances for longer lasting durations of time. Either way, producers should use the term *sympathy*, not *empathy*, to describe children's emotional experiences with presentational styles of playwriting and performance. A detailed analysis of presentational factors in *Crying to Laugh* further explains how memorable, salient elements interact with empathetic processes in delayed recall.

Performance Factors that Inhibit Empathy

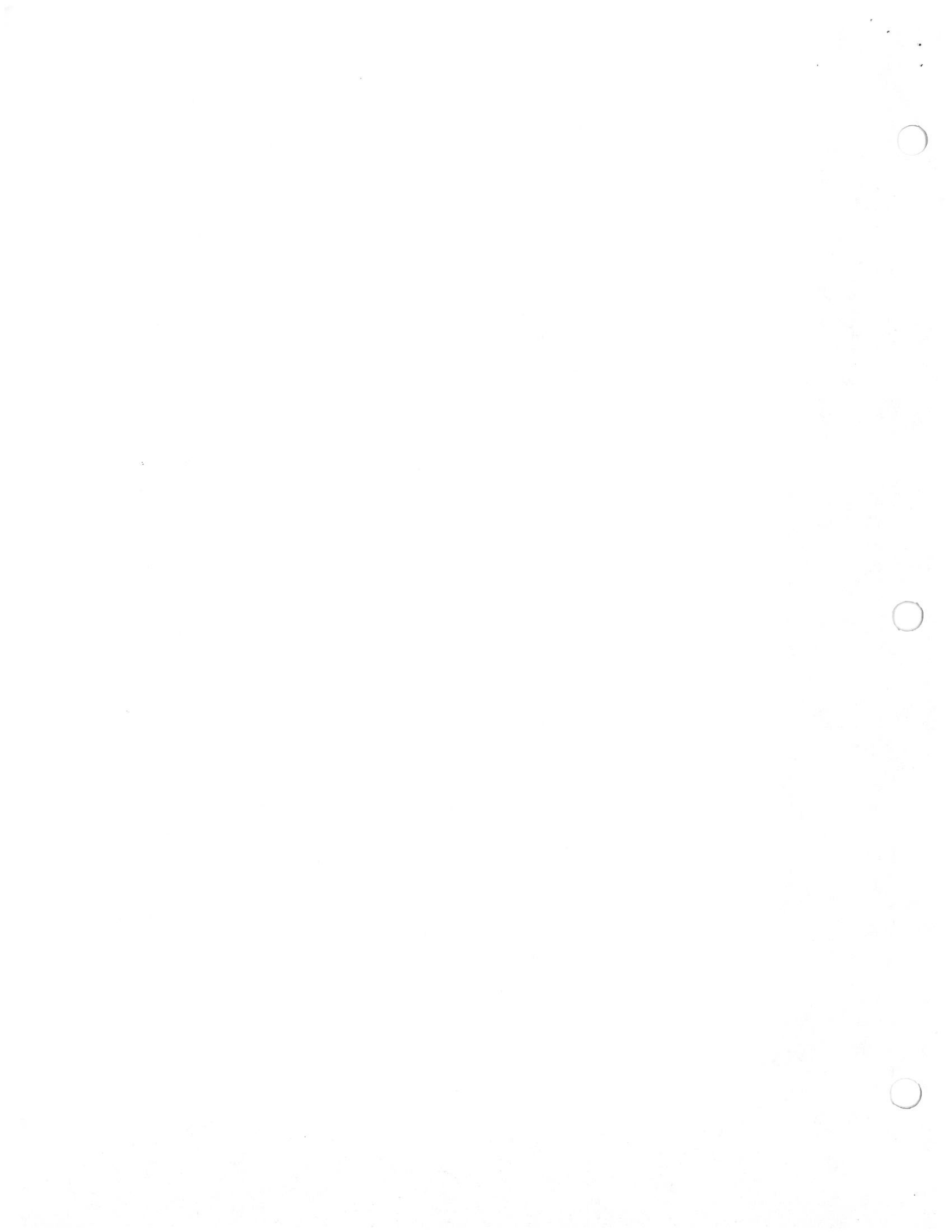
While children felt compassion for Mea's plight (as many identified with Seluf, her ideal role-model), several key performance factors inhibited empathy, induced sympathy, and triggered distancing. First, the inability of the audience to assist protagonists directly on stage (in this non-participatory

production) may have induced objective perspectives and justice orientations from the start. Though few, but equal, numbers of boys and girls (30% total) judged Yua's unjust actions with moral prescriptions (e.g., "Because you should bury the animal instead of throwing it away," or "Because you shouldn't lock somebody else's friend away"), those who focused on this antagonist's immoral actions were less likely to sympathize. This finding suggests why teachers and parents, who oppose plays which supposedly "glorify" anti-social behaviors on stage, fail to focus on the overriding values of prosocial resolutions in such plays.

Second, characters broke "the fourth wall" by speaking directly to spectators and acknowledging their collective presence. This device may have heightened self-awarenesses of watching live actors (not necessarily fictive characters) by calling attention to the reality that this artificially staged event was "just a play" (Swortzell 246). Audiences may have been distanced outside the fiction whenever characters related their internal thoughts and motives directly (cf. Langer 316-319).

Third, the play's dramatic events and staged activities and its expressionistic use of theatrical costumes, props, song, and spectacle moderated emotional responses during performances (see Figure 2). Because the major conflict and obstacle were introduced within the first few minutes of the play, spectators had not yet had sufficient time to become familiar with these novel characters or emotionally engaged in their situations, so empathetic feelings were quite low (2% to 6%). In addition, the drowning (conflict) and literal trashing of a hand puppet (reaction 1) created a fantasy out of an otherwise realistic situation (e.g., "I felt okay 'cause I just knew that it was a play, and I also knew that that dog was just a fake"). Some children expressed compassion more for the "poor doggie" than for Mea's loss, because "I like animals a lot and I don't like to see them die." Shado's death also shocked and "alienated" some viewers (mostly adults), because "I didn't think the dog was gonna die" (cf. Klein 1986, 3).

Despite these immediate distancing factors, empathetic involvement increased steadily during the course of the play, as spectators grew connected and developed vicarious relationships. Sympathetic viewers expressed personal distress or contagious sadness for Mea when Shado died, and they also projected their indignant anger at Yua when he threw Shado away and when he trapped Seluf in the mirror (e.g., "Yua didn't really care about Mea's feelings," and "He didn't even listen to what she said"). Most felt happy for Mea when she saw Yua's stilts, because "that's the first time she's yelled at somebody"; and because "finally Mea listened to her Self," "found out the truth," and "proved [Yua] wrong." Children empathized most during the play's resolution by sharing Mea's jubilant victory of self-expression (e.g., "I felt happy because she knew that nobody could tease her about her size and tell her not to cry. She could show her feelings, and I think that's special"). After all, audiences may prefer more to empathize happily with winners in victory than sadly with losers in conflict with their inner selves.



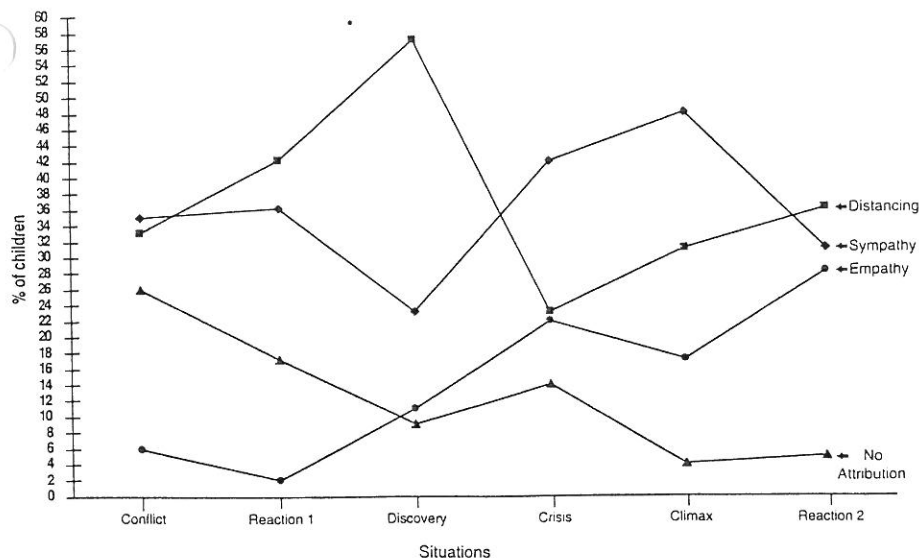


Figure 2. Total percent of children's attributions across situations.

As noted above, theatrical props also triggered distancing. One unfamiliar theatrical device, in particular, triggered the most distancing (57%) of all given situations by meeting or thwarting children's personal expectations. Just as Seluf discovered Yua's two-foot stilts under his pant leg, so too did audience members discover whether their conventional assumptions were right or wrong. Some children, watching from presentational perspectives, reported feeling "OK" or neutral, because "it was obvious he was on stilts" (e.g., "I knew he was on stilts because you don't usually see people [eight-foot] tall"). They accepted this costume convention "for acting," without questioning it, but "as soon as I saw [the stilts], it was just like, 'Why in the world would they be showing his stilts?'" They were surprised that the actors would reveal the stilts, thereby exposing a technical trick (e.g., "I didn't really think that she was gonna lift his pant leg so you could see his stilts"). Boys appeared to be more intrigued by the stilts than girls (e.g., "I thought he was on like the *wooden* stilts, not like metal stilts"). Others were taken aback when they realized that the protagonists in the drama didn't know what was so obvious to the audience (e.g., "I knew that they *were* stilts, 'cause I could tell that. But when the Seluf uncovered it up, and I realized that they didn't know, I kinda went like, 'Whoa'"). Some didn't expect these characters ever to learn of the stilts (e.g., "Even though I knew he had stilts on, I never thought they'd find out"). Still others, who suspended disbelief by believing in this illusion of height, had no idea that Yua faked his adult superiority on stilts (like Seluf). However, they were jarred out of these perspectives with their surprise in the discovery that Yua's stilts were a crucial plot device in the play's action (e.g., "I didn't think the story would kind of be based on that. I thought he was just gonna be tall, and she wouldn't pull [his pant leg] up").

As illustrated above, some children held specific plot and character expectations (probably learned from their experiences with other stories) which distanced them outside the drama. For example, some felt "OK" knowing that "at some point in the play that [Mea] would feel a little bit better" after Shado's death; or that "Mea would probably get Self out some way" from being trapped in the mirror. Many expected these female protagonists to discover the truth about Yua's deception—eventually—but, for some, "I didn't think that Mea would ever find out that Yua had stilts," "because she was wasn't believing the Seluf." Some felt surprised when Mea jumped on the bed, because "I didn't expect her to do that," "in front of the person she looked up to [because] he didn't want her to do that."

While such expectations about the story and theatrical elements accounted for over half of all distancing factors, personal associations and enjoyment made up the other half. First and third grade boys, in particular, often associated how they "liked" similar things (e.g., dogs) and incidental activities (e.g., "I like to jump on beds and throw everything around," and "I like balloons popping and things going flying"). They often laughed *at* actors' "funny" antics and facial expressions, rather than *with* characters' discoveries, regardless of the seriousness of given situations. For example, some felt happy because "[Seluf] looked up [Yua's] pants and he didn't feel it"; "It was funny trying to get [Seluf] out [from the mirror]"; and, "I thought it was kind of funny how he was small, too, [and] how [Mea] was angry at him. . . ."

The extravagant spectacle and special effects used at the play's climatic resolution inhibited empathy and triggered distancing the most by overloading and distracting the youngest children from the play's metaphoric theme (see photo). Empathy (28%) and sympathy (31%) converged with distancing (36%), as children's contagiously happy enjoyment—and cognitive focus—split three ways in their interpretations of the finale. When colorful balloons, feathers, and soft balls fell from above, and when a mirror ball cast soft purple "balloons" of moving light around the auditorium, children's attention focused joyfully on this spectacle—thus, many missed the metaphoric implications of the scene. In fact, a few children were so delighted with Mea's romp in this environment, they wanted to break the fourth wall further by participating on stage "'Cause any kid would if they saw it." While empathizers perceived this spectacle as an aesthetic expression of Mea's emotional release and jubilant catharsis (e.g., "Because she finally knew that she could let out her feelings when she wanted"), as the artists intended, sympathizers projected their own meanings. Their happiness for Mea derived from her ability "to do stuff that she's never gotten to do before," because "she was having fun like she's supposed to." More specifically, "she got to mess up the bed," "throwing that pillow around and popping balloons"; because "she didn't have to worry about keeping everything clean," and "she didn't have to listen to Yua anymore" by "trying to be this clean freak like her father."



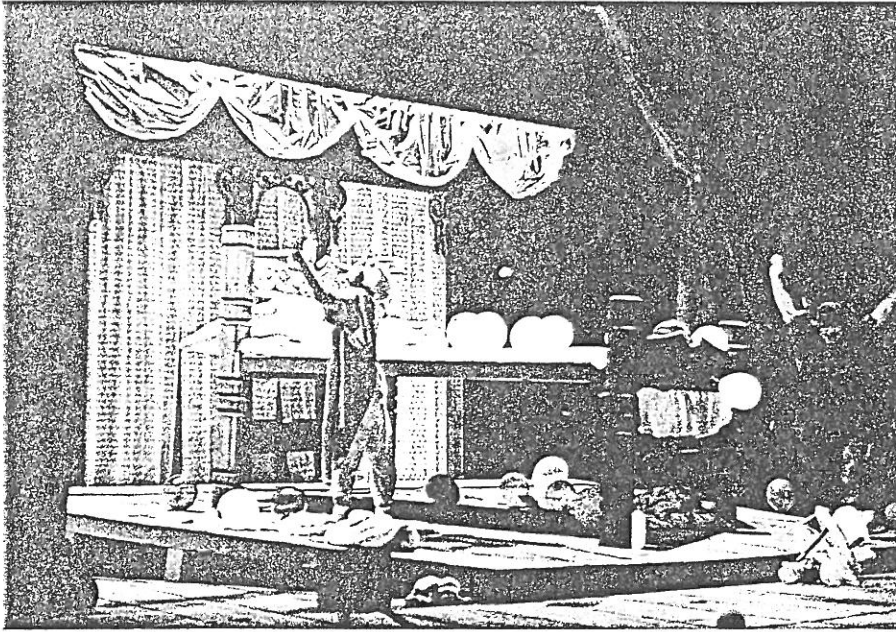


Figure 3. Seluf (Elizabeth D'Amato) and Mea (Cinnamon Schultz) celebrate in the finale of *Crying to Laugh* (KU Theatre for Young People). Photo: Earl Iversen.

Though these activities *represented* Mea's psychological objective to express her true inner feelings, many children perceived and focused on her incidental physical activities more than on her central psychological actions. No one reported that Mea's balloon-popping *signified* her physical release of stress, even though Seluf had demonstrated and *taught* this central metaphor explicitly, both visually and verbally, earlier in the play. Because few (20%) recalled that Mea's verbally and visually repeated physical aches *caused* her internal conflict, and that the solution was to cry, many young children missed the play's "lesson" that people must cry in order to release stress. Instead, the more often repeated activity of chanting the "Zip" song, Mea's tactic to lock in feelings, outweighed Seluf's less repeated "Unzip" song to "let it go" as another crucial factor which distracted children from inferring the underlying theme.

Given these intrusive performance factors, only 21% of the first graders and 39% of the third graders recalled that the play was about healthy emotional expression. Even when asked to infer what Mea learned at the end of the play, almost half (48%) of the first graders and one third (32%) of the third graders still had not reported, even literally, that Mea learned to cry, to get angry, or to express her Self—unlike the other half of their peers who relied on Seluf's verbal teaching to infer Mea's learning (i.e., "because Seluf taught Mea to cry"). In contrast, fifth graders had little difficulty recalling (78%) or inferring (93%) the play's intended theme (e.g., "She learned you shouldn't keep your feelings inside yourself, because you will get sick and

to just let it all out")—by relying more on Mea's emotional behaviors (78%) than on Seluf's teaching (37%). Therefore, the play's presentational performance style not only inhibited empathy, but its distancing factors ironically *diverted*—that is, *entertained*—attention away from the performance's educational purpose for *primary grade* audiences. Even Seluf's verbal teaching and explicit role-modeling could not overpower other, more salient, visual features of this performance for 40% of the first and third graders combined.

This analysis indicates that *Crying to Laugh* was not completely successful in "teaching" primary grade audiences "new" ideas about crying, getting angry, or releasing emotional stress whenever they feel physically ill. The play's central problem and solution may not have been applicable to many first graders, because they may still be allowed to cry more often than older children who are taught to "control" themselves as they grow up—just as Yua sought to control Mea. They relied less on Mea's emotional behaviors (15%) and more on Seluf's teaching (51%) to infer Mea's learning, perhaps because they had less *need* to compare the physical consequences of not crying against the causes of her divergent problem.

Thus, true to the play's ironic title, children laughed and enjoyed themselves very much—without crying (or *trying to*)—unlike many adults who reported crying by the play's end. Children were entertained, indeed, but not necessarily "educated" or "changed" by this experience, contrary to what many TYA producers propose, believe, and idealize about presentational theatre for young audiences (e.g., Rosenberg and Prendergast 24, 56, 88). Ironically, *Crying to Laugh* may be more applicable to adult audiences—authority figures who need to cry more often and in front of children! Likewise, this play might be more meaningful to primary grade audiences who live the daily stresses of poverty, abuse, and neglect—children who *need* to express their feelings and to release physical stress to someone who cares.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEATRE ARTISTS

Young audiences certainly care and feel compassion for characters as they experience identical or plausible emotions through empathy or sympathetic contagion, personal distress, projection, and sometimes, dramatic role-taking. However, young children distance themselves easily from characters' perspectives when dramatic events, incidental activities, and theatrical elements provoke them to reflect upon personal expectations, experiences, and superficial pleasures. In other words, dramatic conventions and performance features which entertain attention away from metaphoric themes run the risk of triggering distancing and inhibiting empathy, contrary to artistic intentions (cf. Mikhailov 9–12). Thus, when given presentational frameworks, young boys appear likely to disconnect themselves from female character relationships by entertaining personal desires. In contrast, older girls appear likely to *resist* distancing intentions by sustaining their thinking from within characters' perspectives (inside *representational* fictive frameworks) as they seek to connect themselves with female characters.



When children say only that they “like” a play or certain actors or characters, as they frequently do, that, in itself, does not mean they have empathized, or even sympathized. Instead, they are indicating their enjoyment in searching physical appearances for their favorite objects and activities rather than comparing characters’ emotional behaviors against their own. They are being entertained superficially by laughing at actors’ tactics; and dishonest actors, who play caricatures more than characters, are only too happy to comply by feeding their mutual egos (Klein 1992).

Children’s personal enjoyment is by no means an indication of their “evaluations” of theatre. After all, just because a person likes a play doesn’t make him or her an educated theatre critic. Elementary-age students need to move beyond preschool “favoritism” and “beauty and realism” stages of what they like about art and entertainment to deeper, more expressive evaluations of artistic significations (Parsons). Because young boys focus more on external performance factors and older girls focus more on internal character relationships, all young audiences need to integrate these two essential and complementary modes of making meaning from performances. Study guides might emphasize how a production’s visualized actions and designs *signify* a play’s metaphoric meanings in performance beyond superficial representations.

Theatre artists must go beyond basic script analysis to more in-depth interpretations of how visual signs in performance may affect young spectators’ minds, learning, and aesthetic appreciation. For example, to solve the diverting spectacle problem of the final scene in *Crying to Laugh*, a director could slow the action to give young children time to realize its metaphoric significance. After Mea’s explosive monologue on the bed, one lone balloon could fall. Mea could catch it, pause to reflect upon what Seluf taught her about its symbolism, and then pop it against her old stomach ache with all her gleeful might. More balloons could then fall, more gradually, so she could pop each one at a time—before allowing the whole onslaught of feathers and balls to descend and the mirror ball to revolve. Youngsters could then, more directly, connect Mea’s thinking about balloons with her internal aches.

For those TYA companies whose missions prioritize education over art, presentational theatre may not be the most effective entertaining means of teaching intrapersonal behaviors to the primary grades. Whether representational or alternative styles of theatre (e.g., Theatre-In-Education) can do better remains for future comparative investigations. For example, when participation theatre teaches young children directly to engage in *characters’*, not actors’, perspectives, without distracting conventions that overpower educational themes, this form may accomplish empathetic goals and artistic missions more effectively than others (M. Goldberg 104–106).

Directors should also engage in more cross-gender and non-traditional casting as a further way to achieve empathetic goals.³ Boys need to see male

heroes revealing more "feminine" behaviors, and girls need more frequent exposure to female heroines with assertive "masculine" qualities. And, obviously, boys and girls need both role-models to understand and accept what it means to be full human beings.

Breaking children (and adults) of their socially constructed gender and ethnic stereotypes will not come easy, as numerous researchers have demonstrated (e.g., Serbin et al.). For example, even after reading feminist tales to preschoolers, Davies concludes, "The power of the pre-existing structure of the traditional narrative to prevent a new form of narrative from being heard is ever-present" (69). As long as children are socialized by families, schools, and media to stereotype behaviors by gender, girls will continue to identify with empowered female and strong male characters, and boys will continue to perceive themselves as powerful (and usually violent) male figures more often than as "weak and emotional" heroines.

More research is needed to explore the interactive nature of empathy in other theatre performances and in drama education (e.g., Bramwell). Though drama can be a potent artistic method of "empathy education" (Eisenberg 101-104), students may not necessarily empathize if they play characters objectively, rather than subjectively as themselves, by focusing self-consciously on acting skills. Drama leaders, who sustain character perspectives in role, may stimulate empathy best, especially if they encourage students to imagine themselves in relation to *divergent* emotional perspectives (Strayer 1987, 221-225).

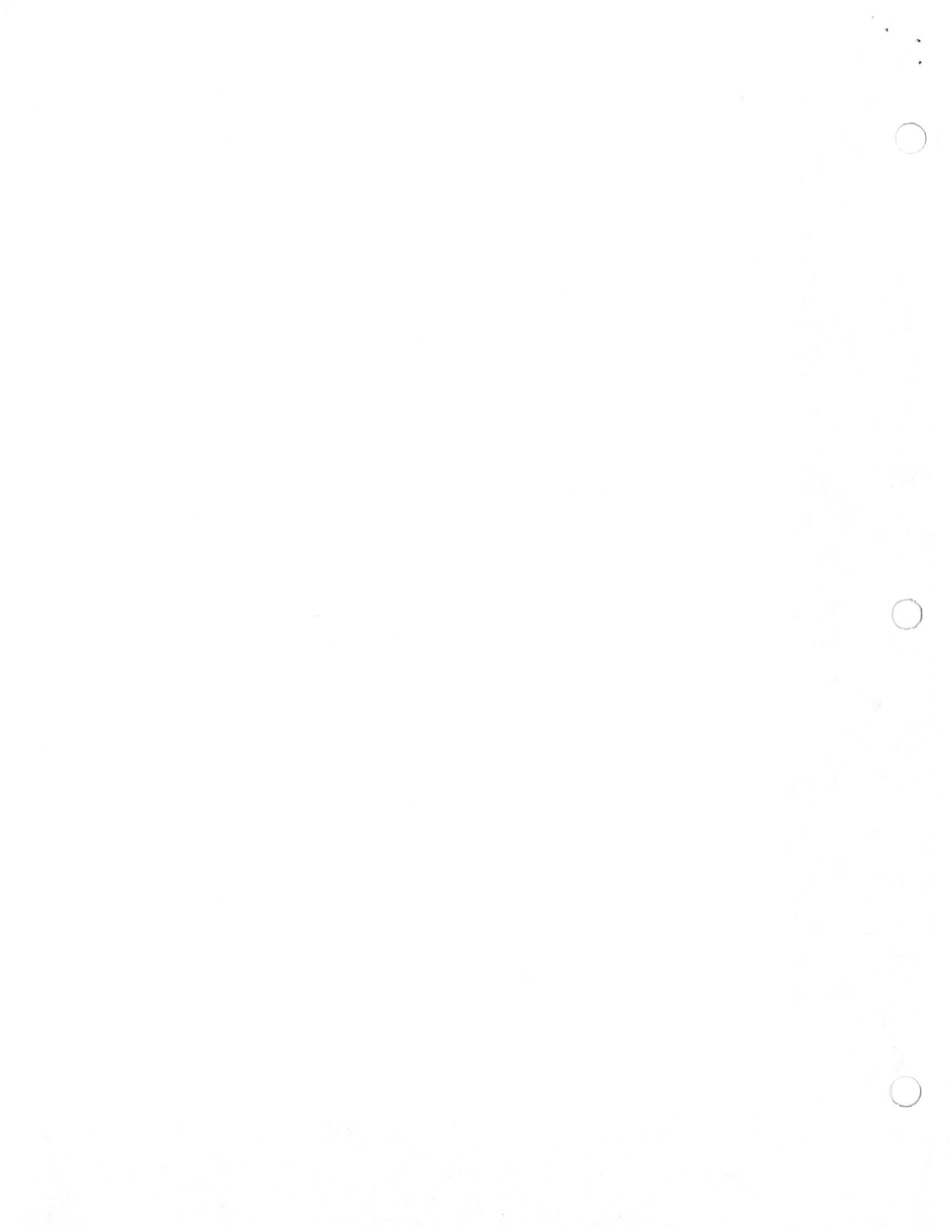
By questioning assumptions and testing reception theories in practice, investigators may challenge theoretical concepts with *children's* voices rather than with adults' *sympathetic projections* of childhood fantasies and naive ideas. By empathizing with young audiences, artists and educators may then entertain caring and compassionate children through theatre that offers more emotionally rewarding pleasures.

NOTES

¹ For details about the methods and results of this study, see Jeanne M. Klein, "The Nature of Empathy in Theatre: *Crying to Laugh*," a 407-page technical report submitted to ERIC. While conclusions regarding this particular performance of this play reflect the contexts specific to this geographic population, its results are generalizable according to the constructivist principles of social cognitive psychology.

² For example, Carol Evans, artistic director of Metro Theatre Company, and Suzan Zeder, playwright-in-residence at the University of Texas at Austin, have argued elsewhere that children's attention is held by "emotional truth" and not "comprehensible" material which they cannot necessarily verbalize.

³ I had originally intended to cast a male actor in the role of Mea, as a boy who needs to cry, to explore whether boys would identify with a male protagonist exhibiting "female" behaviors. Unfortunately, it was not possible to cast a short male actor from the largely female talent pool of short women.



 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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