

The Impact of Theatre Performance in a school setting on Children's Learning

(Vol. 1 of 2)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis asks how does school-based theatre performance help primary-aged children learn, how is the learning altered or enriched by teacher intervention and how does the impact of the performance change over time? Drawing upon three case-study productions between 2016 to 2018 of Devon based performance company Theatre Alibi, this inter-disciplinary research explores the relationship between the company, schools and centrally the children who have experienced their performances. Using a child-centred, mixed method approach, incorporating quantitative and qualitative analysis and arts-based methods to capture research from over 900 children aged between 5-11 years, this thesis provides new insights into audience reception, educational and longitudinal impact. It also gives feedback on under-researched audiences for theatre makers, educators, academics and policy makers on the impact of theatre on children. This thesis traces the connection between theatre and learning, looking in turn at: the company's contribution and distinctiveness in the field of Educational Theatre; the emotional impact of a one-off experience; the impact of teacher mediation; and finally, the after-life of the performance. This interdisciplinary research argues the emotional impact of theatre performance is long-lasting, refuting the 'common-sense' assumption that performance is transient, disappearing the moment its eventfulness is over. It offers the academy, theatre practitioners, teachers and policy makers' research into unheard voices of children, particularly non-traditional theatre goes in the setting of their own school, seeing a performance not as a one-off experience, but as an untapped source for further learning and particularly creativity. It also offers rare insight into longitudinal findings by following the impact on children of a performance of no more than an hour's duration over a two-year period.

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Chapter One – Introduction

This thesis uses Theatre Alibi's performances to examine the relationship between school-based theatre performance and learning. Watching a performance in a school is different to seeing a performance in a theatre, offering distinct opportunities and challenges for performers, teachers and children. The partnership between Theatre Alibi and the Devon primary schools they visit is well-established with performances a regular part of the annual school calendar in many schools. As a well-respected company working in the field of Theatre for Children and Young Adults (TfCYA), Theatre Alibi's reputation is built on its high production values and storytelling principles. My research explores how Theatre Alibi performances enhance children's learning: firstly, through looking at the performance alone as an emotional, cultural and theatrical experience, and secondly, through teacher intervention inspired by the performance. It examines whether this intervention turns the performance into an instrument for learning and whether in doing so compromises the value of the performance. As applied theatre academics Monica Prendergast and Julianna Saxton suggest, 'too much emphasis on results and the instrumental benefits can submerge the very real power of what art itself can do for the people who engage with it. "Do no harm" applies equally to the art form itself' (2009:198). Throughout my research there has been a strong commitment, despite ethical challenges, to adopt a child-centred approach providing new perspectives to the research field.

Theatre Alibi is a well-regarded theatre company formed in 1982 by Alison Hodge and Tim Spicer who graduated from the University of Exeter Drama Department in 1980. Initially itinerant, the company moved to Emmanuel Hall in the St Thomas area of Exeter in 1986 where it remains. By 1994, the founding Artistic Directors had relinquished their roles, Hodge in 1990 and Spicer in 1994, however artistic continuity was retained under new Artistic Directors, Nikki Sved and Daniel Jamieson who had joined the company as performers on leaving university. Sved has remained as the sole Artistic Director and Jamieson, although relinquishing his role of Artistic Director in 2000, has continued to have a very close relationship with Theatre Alibi as Associate Writer. While creating imaginative work for children has been a substantial and constant part of the company's artistic programme since its inception, it is not the only element.

Theatre Alibi is not restricted to one theatrical style. It has, and continues to produce work for adults as well as children, performing in schools and regional small to mid-scale theatres. This thesis principally focuses on one aspect of the company's recent work: its work with TfCYA in a school setting.

1.Aims and Research Questions

This inter-disciplinary thesis is positioned in the research fields of theatre studies, particularly applied theatre and audience reception studies; education, specifically, curriculum studies and educational policy; and psychology, explicitly cognitive science, emotional well-being and memory studies. It has three broad research aims:

1. To investigate the learning that results from school-based theatre performance.
2. To assess how teacher intervention can confirm and enhance learning and how this impacts on the performance.
3. To analyse the contribution Theatre Alibi has made within the field of Educational Theatre and assess longitudinal impact.

Research Questions

To meet these aims, this research centres around three questions:

1. How do Theatre Alibi performances help children learn by enhancing personal, social and emotional well-being?
2. How does teacher intervention alter, confirm and enhance the children's learning?
3. What is the longitudinal impact of Theatre Alibi's work?

For the first question, this thesis addresses the issues of assessing the impact of the performance itself, as a stand-alone event without teacher intervention, exploring the emotional, social and cultural benefits of watching a school-based theatre performance. It also investigates whether it is possible to measure the impact of the performance on children's emotional well-being.

The second question is multi-layered, being concerned with how teachers integrate the performances into their curriculum delivery and how this impacts

on the children's learning. My research discusses whether it is possible to develop an effective partnership which retains artistic integrity and enhances learning, thus, discovering whether the performance and teacher intervention can both benefit children: Theatre *with* Education, a concept explored in more detail in Chapter Two. Working closely with teachers, this aspect of the enquiry required an adaptable and responsive range of flexible methods to be able to evaluate the impact on, for example, literacy or more generally, developmental subjects such as Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). I further explore what impact teacher intervention has on the affect and effect of both the performance and learning on children; particularly, how providing children with the opportunity to reflect and connect the performance to their own lives enhances their understanding, enjoyment and longitudinal memory.

Finally, to address the third question, my research investigates beyond the impact of the one-off performance, the performance as part of an extended learning experience, and explores the longitudinal impact of Theatre Alibi's performances. Using case-study performances over three years of my PhD research, I examine how the impact of the performance, including memories and emotional response, changes over time.

Adopting a historiographical approach, my research explores the background and distinctiveness of Theatre Alibi within the field of educational theatre and, from analysis of interviews and archive material, provides an overview of the company's work. Although an established Exeter-based theatre company with Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation funding there is very little scholarship on Theatre Alibi¹. Therefore, this research aims to acknowledge one aspect of their artistic provision: their work for children in a primary school setting.

¹ The name of Theatre Alibi is mentioned in the contributor's biography on Alison Hodge and Dorinda Hulton in Hodge, A. (ed.) (2010) *Actor Training*, (2nd ed) Abingdon: Routledge; and in the contributor's biography on Dorinda Hulton in McCullough, C. (ed.) (1998) *Theatre Praxis*, Basingstoke: MacMillan Press.

2. An under-represented area of research

There are gaps in both research on children as audience members, particularly in non-traditional settings beyond the theatre building, and additionally on the impact of performance on children's learning. There is existing research involving theatre companies working in schools with teachers within the field of TIE (Wooster 2007, Winston 2009, Jackson and Vine 2013, Cooper 2013, Big Brum 2019, Bolton 2019) but rarely where theatre is for children without educational objectives. There is also a recognised gap in longitudinal research (Weaver 2009:x; Freshwater 2009:11; Reinelt et al. 2014:9,91; Reinelt 2014:360). A more extensive survey of existing literature is discussed within the Research Context in the next chapter, however, durational studies into audience reception with adults rarely go beyond a year after seeing the performance (Reinelt et al. 2014). My research assesses impact over a longer time frame of at least two years.

Theatre Alibi's performances in schools provide an opportunity to engage children in a cultural activity. Seeing performances at an early age is a significant predictor for maintaining a theatre going habit in later life (Reinelt et al 2014:24). As editors Michael Etherton and Tim Prentki identify in their special issue on impact assessment in *Research in Drama Education*, impact surveys are often short-term, being unable to capture the longer-term 'knowledge and attitudes "left behind" after the theatre "expert" has finished his/her visit' (2006:152). My longitudinal research offers new insight into the impact of a theatre performance. Where studies exist in educational theatre, longitudinal assessment is often difficult due to the transient nature with both children and teachers leaving the school. Through discussion with current child audiences and with some adults who saw Theatre Alibi performances when they were children in primary schools, I have been able to reflect on whether seeing Theatre Alibi performances has impacted on their cultural habits and attitudes towards theatre going.

A specific focus of my research is an evaluation of the contribution Theatre Alibi has made to schools since its formation in 1982. Nicholson (2009,2011,2014) Jackson and Vine (2013), Wooster (2007) and Redington (1983) offer extensive research into the changing political, educational and creative contexts that theatre companies working in educational theatre have faced over the last fifty

years. This provided a starting point for my research and gave a national context for the challenges faced by companies. My previous background in education as a secondary school drama teacher and Headteacher also provided an understanding of the current school system and the associated issues for theatre companies performing in schools.

3.School-based performance

As this PhD focusses on performances in a school-based setting, rather than a traditional theatre venue, it is important to acknowledge the differing opportunities and challenges presented, which go beyond the physical setting. Theatre Alibi's Autumn tours are specifically designed to be performed to children across the primary age range in their school or nearby village hall, during the school day, and aimed at the whole school community. From observations of rehearsals throughout my case-study research, attention is given to the practicalities of the performance in a school setting to provide the children with the highest quality performance possible, as discussed in Chapter Four. In *Apple John* (2017), there was discussion of the appropriateness and sensitivity of dealing with the challenging matter of the death of a central character, John, with an audience spanning the ages of 5–11 years. Through careful storytelling, the apple tree, which had grown in parallel to John, was felled, leaving the interpretation to the child's imagination. Although this challenge would be equally relevant if the performance was in a theatre, unlike a theatre venue where the teacher may have to wait to discuss or mediate these complex issues with their class, in a school, the mediation can become a natural and immediate progression from the performance.

In contrast, theatre settings have additional technical resources to draw upon: stage lighting, darkened auditoria, comfortable seating and the unfamiliarity and excitement of the journey to the venue. For the theatre company, consideration needs to be given to sight-lines and making sure all children see the performance equally well without raked seating. There may also be specific technical requirements, such as the use of projection in *Apple John*, which present additional challenges in ensuring the quality is retained in a brightly lit school hall as it would be in a darkened theatre. For school-based performances there is the

ordinariness of watching the performance in daylight in a familiar space, and discomfort of being seated on a hard floor for an hour. However, there is also the safety and security of being in a familiar space that has been transformed into something extraordinary, a blending of the special with the everyday. Watching in a school is a shared, collective community event; the children are able to feel, laugh and mimic openly with their classmates.

Besides the practicalities of the school hall as a performance space there are also the cultural difficulties of a theatre company performing in an educational, or 'institutional space'. Helen Nicholson in *Theatre, Education and Performance* observes performing in 'institutional spaces' such as schools can give a perception of disrupting order and having theatre-makers in schools is often 'due to the enlightened and creative teachers who want to offer new opportunities to the children with whom they work on a daily basis' (2011:12). As Nicholson highlights, the reason for booking a theatre company, may be due to interest of an 'enlightened and creative teacher' or a culturally committed headteacher who believes in providing access to all children to a high-quality theatre performance. This does not mean that all staff within the school feel as positive about the disruption, or share the same values. Crossing the physical and temporal boundaries of the school gates presents members of the theatre company, and the staff at the school, with competing demands and has the potential for conflict.

Baz Kershaw, in his discussion of the commodification of culture and theatre offers useful terminology: 'theatre-as-institution', referring to the building or mode of production and 'performance-as-event' referring to the live performance itself (1994:174-176). Theatre Alibi's school-based performances are obviously not placed in a traditional cultural 'institution'. However, the theatre company may be booked to 'deliver' or 'provide' a cultural activity which supports Kershaw's notion of 'consuming theatre as a service' (1994:177). There is a strong inter-connectivity between the 'institution' and the 'event', with the audience responding to the second within the first. As Kershaw notes, while the audience is consuming the performance the reverse can often happen; 'the performance consumes the audience and, again, paradoxically, that generates the collective power of the audience' (1994:183). Whilst adapting Kershaw's terminology 'theatre-as-institution' contextually to a school, the impact of the 'school

institution' is an equally crucial influence on the effect of the performance on the young audience. The value system or ethos within the school 'institutional space' has significant influence, but this is unlikely to be consistent across schools. Some schools timetable the performance at the end of the school day so the children go straight home, allowing no further discussion. Others see the performance as an end of term 'treat' where the children are 'entertained' by the theatre company whilst the teachers tidy up the classroom or prepare lessons for the next term. Conversely, other schools go to great lengths to change the school day, by moving 'break-time' to accommodate the performance. Teachers watch and enjoy the performance alongside their class, mentioning it repeatedly in lessons or assemblies. One of the key 'value indicators' is what the teacher or support staff 'do' during the performance, whether they actively watch the performance with the children, mark books, or leave their class in the hall and disappear back to the classroom. How the staff interact with the children and the performance transmits important value-laden messages, giving implicit value to the performance or not. Where children return to their classroom immediately after the performance and have no further discussion, the creative activity may become stifled, left unfinished in the minds of the young people, with the performance seen as an 'event', or 'mere entertainment', and thus may have diminished worth.

Transformation of the school space

I vividly remember coming into the school hall and it being transformed. It was where we were eating lunch every day and coming in ... it was exciting... [a broad smile develops across her face] ... I remember feeling the excitement and it being really magical as well. I remember always being so excited about how they were going to use the set. For me, that was one of the biggest parts of them [Theatre Alibi visits]. 'What is the set going to be like?' and how are they then going to use it or change it. That amazement of seeing something... but just seeing something transforming into something else. It could be the school hall but also a prop that might be one thing and then suddenly it becomes a baby or something else (Ripley 2017:1-2).

This account was provided by Izzy Ripley, a young adult, who remembers seeing Theatre Alibi shows throughout her primary years, from 2002, since she was six years old. Her most striking memory was the transformation of an ordinary,

utilitarian space, her school hall, into an extraordinary one. Whilst recalling her memory from 15 years earlier, the joy associated with the performance was still present, with her smiling repeatedly as she relived the memory. Whilst Izzy, growing up in a theatre-going family, may not be typical of all children, case-study research confirmed that for many children the sense of ‘awe’ and ‘wonder’ starts before the action of the play, and from the moment they have been taken into the hall by their teacher.² For a few younger curious children, it would start before, as they crept out of their classroom whilst the company were setting up, to see how their school was being transformed into, as Izzy mentions, a ‘magical’ and ‘exciting’ place.³

As there are few of the technical advantages of purpose-built theatres, the success of the performance is reliant on the skill of the actors, designers, musicians and director to transport the children to another time and space. They see the set and hear the music, which is a prologue to the performance, as they wait to be led into the school hall. Children bring their imagination, and ‘suspend their disbelief’ to enter the world of the story; they need to, and most do, cross a spatial and temporal boundary – accepting that in one minute they are in a garden, the next in a taxi or riding on a unicorn in a war-torn country.

Whilst the children negotiate the space in their imagination, the company must negotiate the space in more practical ways. The school hall is often the territory of the catering team, who require sufficient time to return it back to its utilitarian purpose before lunch commences. As well as negotiating the space, the theatre company must also be aware of other school constraints and operational factors that are specific to school-based performances. The first; fitting the one-hour performance around the school timetable. Some schools are prepared to move their school break or snack time, but children are not; they don’t like changes to their routine, particularly if not informed, and cannot stop themselves feeling hungry or needing to go to the toilet. Unlike theatre based performances, the actors may need to be able to cope with the unexpected: the added distractions

² There are numerous field-study examples which include FS-BM103-APS1, BM-FS01-SMC:1, BM-FS04-MS:1, AJ-FS05-IPS:1, AJ-FS15-SaPS:1, AJ-FS01-SHJ:1.

³ FS-BM101-SVP, FS-BM103-APS1, FS-BM106-HoPS.

of children coming onto the stage, the receptionist who enters to give a message to a teacher or a child, children repeatedly leaving to go to the toilet, teachers marking books at the side, or the noise of builders repairing the hall roof.⁴At times, actors may find it difficult to negotiate school systems and educationalists find it difficult to understand the world of creatives.

As the children enter the hall they bring their own expectations and excitement. For some, who have seen Theatre Alibi before, they have the familiar anticipation of what Susan Bennett describes as 'spectatorial pleasure' (1997:118). In a traditional theatre setting, Bennett suggests there is a 'social contract' between the theatre venue and the spectator through purchasing a ticket, leading to an expectation of an auditorium seat for a quality performance (1997:204). In a school setting, the social contract is between the theatre company and the teacher booking the performance who trust that the event will justify the alternative use of curriculum time.

Concentrating on performances in schools provides a democratic and inclusive aspect to this research; all children who attend the school see a Theatre Alibi performance, irrespective of their age, socio-economic background, cultural experience or choice. Therefore, this research draws on children who have an interest in seeing performance as well as those who do not – children who might have chosen to do other classroom activities had they been given a choice.

4.Positionality

My research has been contextualised by my previous knowledge of Theatre Alibi's secondary-age and adult performances from my experience as a drama teacher, Headteacher and Centre Director of a community arts centre who booked the company prior to commencing this PhD. I therefore acknowledge my attitude towards the company could be judged as being inherently positive. However, I had no experience of the company's primary-age schools work before commencing this PhD and, as a researcher have been mindful to adopt an

⁴ Observations during case-study performances include- FS-BM106-HoPS, FS-BM103-APS, BM-FS01-SMC, AJ-FS03-WB, AJ-FS14-SiS, TM-FS09-BBSS, TM-FS12-Wil1.

objective insider-outsider perspective. I was not employed by Theatre Alibi but my research inevitably required me to work closely with them. I have observed case-study performances as they developed from research and development through rehearsals into their annual schools tour. I have also had access to the Teacher's Resource Pack⁵ and Teacher Feedback Forms received by the company. I have shared my initial communication with schools, my field-study plans and developing hypothesis with relevant members of the company but they have no editorial control. I also have access to the Theatre Alibi archive – both physical and digital – and to members of staff, both current and past who have supported my investigation, particularly into the longitudinal impact. I position myself as being 'inside' the organisation, which has communication advantage, but also 'outside' the organisation as an independent researcher.

This research centres on three Theatre Alibi productions over three years, using quantitative and qualitative data, including responses gathered by Theatre Alibi's own evaluation as well as through a range of my own ethnography methods. This data collection, from a wide selection of schools, provides a further comprehensive analysis and will inform Theatre Alibi's future practice in schools. Wherever possible my research has drawn upon three methods, aiming to triangulate the data, thereby providing greater validity and credibility for other interested sectors: educationalists, academics, policy makers and theatre practitioners.

5. Structuring the Thesis

Each chapter that follows draws upon a different disciplinary connection, and in the case of Chapters Four, Five and Six, explore different research questions and focus on different Theatre Alibi case-study productions – *Apple John* (2017), *Table Mates* (2018) and *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* (2016/2018) respectively. As there is currently no academic writing analysing Theatre Alibi's work Chapter Two provides a biography of the company's background, distinctiveness, longevity and contribution to the field of theatre studies. Chapter Three focuses on the challenges and tensions of inter-disciplinary

⁵ See Appendix R and pp.204-208, 231-236 for clarification and usage.

methodological approaches, particularly when working across theatre, education and health and well-being. It discusses differing methodological frameworks, particularly from audience studies. This enabled me to devise methods which are appropriate for children, and generate research which is relevant to academics and practitioners from different fields. Chapter Four draws upon emotionology, emotional well-being and reception studies to examine the affective impact of the one-off performance and addresses question one. Chapter Five explores research question two, how the impact of the performance is altered by teacher intervention, and therefore connects with the discipline of education studies. Finally, Chapter Six draws upon memory studies and creativity to assess the longitudinal impact of a performance, exploring how emotional engagement of children and memory changes. Throughout each chapter, there is an analysis of the strengths, limitations and adaptations of the methods employed. As each case-study chapter commences I have included a summary of findings and then provide the supporting evidence from field-study visits. In a brief conclusion, I return to consider my research question of how theatre helps children learn and discuss the implications of my research findings for theatre practitioners, educationalists and policy makers as well as identifying the impact of my research and future related research areas.

Throughout this thesis, I have used a notational system for identifying and referencing field-study notes of visits. The prefix AJ refers to the production *Apple John*, BM the production *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* and TM, *Table Mates*. Additionally, the abbreviation FS refer to field-studies conducted on the day of the production and are followed by a number and initials identifying the school. The prefix ME indicates a return visit with 01 referring to after one-three months, 02 after a year and 03 after two years. Hence, AJ-FS06-HPS refers to a field-study conducted during *Apple John* at Holsworthy Primary School and ME-AJ02-HPS refers to a return visit to discuss the same performance of *Apple John* after one year. To distinguish the two productions of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, the original tour is identified by FS-BM (FS-BM105-WBS) and the 2018 re-tour BM-FS (BM-FS01-SMC).

Chapter Two – Exploring the Background and distinctiveness of Theatre Alibi

As a brief outline of Theatre Alibi's history has been provided earlier, this chapter will explore in more depth the company's origins, development and its multi-layered approach to produce rich storytelling performances. To explore the longitudinal impact of the company's work, I adopt an approach outlined by Theatre historian Thomas Postlewait, placing emphasis on examining the authenticity of sources and reliability of witnesses. My research is rich in personal recall. I have sought to confirm and cross-reference memories with photographic and literary evidence from various archives. I have drawn upon archive materials; a digital archive of Theatre Alibi's work, including performances since 1991, housed at the University of Exeter Drama Department; and a physical archive of photographs, marketing material, booking schedules and annual reports housed at the Theatre Alibi office. Using ethnographic evidence of interviews capturing oral history, personal memories and anecdotes, I have adopted a 'history-as-told' approach. I acknowledge using ethnographic research from 'living memory', the narrative that is told may have been frequently reconstructed over time consciously or subconsciously editing or reordering. Maggie Gale and Ann Featherstone writing on the use of archives in historiography caution that 'Researchers need to negotiate between truth and supposition, fact and fiction: all they can produce in effect is a *version* of history' (2011:23), claiming that memory can be 'faulty or unreliable' (2011:24), a subject I will return to at the end of this chapter.

Throughout my research, I endeavour to increase reliability by using more than one source, wherever possible triangulating 'history-as-read' with 'history-as-record' and 'history-as-told'. Analysing photographs and watching digital recordings of school-based performances increased authenticity by enabling me to interpret audience reaction and culture of the school in the context of the education system at that time. The digital archive encompasses primary school performances from 1991, nine years after the company was formed, and education packs, since their introduction in 2000, providing educational and artistic context. Sifting the digital archive has allowed me to evaluate the

directorial style and creative objectives of all Theatre Alibi's artistic directors. This archive and supplementary interviews have enabled me to examine the 'artistic heritage' (Postlewait 2009:15), the artistic traditions, conventions and aesthetic ideas in the early years of the company. The artistic heritage of Theatre Alibi's creation is significant when considering the influence and impact of the University of Exeter Drama Department on the company and will be discussed in greater depth later when looking at the roots of the company.

Theatre Alibi's digital archive provides a partial and fragmentary view. It does not record every performance in every school, nor does it offer background or provide depth of understanding. Personal recollections provide an important method for capturing the human impact of the company's work although I acknowledge reliability of memories over time may be problematic. I also recognise that many of those interviewed have a personal connection to Theatre Alibi and therefore are more likely to provide a partial and positive reflection on the company.²⁰

This chapter draws upon a range of ethnographic and literary sources to offer an overview of the company's work. To add reliability and authenticity, my research is placed within a local, regional and national context. I have therefore drawn upon historical source material from the time; at a local level, drawing upon annual reports of the Theatre Alibi Board of Trustees; at a regional level, drawing upon press reports, South West Arts accounts and other literary sources; and at a national level, drawing upon the Arts Council archive.

This chapter has two parts. Part One covers the creation of the company and the work of the founding artistic directors, Alison Hodge and Tim Spicer. Part Two embraces the work from 1994 until the present day under the tenure of the current Artistic Director, Nikki Sved. In presenting my research, I suggest Theatre Alibi can be seen through the metaphor of a growing child, which has been nurtured, challenged and shaped over time. This metaphor of a family is suggested by Spicer who describes the founding Artistic Directors' role as parents and the Drama Department as its wider family: 'The act of creating a

²⁰ See also further discussion on advocacy pp. 97-98.

theatre company was for me like having children, not that at that time I had an understanding of what having a family was like, but that sense of we were creating something together' (Spicer 2019:2). Part One commences by reflecting on the company's parentage and the social, political, artistic and local context of the late 1970s, identifying the influences leading up to its conception. This is followed by an analysis of the company's birth and early years (1980-1985), referring to its core values, characteristics and artistic ecology illustrated in its initial work. Childhood and teenage years (1986-1994) encapsulate the company's experimental phase, or being 'consistently adventurous' as Kim Hager, Chair of Theatre Alibi's Board of Trustees, celebrated at the time of the company's 10th anniversary (1991:1). Drawing upon academic literature from the fields of TiE and TfCYA, archive evidence and research interviews from company members, this section explores where Theatre Alibi is located within the broader field of Educational Theatre.

Part Two draws further upon the digital archive to examine the development of the company over the last 25 years. As well as analysing several primary school productions and ethnographic evidence from performers who have worked regularly for the company, I consider how Theatre Alibi has developed artistically and evaluate the distinctive elements of their performances in school. I argue that the integration of these features implicitly contributes to the affective development of children, going beyond the classroom curriculum. Finally, I return to the core aims and values of the company in assessing the balance between education and theatre in their artistic philosophy.

Part One

1.Theatre Alibi: Background

Before discussing Theatre Alibi's creation, it is important to consider what Postlewait refers to as the 'artistic heritage' of the company's conception; the national, local and artistic influences which affected the company's creation and early years. Much of the theatrical company's heritage derives from the mid-1960s which would have been the founding artistic directors' childhood years.

The 1960s saw much political and social change including educational, social and artistic growth in Britain, the election of Labour Governments in 1964 and 1966, and greater financial security for many. Nicholson in *Theatre, Education and Performance* explains how a period of economic expansion led to generous state funding for the arts, particularly as part of redevelopment projects in urban areas which had been most affected by the Second World War (2011:66). Confirmation of increased funding for the arts, following the creation of The Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) in 1965, was not only restricted to urban areas as identified by Ivan Cutting, Artistic Director of Eastern Angles Theatre Company writing on rural touring:

The upsurge of small-scale touring in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the Arts Council's R&D officers went around waving cheque books and dispensing Mercedes Benz vans, set a whole bandwagon rolling: Incubus, Joint Stock, Foco Novo, Cheek by Jowl all crisscrossed the country, visiting the burgeoning arts centres and small studio theatres that sought original and alternative theatre (Cutting 2006).

The 1960s and 1970s also saw the emergence of the British 'alternative' theatre, a progressive movement, based on radical ideologies which are often linked to Bertolt Brecht's theory and practice of theatre having the capacity to be transformative and bring about social change (Prentki and Preston 2009:12-13). What is significant within the alternative theatre movement is the desire for democratisation, the rejection of mainstream theatre performance and the desire to produce relevant theatrical work in non-traditional and community spaces for the working classes (Prentki and Preston 2009:10; Prendergast and Saxton 2009:6-7,11-12; Kershaw 1992:3-5).

Within the education system at this time, following the publication of the Plowden Report into Primary Education in 1967, there was increasing concern about progressive education and its effect on standards in State Education as highlighted by the then Prime Minister Jim Callaghan's Ruskin College speech calling for 'The Great Debate' on education in 1976. In secondary education, there was a growing desire for school re-organisation with a move away from a tripartite system of secondary modern, grammar and technical schools towards a fully comprehensive system. Local Education Authorities (LEAs) organised themselves differently on the age of transfer between each phase. Within Exeter,

Infant Schools took children up to the age of seven years, Middle/Junior Schools from 8-12 years and Upper Secondary Schools from 13-16 years. This proved significant for Theatre Alibi, leading them to design their performances for a very broad 5-12 age range and a far-reaching school tour capacity. There was also greater autonomy over the curriculum in schools; apart from ensuring commitment to the '3Rs' there were few constraints on what should be taught and how it should be delivered.

Local Theatre Companies operating within the Devon Community

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw an increase in new touring theatre companies. Within the South West there emerged Medium Fair Theatre Company, Fooksbarn Travelling Theatre, Kneehigh, Orchard Theatre and Rent-a-Role Drama Service. Orchard Theatre, situated in North Devon, was the largest of these companies producing adult and community performances throughout the South West; Rent-a-Role was more educationally specific, touring Plymouth schools with educational programmes from 1980; Fooksbarn Travelling Theatre and Kneehigh, formed in 1971 and 1980 respectively, toured within Cornwall.

Medium Fair founded by John Rudlin, Head of Drama at the University of Exeter, consisted of alumni and existing students. Rudlin was committed to providing theatre *for* and *in* the community. According to Peter Thomson, Professor of Drama throughout this time and Medium Fair board member, the company consisted of three branches of community-based work which toured villages throughout East Devon and Teignbridge. One branch produced performances for adult audiences; a second branch, Fair Play, a touring company focused on youth work and education; and a third branch, specialised on Reminiscence Theatre. A further short-lived initiative focused on living within the community and leaving a legacy from the project (Thomson 2017:1). Kershaw, in *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention*, who between 1975 and 1980 was a director for Medium Fair, identifies the company as a 'cultural catalyst' (1992:3). Medium Fair and other similar companies 'were predicated on the possible usefulness of theatre to particular communities'

(Kershaw 1992:3). Outlining the company's ideology to transform the community through theatre activity, including refurbishing community amenities, Kershaw suggests, 'such a show might contribute to the same kind of progressive social, even political development' (1992:3). Kershaw classified companies such as Medium Fair, as being part of the 'rural community theatre movement' identifying themselves as 'part of a wider movement: the British alternative theatre movement' (1992:4). The artistic heritage within the Devon area, and particularly Medium Fair, was strongly influenced by the Drama Department at the University of Exeter and undergraduates Spicer and Hodge (1977-1980). Hodge was also recruited to Fair Play on leaving university (Hodge 2017:3).

The Influence of University of Exeter Drama Department

The mid 1960s and 70s, following the 1963 Robbins Report on Higher Education saw an expansion of university education with increased state-funding of fees and maintenance grants leading to increased access for working-class students. In 1976, at the University of Exeter, the Drama Department, which had since 1968 been within the English Department, became a department offering a single Honours degree and experienced considerable growth. Thomson, who joined the Drama Department in 1974, notes the differences in progression routes for graduating students from his previous post at Manchester University: 'unlike say, Bristol or Manchester Drama Departments which fed into more orthodox theatre, Exeter fed into community-based fringe theatre more' (2017:4). He illustrates his point by identifying other nationally-recognised companies such as Forced Entertainment, who also had connections with Theatre Alibi,²¹ and Punchdrunk. Thomson identifies Rudlin's vision of theatre in the community, (basing theatre around the needs of the community, such as working with schools for the Deaf and Blind, borstals or other institutions), having an impact in the department: 'So the students who founded Theatre Alibi would have had a deep involvement with that type of theatre'...and 'Theatre Alibi grew naturally out of the undergraduate experience' (Thomson 2017:1).

²¹ Hodge confirms a connection between Forced Entertainment and Theatre Alibi with Terry O'Connor who joined Theatre Alibi on graduating from Exeter before joining Forced Entertainment. She was one of the first additional actors to join Theatre Alibi (Hodge 2017:10).

At this time and into the late 1990s, the Drama experience for undergraduates was intense and very practically project-based in nature. Thomson attributed much of the Department's practice-based approach to 'Rudlin believing in the Black Mountain college philosophy from America' and 'it's non-hierarchy but learning together approach' (Thomson 2017:5).²² This commitment to progressive education and experiential student-centred learning at Exeter manifested in a non-hierarchical structure between lecturers and students with all theory being taught through practical sessions rather than lectures and seminars but also a strict adherence to rehearsal discipline. As with much education at that time, Thomson felt, many of the practices, such as night walks over Dartmoor would not happen 'these days as you would have to pass safety regulations and there were some risks involved. The experience was extraordinary and it made for very accomplished human beings out of them. In many ways, I deeply regret its passing. It was an important mode of education' (2017:5).

In the introduction to *Theatre Praxis*, Christopher McCullough, a former Head of Department, confirms the importance of the project approach the graduates from Exeter in the 1970s and 1980s, including the Theatre Alibi artistic directors, would have experienced: 'From its inception, the Drama Department rejected the conventions expected by an academic timetable, dispensing with separate timetabled hours for lectures, seminars, tutorials and practical sessions. Instead, the timetable was based on a series of five-week projects' (1997:7). These projects were certainly influential to Theatre Alibi's work, particularly the story-theatre project in the second year run by Les Read. Hodge describes the experiences gained from the storytelling project as being a 'formative time' (Hodge 2017:2) and recalls how they were introduced to the notion of storytelling from different cultures and the concept of storyteller as bard, 'turning up in the village with a bag of tricks for the children and the community' (2017:2).

²² The Black Mountain College in North Carolina which closed in 1957 was a Centre for Liberal Arts and Progressive Education focusing on cultural production and inter-disciplinary work and based on the education philosophy of John Dewey, a key exponent of the progress Education movement (Harris M, E. (1988) *The Arts at Black Mountain College* Cambridge Massachusetts. MIT Press).

Traditional stories from Iona and Peter Opie and accompanying literature from Peter Brook's performances adapted from the Persian poem, *The Conference of the Birds*,²³ created a 'very indelible mark on Tim and my imaginations' (Hodge 2017:2). This is verified by Spicer, who confirms, 'Les Read was hugely influential with the sense of storytelling' (2019:13), but acknowledges how he and Hodge subverted the project's choice of stories as 'he [Read] wanted to be on epics like Beowulf and we brought in fairy stories, which were fun and shorter, and we could understand what they were about' (2019:14). The story-theatre project which took the students from the university into the city centre, was an invaluable experience in learning how to engage an audience and hold their attention. These theatrical skills would be crucial to the company's work in schools and other non-traditional spaces such as site-specific performances on Exmoor (Hodge 2017:2). Hodge also recalls a further community-based project in the third-year project on TiE which then led to her working with Fair Play when leaving university. It enabled her to realise how little theatre was going into schools and how there was a 'gap in the market' (Hodge 2017:3-4). Although they did not perform their first show in schools until two years later, it is evident this love of storytelling, reaching out into the community and pragmatism for seeking opportunities was fostered.

Nick Sales, another Drama department lecturer, who had previously worked in Poland with Jerzy Grotowski's company, is also considered to have been an important influence on the creators of Theatre Alibi. His highly physical training, where he foregrounded the actor's body in performance in relation to space in both first year and second year projects, was identified by Hodge as having a strong impact (Hodge 2018:1). Spicer also highlights residential weekends where Sales' teaching focused on 'how to create ritual...how to mark things... theatre as event and Poor Theatre' (2019:13) as being significant not only in the minimalist approach the company took to early work in schools, but also Spicer's later more sensory work in *The Victorian World* (1986/7), *Platform 4* and *The Railway Arches* (1993-4).

²³ Opie, I and P. (1980) *The Classic Fairy Tales*. Oxford, Oxford University Press and Heilpern, J. (1977) *Conference of the Birds: the story of Peter Brook in Africa*. London, Faber.

Once Drama students had graduated, links with the department were often maintained, and a close network of past students formed, as the year groups up until 1986 were very small, being no more than 16 students. Hodge identifies many connections which were made at university which were then to impact on Theatre Alibi's work, particularly in the field of TiE which will be discussed later. Spicer also identifies the practical and familial ways former lecturers responded to phone calls, rescuing Spicer and Hodge when their transport broke down, including Sales creating a dance whilst plaiting a tow rope (2019:14).

The University of Exeter Drama Department is not only seen to have had an impact on the work produced by the founding artistic directors but also on the relationship between Theatre Alibi and the department in the sharing of work and recruitment of actors. In the mid 1980s, and into the late 1990s, a substantial number of Exeter students started their acting and directing careers at Theatre Alibi. Annemarie MacDonald, who worked for Theatre Alibi for 28 years, acknowledged the Drama Department was 'a huge source of performers' for Theatre Alibi following graduation, which continued annually until the department became less practical in nature' (MacDonald 2017:6).²⁴ This was expedient for the company, knowing the training students had, would support and match the Alibi style. An example of the collaboration between Theatre Alibi and students at Exeter is reported by Daniel Jamieson, a student between 1986-89, who later joined the company as an actor/musician on graduation. Jamieson recalls students visiting Emmanuel Hall to participate in workshops as part of their timetabled course and participate in TiE programmes of *No Heroes, No Cowards* and *Lives Worth Living*. The connection between Theatre Alibi and the University of Exeter Drama Department was a distinguishing feature in the early years with Spicer describing it as 'almost my first family' (2019:2).

²⁴ MacDonald and Hodge confirm the vast majority of performers from 1982–1994 were recruited from the Drama Department. The company also auditioned nationally recruiting actors including Emma Rice, Emma Clotworthy and Peter Holdsworth before these left to pursue careers with other performance companies or enter academia. The company also appointed administrator Stephen Mole who was not from Exeter (Hodge 2018:1, Hodge 2017:7,10).

2. Birth and the Early Years

Theatre Alibi was formed by Hodge and Spicer in 1982 although between leaving the University of Exeter in 1980 and setting up the company, Thomson recalls several manifestations of the company including performances with other actors who had trained with Hodge and Spicer. He recalls the quality of their work both at university and after leaving as 'extraordinary' (Thomson 2017:6). One such performance which illustrates their commitment to local and political issues was in Autumn 1981 as part of the 'CND Stop the Countdown Rally' in Bury Meadow, Exeter, protesting about the siting of nuclear missiles in the UK (Thomson 2017:1). This anti-nuclear weapons political parody was performed by an earlier emanation of Theatre Alibi. The company, named Echo Theatre, included Hodge and Spicer together with six other students from the same year. The production toured Devon and Cornwall resulting in South West Arts providing funding for a new production of an adaptation of *Frankenstein* which proved less successful. As a result, Echo Theatre was disbanded but, honouring the existing programming commitments and maximising the momentum which the company had created, Hodge and Spicer developed a new politically motivated comedy, *The Strange Affair* performing in the spring and summer of 1982 as the new company of Theatre Alibi (Hodge 2017:4, Spicer 2019:3).²⁵ The company's first performance is positioned within the field of alternative theatre, with its roots in radical, community politics, and was a forerunner to the more political TIE programmes the company presented in the mid and late 1980s.

The success of *The Strange Affair*, their interest in storytelling from Les Read's project and their recognition that there was a gap in the market, with no other company going into schools, led to their first schools' production, *Telling Tales* in 1982. Spicer and Hodge were keen to produce *theatre* rather than for a discrete audience, as Spicer explains:

We weren't interested in doing children's theatre, or theatre for schools, or adult theatre. We were interested in doing theatre and doing it in places where people who often didn't see much theatre or didn't have much preconception of theatre would see

²⁵ Poster and marketing evidence of *The Strange Affair* show one performance took place at the Barnfield Theatre on 20 May 1982 at the entry price of £1.00. (TAA 1982a).

it... So, because we didn't have a niche anywhere some of the things, some of the stuff with the storytelling in schools was because we could earn money at it. We could charge them. We didn't charge them very much, but there are lots of schools and therefore, if we did lots of shows we could live in the same way we couldn't have done that with adult shows (2019:4-5).

This demonstrates the artistic directors' understanding of business as a necessity for theatrical success if the company was to survive. Indirect funding was supplied by the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, an initiative of Margaret Thatcher's government which enabled recipients on a low wage to work and claim benefits (Hodge 2017:5). The artistic directors' awareness of the need for marketing and public endorsement is demonstrated in their seeking support and approval from Terry Jones, Devon's Drama Advisor, who offered advice on the suitability of their performance for a primary school audience and agreed to members of the company phoning schools acknowledging his commendation (Hodge 2017:3).

Analysis of the company's marketing material illustrates how they positioned themselves as storytellers, drawing upon 'traditional, contemporary, and fading forms of entertainment', using old folktales, myths, passed down through word of mouth from a range of different cultures and traditions (TAA 1982b *Telling Tales*). The programme from this first production, aimed at 5-12 year olds, sets out the company's aims: 'to stimulate rather than lull the imagination, to raise questions rather than give answers' (TAA 1982b). What is clear from the outset is the company's desire to unsettle and provoke, to 'also provide a fresh perspective on the real world' (TAA 1982b). This was an educational philosophy similar to the TiE movement, prominent at this time, but delivered through the style of traditional storytelling. Archive photographs also demonstrate similarity to the TiE movement featuring a small audience sat on three-sides around the performers and additional workshop participation.

Storytelling

The structure of the schools' programme, with three or four stories being told within a one hour performance, was a deliberate artistic decision and a long-

standing feature of Theatre Alibi's work until 2002.²⁶ It was both practical, allowing younger children to retain their interest and concentration, and provided a creative opportunity to explore and experiment with a range of theatrical styles which a longer unified play may not allow. For Spicer this decision was fundamental to Alibi's work:

it was not a play; it was a set of stories...a kind of portmanteau structure so you could go to four different places...It is a positive thing, not a negative that there is a number of narratives...It was liberating rather than constraining (2019:7-8).

As the company had no regular rehearsal space until 1986, the props, costumes and production features were predetermined by the practicalities of what could be created in the artistic directors' flat (they were a couple, at the time): 'so there's a sense that it is Poor Theatre. It has to be compact and economical and people have to imagine the stuff that you can't carry with you. You had to fit your form to your economic situation' (Spicer 2019:12).

Hodge confirmed the format of the *Telling Tales* programme had interactive elements both within the stories and in the transitions between stories to encourage the sense of liveness in the performance. The performances, which may have included stories told by individual actors, or pairs of actors, were often highly physical, using different theatrical forms, such as masks in the retelling of "Beauty and the Beast", or 'a funny, very fast, comic, physical story with lots of changes of hats' inspired by the stories from the "Arabian Nights" which they had studied at University (Hodge 2017:7). Spicer's recollection of the change of hats routine had its inspiration from a different source being based on Tommy Cooper's "The Hunchback" routine where the story relies on multiple changes of identity through using different hats (2019:14)²⁷. Whatever the inspiration, this example illustrates the simplistic visual style of the performance relying on the child audience having to use their imagination and accept quick character transformations.

²⁶ A less obvious three-story narrative within a unified theme can also be seen within some more recent work, such as, in *Table Mates* (2018).

²⁷ A recoding of the Tommy Cooper "The Hunchback" routine can be found https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=pKbIP3_EkM0

For Hodge, the transformation from ordinary to extra-ordinary, from mundane to theatre was important to Theatre Alibi's work and informed by her own experience as a young girl watching a theatre company in her primary school:

It had an enormous impact on me. I can remember thinking "Wow! This is the most exciting thing that ever happened in this school", and I think it probably was...The impact of seeing that show which I think involved masks and puppets encouraged me to get involved in drama at school (Hodge 2017:1).

Theatre Alibi's performances in schools aimed to have the same impact as Hodge had experienced. For Alibi the simple transformation of an everyday space was important. They erected an enormous fan in the school hall to cover up the kitchen and transform it into an imaginative, theatrical space.



Fig. 1 *Telling Tales* (1982c)

The performance started with dialogue in which the actors asked the children about their favourite story; 'So there was always chat, there was always the possibility of them being able to speak. So right from the beginning of the actors coming on we would talk to them as they came into the space so there was never a fourth wall. Never that' (Hodge 2017:5). Their style of storytelling involved showing the children themselves first as actors and them transforming into

several different characters by using a gesture, a change of voice or a piece of costume and promoted by the three-four story structure. This theatrical convention of openly moving into and between characters also drew upon the approach used by Mike Alfreds with storytelling theatre company Shared Experience, reported in *Theatre Papers* (Alfreds 1977),²⁸ which they encountered during their university course. Hodge recognises the similarity: ‘Alfreds almost confirmed a lot of things we were already doing, because what we had done with Les, from our time in the streets of Exeter was that. So, it wasn’t as much we read about it and then tried it. I think we went “we know this works”’ (2017:6). She saw Alfreds’ work as ‘a parallel text that really crystallised a lot of our ideas...and helped us formulate more clearly what we were doing’ (Hodge 2017:15). Reflecting on the early years of Theatre Alibi she is keen to emphasise how much their storytelling and theatre work was ‘learnt on the job. A lot through practice, and that is in the spirit of the Exeter Drama Department which was through practice, but Alfreds was an important text’ (Hodge 2017:15). An important aspect of the storytelling technique was the creation of pivotal points or ‘hinge-points’, a term used by Alfreds, where the audience are ‘trampolined’ into a new unit of the story or character. These storytelling techniques are further explored in a studio workshop seminar on *Tom Thumb* led by Hodge and evidenced in the Exeter University Digital Arts Archive (EDA/AA/070 1993). She discusses the importance of the actor creating clarity for the audience by having a clear image of the new character they are playing and transferring and transitioning from one characterisation to another. This transformation may be depicted physically, through gesture or voice. Using an example from the digital archive of *The Goose* (1992), it is possible to analyse the storytelling techniques used by the company. ‘Trampolining’ and ‘springboarding’ are illustrated when the single storyteller moves from narrator and creates four animal characters through hand gestures indicating height, a slight turn and vocal illustrations. The rhythmical sound of ‘N-a-a, honk honk, B-a-a, Mo-o-o is repeated throughout the story to create the imaginary goat, goose, ram and steer. The brutality of the steer being slaughtered is reinforced by the

²⁸ *Theatre Papers* is a series of published interviews with prominent theatre practitioners conducted by Peter Hulton.

repetition of n-a-a, honk honk, b-a-a ...pause. This adds humour for the older members of the audience.²⁹

Early Performances

The development of the company and the style of performances was organic with some artistic decisions being consciously made whilst others 'were half-understood or accidentally stumbled upon and then recognised and used' (Spicer 2019:10). They drew upon the practice of Jacques Tati, Dario Fo, Tony Hancock and the storytelling project from their university days but also from experiences and encounters elsewhere. For Spicer, an additional influence was his post-university experience with Common Stock Theatre Company where he was introduced to the work of Bruno Bettelheim and the symbolism of fairy stories (2019:8,14).

Symbolism was also important in the marketing material for the 1984 tour of *Telling Tales* which contains an image of Spicer in a stereotypical medieval jester costume, complete with stripes and bells, reminiscent of the medieval theatre troops touring around the country (TAA 1984a). Parallels can also be drawn between Theatre Alibi's early work and what Stuart Bennett in *Theatre for Children and Young People* identifies as the earliest forms of children's theatre in the late 19th century and early 20th century as 'touring companies with dramatisations of folk and fairy-tales' (Bennett 2005:12). Although Spicer and Hodge were resistant to Theatre Alibi being defined by one type of theatre, the most important aspect for them was creating theatre as an event (Hodge 2017:5, Spicer 2019:4). Placing a label on the form of theatre or intended audience was mainly for pragmatic reasons either because there was an 'unoccupied niche' (Spicer 2019:5) as in the case of Theatre for Young People, or because of funders' requirements:

it is not that we want to educate children, although they may derive some educational value from it, or that there is a particular message to them or we want to fit into a curriculum, but the

²⁹ A further example of this transformational storytelling technique will be explored when considering the company's consistent directorial style with Sved's *Why the Sky is Far Away and other stories* pp.64-66.

actual experience of theatre isn't actually that different if you are five, fifteen or seventy-five (Spicer 2019:4).

Theatre Alibi, with Hodge and Spicer as actors and joint artistic directors toured extensively, not only to primary school audiences but also family audiences in village halls and other outside spaces. Analysis of the company's booking records in the first year, between September 1982 to August 1983, shows 129 school performances across Devon, Dorset, Gloucester and Cornwall. The following year they re-toured *Telling Tales* to a new touring area of the Channel Islands and Somerset as well as taking a new production, *Shapeshifter* (1983/4), into schools where they had previously performed *Telling Tales*. Drawing upon Hodge's early apprenticeship with Medium Fair, the company also expanded its work to include other audiences, such as rural Devon communities, encouraging self-help workshops as part of commissioned work by Devon Councils. This again demonstrates their pragmatic and entrepreneurial approach to theatre making, not being restricted to children's theatre in schools. A further funding source was provided by the University of Exeter in 1984 when Hodge and Spicer led an undergraduate project focusing on clowning and retelling the story of *Beowulf* on a Bronze Age hillfort on Exmoor; an interesting choice of topic bearing in mind their resistance to the epic story cited earlier. Theatre Alibi, together with the students, provided performances in a large scout tent to walkers and by-standers during the late afternoon and evening for a week. During the day-time they performed a clowning show to local primary schools situated close to the hillfort. (Hodge 2017:8). The site-specific setting of 'a Bronze Age fort in the turn of the river' showcased the importance of the environment as a theatrical event with little need for further props or costume and built upon their undergraduate experience in the power of image in theatre; not about the narrative, nor about dramatic structure but about what is the image you present (Spicer 2019:11). The significance of image and sensory elements when creating theatre performance became increasingly important, particularly in their work between 1987-1994.

These early productions provide clear examples of the company's core aims of social inclusiveness, as explained by MacDonald:

performing for a broad and diverse audience, taking into account social and economic considerations, geography and other factors like disability and ethnic background has always been core to Alibi's values. This meant performing in places where you could reach such an audience, and often meant not performing in theatres but in primary schools (2017:1).

This has continued to be a core principle of Theatre Alibi's work, particularly its commitment to take performance into schools and provide the first theatre experience for many of the children. This core purpose is identified in *Theatre Alibi ...The story so far*, an accompanying brochure celebrating the company's 21st anniversary exhibition in 2003 which states, 'Performing in schools enabled Theatre Alibi to reach the broadest possible mix of children and, for many, a visit from the company was their only opportunity to see professional theatre' (TAA 2003a:1). A further aim of the company was making theatre that was broadly accessible and which was 'innovative and adventurous' using the vehicle of storytelling (TAA 2003a:1). These core intentions of enhancing social capital are a further example of the University of Exeter Drama Department's influence.

Photographic evidence of productions between 1982-1986 suggests Theatre Alibi's use of props and costumes had become artistically more adventurous. This was typified in 1985 by the touring production of *The Dragon and St George* for family audiences, mainly performed in school or village halls, which played with scale and used large bamboo structure extensions which sat on top of the actor playing St George and smaller puppet dragons. This production, the first designed by Rona Lee who doubled up as an actor, was also performed as a procession through the streets of Exeter (Spicer 2019:11). The company had also expanded, to include two additional actors who would double up as production managers enabling re-tours of previous productions concurrent with new work. Between 1982-1985 it is clear the company had an increased presence and recognition throughout the South West, being invited to participate in Dartington Arts Society Festival for the Arts, alongside other regional and national theatre companies such as The Royal Court Theatre, Cheek by Jowl, Triad Stage Alliance, 7:84 Theatre Company, TNT and Theatre Exchange (TAA 1983a: Dartington Arts Society Marketing Brochure). This increased profile for Theatre Alibi brought with it funding from South West Arts reported in programmes from 1984.

Despite the company being relatively inexperienced there was a shift in the company's educational emphasis. By 1985 the marketing material for primary school productions rarely mentioned education or encouraging children to question or be provoked; instead there was a greater emphasis on artistic features, theatrical styles and imaginative storytelling (TAA 1985c: *Game Play*). However, with secondary-aged children the company moved into more educationally focused work with the introduction of their first TiE production which will be discussed later in this chapter.

A pragmatic business approach

Throughout the company's existence there has always been a strong, pragmatic business approach. Although MacDonald did not start working for the company until 1988, she knew that a strong operational emphasis on marketing and budgeting was well established from the beginning, recognising that 'Tim and Alison had a really good partnership' (MacDonald 2017:2) in business as well as artistically. Hodge and Spicer took joint responsibility for fund-raising and strategic planning until they later employed an administrator:

What they realised was that, in order to have stability and be able to concentrate on their artistic ambitions, they needed to have others to focus on administration, finance and marketing. They were early adopters of the value of management compared with companies at a similar stage of development (MacDonald 2017:2).

She notes that many other companies at the time lacked business acumen and marketing to a consistently professional standard to secure regular funding opportunities. This observation is borne out by Thomson who, as a board member of several local touring companies including Medium Fair, puts their demise down to being more concerned with artistic issues than concern for details of contracts and insurance (Thomson 2017:8). However, Spicer believed the demise of Medium Fair was for more artistic reasons: 'They died out because they were too *set*. We weren't *set*' (2019:5) and offers two reasons why Theatre Alibi were less '*set*'. Firstly, not having any additional financial support and therefore needing to pursue every funding opportunity, and secondly, and more importantly and unusually, the dynamism provided by the company having two artistic directors. Both artistic directors contributed to the earlier jointly devised

productions, and increasingly, separately created their own work which had differing artistic qualities, often intended for different audiences (Spicer 2019:5).

Hodge recognised the importance of keeping the energy of the company refreshed and the need for an administrator to join the company in 1986. One of the first people asked to join the company was Nick Mosely, another Exeter graduate, who as administrator, was appointed not solely for his administrative skills but because of his understanding and commitment to being 'in the same mould of touring, hard work and interested in actors as creators' (Hodge 2017:10). The appointment of members of administrative staff who also had a strong interest and commitment to the artistic intentions of the company can be seen with the appointment of MacDonald in 1988. MacDonald, recognising the importance of funding, also identifies the way Hodge lobbied the appropriate people from all political parties within Devon and Somerset County Councils and Exeter City Council to raise the profile of the company and attract funding, however small (MacDonald 2017:3).

Arts Council Funding and opportunity

It is worth stepping aside from Theatre Alibi to consider the issue of funding, the principal reason why many touring companies identified previously folded. Anthony Jackson and Chis Vine in *Learning Through Theatre* clearly outline the debate between LEAs and the ACGB around who funded Theatre for Children and TiE. They explain how in 1967, the ACGB acknowledged that theatre for young people had been overlooked when the ACGB was established in 1965. To rectify this omission, larger theatre companies were given funding to establish additional in-house companies 'to play specifically to young people' (Jackson and Vine 2013:25). This change led to significant expansion between 1968-1975 in the formation of TiE companies attached to regional theatres of Bolton, Leeds, Coventry, Edinburgh, Greenwich, Nottingham, Peterborough and Lancaster. However, the ACGB was reluctant to support activities which took place on school premises and in school time, and strongly recommended that LEAs should also substantially support TiE companies as they were responsible for educational provision. Jackson and Vine suggest that who should pay for TiE in schools was a contentious issue in some areas of the country, particularly as up

until 1990 all education provision, including schools' budgets, was the responsibility of LEAs (2013:24-34).

In Devon, the Northcott Theatre, run by George Roman, was coming under increased pressure to extend the outreach work of the theatre to secure additional funding from the ACGB. Hodge remembers Peter Thomson putting Roman in contact with the company to see if they would be interested in delivering the Northcott's outreach commitment, 'They saw it as a great way of covering that aspect of their range. So, the deal was, I think, we got the hall for a peppercorn rent and they were seen to be supporting the outreach company...This was fantastic for us' (2017:7). Emmanuel Hall had recently been acquired by the Northcott Theatre to provide rehearsal space and some studio provision as a touring-in venue as it was now developing itself as a producing theatre. Theatre Alibi would have an upstairs office and a rehearsal studio. This association with the Northcott Theatre, their increased reputation, financial security and a desire to be at the forefront of innovative work led to the next phase of the company's existence.

3. Growing Up and Teenage Years – Experimentation, Education and Expansion

1986 was a pivotal time for Theatre Alibi. Firstly, the company moved into a permanent base, which Spicer describes as 'like moving to a family home' (2019:3), instead of being itinerant. This enabled the company to celebrate and exploit the space, producing *The Victorian World*, 'where the actual space was the main event' (2019:17). Secondly, and paradoxically, the break-up of the personal relationship between the artistic directors prior to moving into Emmanuel Hall, nearly resulted in the dissolution of the company. Spicer recalls a conversation at that time between himself, Hodge and their previous tutor, John Rudlin whose intervention on whether they "let a little thing like your relationship splitting up stop you, and are you continuing or what? If you stop, all of *that* stops" (2019:14) was instrumental in the company continuing. As a consequence of both events, Theatre Alibi became more eclectic, innovative and ensemble in its production style.

Experimentation

The Victorian World (1987), directed by Spicer in collaboration with visual artist Rona Lee, took the company into the field of theatrical installation and site-specific experience. Experimentation into different theatrical forms was enhanced by inviting specialists from other arts disciplines to work with the company (Hodge 2018:1).³⁰ *The Victorian World* brought together, and built upon, the more visual production *The Dragon and St George* and the site-specific experience of *Beowulf*, discussed earlier.

Described as a live exhibition, *The Victorian World* was defined in *The Story So Far* as 'visitors wandered through a maze of Victorian life, glimpsing shadows and ghosts around every corner. This marked the beginning of a new strand – site-considerate work, theatre that happened in and was inspired by unusual locations' (TAA 2003:1).

The multi-media exhibition performance, which transformed the whole of the Emmanuel Hall, was open to the public as well as schools. Records of school bookings showed there was an additional school-based workshop led by company members, further exploring the key themes of the installation. Hodge acknowledges Spicer's ability to create imaginative spaces, in *The Victorian World*, 'his idea of space, where you perform, how you perform, how you create a thrilling theatrical space wherever you are, was very much a part of *Victorian World*. *Victorian World* was way ahead of its time' (Hodge 2017:8). She goes on to suggest, 'it was absolutely Punchdrunk years ahead' (Hodge 2017:8).

³⁰ A further example of working with key collaborators can be seen with Carl Campbell, an African-Caribbean choreographer working with the company to develop the dance-based aspects of storytelling in *In My Mother's Shoes* (1986).



Fig. 2 *The Victorian World* – ‘The poverty of the poor’ (1987)

South West Arts, who by this time were funding aspects of Alibi’s work, reported the exhibition as being a ‘puzzling yet exhilarating experience’, noting the ‘sheer breadth and intensity of the images’ (Event South West 1987:22) which were representational and real, human and multi-media, abstract and sensory:

This was no ordinary ‘educational’ experience: the children who walk round the Victorian world are offered nothing but playthings for their senses: no worksheets, questionnaires or lists. There was nothing said, just the echoing sounds of the world into which the children had stepped...Alibi have been steadily transforming Emmanuel Hall into a kind of living museum...The audience are led around the building to experience Darwin’s grotto...statues carved in chicken wire, walking along plank walkways, seeing figures of poverty ...a series of sights and smells designed to trigger off associations and connections in the spectators’ mind (1987:22-23).

The article, which categorises Theatre Alibi as a TiE company is interesting contextually as it shows Spicer’s conception of the work and the company’s view on the place of education. Spicer is reported as saying:

We wanted to avoid the educational tendency of factualising history, or explaining an age in dates and statistics...The company aims to deport history and instead fire the audience’s imaginations in order to allow free association and hopefully a richer understanding of aspects of a past age...There are no ‘answers’, the exhibition should simply work on a subconscious

level making the spectator feel aware of the contradictions of the Victorian way of life (Spicer, in *Event South West* 1987:23).

The article concludes by noting that the hardest people to convince were the teachers, who instead of allowing the children to absorb the exhibition and draw their own conclusions, were keen to explain and translate it for them. Conversely to the article's suggestion, *The Victorian World* was not intended to be educational in an instrumental way but offered children a broader experience. Instead Spicer's intent was to create an imaginative and emotionally engaging piece of theatre. The installation created and exploited a fully sensory experience, not only sound and images but also smell and touch. Mud from a nearby potato packing farm was used in the poverty exhibit which created 'a pervasive smell of rotting potatoes [providing] a sensory experience... You were in it and couldn't escape it' (Spicer 2019:18). For Spicer, it saturated every sensation. Creating an immersive experience was crucial to Spicer as he saw this sensory dimension adding emotional impact which made the performance memorable (2019:17), something he would exploit years later in *The Railway Arches* and *Platform 4* (1993-4) festivals for new writing.

Hodge also notes that 'for children, it was absolutely incredible...they absolutely loved it' (2017:8). She sees *The Victorian World* as a turning point for the company as it explored,

the actor as creator, the actor's body, the actor galvanising the audience and taking them in their imagination and taking them elsewhere, really working the imaginative muscle with children and adults. So, then we thought 'what else can we do, where else can we go with this and also what other forms interest us?' (Hodge 2017:8).

What they chose to do was to develop the TiE work in secondary schools, develop work for national touring for adults, reduce their storytelling work in primary schools to bi-annual touring and raise the company's profile.

Education – Theatre in Education and work in secondary schools.

Theatre Alibi's TiE work for secondary-aged children (13-16 year olds) was intensive between 1985-1993 and catered for a narrower audience range than their primary school work for 5-12 year olds. This was partially due to the issues and style of TiE, but principally, as explained previously, due to school organisation within Exeter and the company's primary-aged work crossing both Infant (5-7years) and Primary/Middle (8-12years) schools. Although this thesis's central focus in subsequent chapters is on the learning of primary-aged children, it is nevertheless important not to ignore the educational impact of Theatre Alibi's TiE performances as these focus on a more provocative and participatory approach but maintain a common thread of engaging the participant emotionally. Through participation, students are challenged to become more involved in the educational issues or questions. Jackson and Vine suggest:

Essentially TIE seeks to harness the techniques and imaginative potency of theatre in the service of education. The aim is to provide an experience for young people (and increasingly, adult populations) that will be intensely absorbing, challenging, often provocative, and an unrivalled stimulus for further investigation of the chosen subject...structured active participation (2013:5).

Hodge recognises the change in emphasis of Theatre Alibi's work from primary school storytelling, which was concerned with stimulating the imagination, to secondary school TiE which was more political:

With the TiE work, we were in a political world in the 80s ... I think, we felt there was some really wonderful, important human and political message in some of those shows. So, *Lives Worth Living* was very much about the human condition but also about the politics of letting people out of care in that world (2017:15).

***Lives Worth Living* 1985-1993**

Theatre Alibi selected their TiE projects with great care ensuring they could make the programmes originally written for other companies their own; 'those shows we took from other places, we really tried to take ownership of' (Hodge 2017:12). They were aware of *Lives Worth Living*, their first piece of TiE, from their Exeter Drama Department network. Brian Bishop, a member of Echo Theatre, had moved to Belgrade TiE Company in 1982 when Echo Theatre folded and was

part of the Coventry based TiE company when they devised and scripted *Lives Worth Living* in 1983. It tells the story of young adult siblings, Julie and Mark, as they grapple with decisions on the long-term care of Mark whilst on an outing to the sea-side. Mark, who has significant physical and mental disabilities, is abused both off-stage by 'youths' at the start of the play, and through narration during the performance, we learn that he is treated with prejudice and contempt from an 'unfair society'.

An interview with Annie Chave, who saw *Lives Worth Living* in her Devon secondary school in 1985, confirms her recollection, although not detailed, is still emotionally significant after thirty years. Her overwhelming memory was of sand on the floor and the very powerful acting of Spicer, the actor playing Mark, who made a strong impression on her:

Tim's acting was incredible – seeing him become a disabled person in front of my eyes...I only remember Tim's performance, although I also knew Ali, (*Julie*). I think this was because of the impact of his characterisation. I so clearly remember his gestures, rubbing his hands together and spitting because he was getting excited, frustrated and upset...I felt Tim's performance had a profound impact and stayed with me throughout my life. It made me more conscious of people with disability... It made me realise people with disability have feelings too' (Chave 2017:1).

What is clear from the recollection is the longitudinal impact of both the memory from 32 years earlier and the impact of the piece of drama on her attitudes towards people with disability. It illustrates how the performance may have brought about a long-term effect, although I acknowledge that the performance evidence will not be solely responsible for shaping this 14-year-old's attitude to disability and that her upbringing and environment will have also had significant impact. Chave's account also illustrates the broader educational impact of the performance and Theatre Alibi's work of providing young adults with the opportunity to understand complex issues through heightened levels of emotional engagement brought about by live performance. *Lives Worth Living* which was performed by Theatre Alibi from 1985 also illustrates the changing socio-political attitudes towards the presentation of disability in theatre over the last 30 years with the central character, Mark, being performed by an actor 'playing' a disability rather than being performed by an actor with a disability.

When interviewed in 2017, Hodge recognises in the 1980s no one raised concerns about, a non-disabled actor, playing Mark, a boy with Downs Syndrome; however, this would probably not be acceptable today. To make the programme the company's own, they spent time researching and spending time with people with Downs Syndrome.



Fig. 3 *Lives Worth Living* (1985a)

Lives Worth Living was given particular resonance when it was re-toured in 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1993, due to controversy, following poor management, of the Exeter closures in 1986 of Starcross Hospital for people with Learning Difficulties and Digby Hospital following the Mental Health Act of 1983 (MacDonald 2018).³¹As Hodge explains, 'In terms of educating children we were saying "if this was your brother, and he was cut loose from Digby, what would you do?". So, we contextualised ourselves. Encouraging young people to

³¹ The Mental Health Act of 1983 saw many closures of mental health hospitals nationally. Supported care was meant to be secured before patients were placed within the community. However, the level of care was often considered to be insufficient and institutionalised patients were left with little support.

question is at the core of TiE programmes'. (Hodge 2017:11-12). In this way, the Exeter TiE audiences were encouraged to think more deeply about the Theatre Alibi performance they were seeing. As Christine Redington in *Can Theatre Teach?* asserts 'TiE does not support the status quo, but questions society and demands changes' (1983:22). As Chave's recollection demonstrates in *Lives Worth Living*, the audience are asked to question how Mark should be treated and in so doing, question how they treat people with disabilities. They are also asked where responsibilities lie and whether his sister Julie should be responsible for his care?

No Heroes, No Cowards 1987-1991

Such was Theatre Alibi's raised profile nationally that in 1987, Hodge was elected to the Board of SCYPT, the Standing Conference of Children and Young People's Theatre, a national body of makers and creators of TiE and Young People's Theatre. Being on the Board involved travelling nationally to see other companies' work, particularly TiE. Consequently, she saw *No Heroes, No Cowards*, Theatre Alibi's next piece of TiE which was created by Theatre of Fact in Milton Keynes, and run by Rae Hoole and Vince Miles, who were also drama students with Hodge and Spicer. *Lives Worth Living* and *No Heroes, No Cowards* were hugely successful for Theatre Alibi and repeatedly re-toured to schools in Devon, Somerset, Dorset and Essex. *No Heroes, No Cowards* (1987), based on the First World War, creates a discourse around the politics of war and the personal, emotional challenges that it presented. The original Milton Keynes production was based on the life of a local veteran Horton Munday and his experiences of enlisting and having to shoot a deserter. Although created by another TiE company it was important for Hodge to re-created *No Heroes, No Cowards* within a local context and make it their own. Hodge recalls broadcasting on Radio Devon asking for anyone locally who fought in the First World War to come forward. As a result, the company of actors visited Harold Jenkins, a 98-year old veteran who had enlisted at the age of 14 and fought in the battle of the Somme who tearfully recounted his experience. Hodge believes this experience was helpful for the actors 'because it landed in our bodies and, rather than it being a Theatre of Fact show, we found our research which made it far more real' (2017:12). She provides a further anecdote from the production which highlights the 'liveness' of community theatre and TiE performance, giving a new

resonance to historical events of 70 years ago and demonstrating the interaction between the past and present, actor and subject in the immediacy of a particular performance:

It was an extraordinary moment of theatre. Imagine the situation: a man in his 90's sitting in the front row in his wheelchair smoking a cigar (!) challenging the actor who was on stage playing him and taking over the story from his seat in the auditorium to tell his experience of the Somme. The actor (Paul Allain) skillfully responded by encouraging him to do so, and slowly the local community audience realised who Harold was and that he had indeed witnessed the battle as a young man. It was an incredibly moving night for everyone who was there, we had a local storyteller whose memories we had drawn on, honing our account of his experience in the live performance (Hodge 2017:1).

TiE has the power to provide an embodied experience where participants can question from within the drama and objectively outside the performance. Jamieson, as a performer in *No Heroes, No Cowards* found it to be 'some of the most challenging work I have ever done' (2017: 2). When asked to explain further, his recollection and the impact of the event was still intense:

It was a very strong existing piece of TiE in a 1980s mould which made secondary-age children think about the moral issues thrown up by the First World War and how they would respond, or at least feel, when they were put in a similar situation. It involved putting them on the spot and making them, the boys, join the army; bullying them into joining a firing squad to shoot a soldier who had deserted or shown cowardice because he had shell shock. I remember those two scenarios very vividly, but there were other scenarios as well – in a workplace making ammunitions. It put people on the spot, almost in a way that I don't think would be allowed now. Right at the beginning it involved separating the boys and the girls and recruiting the boys and getting the girls to laugh at them... it was terrible, but terribly effective. Provocative (Jamieson 2017:2).

He continues to recall the reactions of the student participants and the impact on the young people, how they conformed to what they were asked to do in a similar way to conscription in 1916:

They did as they were told but they could feel the uncomfortableness as the manipulation was explored and the ways in which people were pushed by peer pressure, ... the pressure of contemporary society and by authority. They were

coerced and co-opted into making the war happen. It was brilliant. (Jamieson 2017:2).

Stamping, Shouting and Singing Home 1988

Stamping, Shouting and Singing Home written by Lisa Evans, a regular playwright for Theatre Centre, was arguably the most provocative of Theatre Alibi's TiE programmes, but potentially had the most impact on its audience. For this production, the company recruited actors nationally to establish a cast of four women, three of whom were black or mixed-race identifying as black. The performance toured Devon and Somerset secondary schools in 1988, a time when audiences, although not significantly less multi-racial than now, were attitudinally more prejudiced.



Fig. 4 *Stamping, Shouting and Singing Home* (1988a)

Hodge recalls the difficulties for the performers but also the real importance of the work:

It was an incredibly important show because there were three black actors in that show and the racism that they experienced in the schools in Devon was absolutely shocking. To their credit, and maybe to ours, we continued until by the end of the performance, the children stopped shouting n***** and it was just unbelievable. This was 1988. We had to deal with quite a lot of that. Of course, it was ignorance, because most of the kids

hadn't seen black people. By the end, they had accepted them. I thought it was a very important show because it really had that impact, white kids who had never seen black actors. It was very hard for the actors but it worked and it was a great educational tool, I think. So that came from SCYPT and from seeing other people's work... I thought "Dare we- dare we do that in Devon?" and "Yes, let's see what happens when you bring three black people into schools in Devon" and I am glad that we did. They always had a resonance (2017:12-13).

By taking a predominantly black cast into schools, the company was providing positive role models for those minority of students in secondary schools who came from a British Asian Minority Ethnic background, so providing broader educational value.

Through TiE, Theatre Alibi was endeavouring to challenge attitudes and bring about change in the young people who experienced their performances. It was certainly political and emotionally charged at a different level to the primary-aged storytelling performances. It aimed to help children learn and develop greater humanity towards others. For Hodge, the aim of their work in schools to produce shows:

where the students could actually experience something, not just intellectually or at a distance, but physically, viscerally, was terribly important to us. We knew that people learn through the body and not just through the head and sitting down behind desks is not the way that we learn and that theatre allows you to learn on so many different levels. So that is why increasingly we wanted more physical interaction for them to understand the physical response to things (2017:16).

The company's longitudinal aim was to change young people's attitudes through affective and thought-provoking theatre. Theatre Alibi were contributing to children's learning not only through the content of the TiE programmes but also through emotional engagement.

The demise of TiE

Despite Theatre Alibi's commitment to developing TiE work to take into schools, the TiE movement nationally was under threat due to political and funding changes and was soon in decline. Theatre Alibi was a late adopter of TiE, having it as a strand of their artistic programme rather than the central component. The

political activism aspect of TiE, Roger Wooster argues, was a contributing factor to the introduction of the Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1988 which 'sought to sweep away the progressive and non-utilitarian ideas of which TIE/DIE had been a hotbed' (Wooster 2007:30). Within the context of TiE, Wooster identifies two key aspects of ERA: firstly, the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS) which transferred the majority of budgetary control of schools from the LEA to schools themselves which put pressure on LEA peripatetic services, including TiE companies; and secondly, with the introduction of the National Curriculum, Drama was not a separate subject but within the English core curriculum (2007:30).

Jamieson, a performer in the re-tours of *No Heroes, No Cowards* perceived that Theatre Alibi's TiE programme stopped for financial and pragmatic reasons rather than ideological. TiE was very labour intensive with four actors participating in a half-day event with a class of 30 students. With 60 children being the maximum numbers from a school to experience the programme, he thought there was a point when TiE became untenable financially 'either the company couldn't afford it, or the schools couldn't afford it' (Jamieson 2017:2).

From the experience of Annie Chave as a participant, mentioned earlier in this section, and Jamieson's recollection as performer, it is clear Theatre Alibi's TiE programme created impact in the long-term memory of those viscerally affected by it.

Where did Theatre Alibi fit within the field of Educational Theatre?

Theatre Alibi employed an ensemble of actors who alternated between TiE, primary school tours and adult productions. They were not the specialist actor/teachers employed by many TiE companies and therefore during the intense TiE period for Theatre Alibi between 1989-1992 would have had to develop the specific skills required of TiE.

Despite education funding for schools being devolved to schools' governing bodies and headteachers following ERA in 1988, Theatre Alibi continued to receive some funding for their TiE work from Devon and Somerset LEAs until 1993. The predominance of TiE in the company's repertoire is interesting, as

nationally TiE was on the wane. Since the late 1980s, many TiE companies have either disbanded due to financial difficulties or changed to follow more constrained funding opportunities by producing programmes which support PSHE themed work such as Health and Drugs Education or Anti-Bullying. They have produced work with more prescribed educational objectives set by the funding body and therefore, lost much of the radical progressive heritage of TiE. Although Theatre Alibi received funding from Exeter Health Authority for delivery of *Lives Worth Living* programmes in 1985, the company chose not to follow an education driven emphasis to their work.

Theatre Alibi was, and is, committed to providing high quality theatre in schools for all ages and therefore, their work is inherently educational in the broadest context of providing an imaginative, cultural and thought-provoking experience, bridging both fields of TiE and TfCYA.

Expansion and change

1989 saw a shift in the company's practice to include both new writing and theatre for adult audiences. The ACGB provided additional funding for Spicer to write the script for *The Withered Arm*, adapted from Thomas Hardy short stories. This production received additional ACGB funding for a national tour of studio theatres and community venues thus broadening Alibi's artistic brief to include developmental studio productions for regional and national touring.

As part of the company's expansion and desire to make new experimental work for adult audiences, eleven company members trained at the Gardzienice – Centre for Theatre Practices, Poland in 1990 (TAA Annual Report 1990/1:2). The initiative, funded by the ACGB and The British Council, was an important investment in training a core of company performers to develop their skills. Company director Wlodzimierz Staniewski's unique approach to actor training, recognising the voice and the body as a single instrument, as well as intensive physical and vocal training, had a lasting impact on Theatre Alibi's later work. Another significant element of Staniewski's approach was the importance of 'their musicality – both in their approach to acting and the construction of the performance that had again, lasting impact on Alibi's work' (Hodge 2018:2).

Dawn Chorus (1990), *Song Stories* (1990) and *Goat Song* (1991) all reflected 'a fusion of close harmony singing and explosive physical movement' (TAA 2003a:1) and were innovative theatrical performances which toured to London as well as the South West. The training visit to Gardzienice also led to a change in the company's artistic directorship with Hodge, inspired by Staniewski's work, deciding to relinquish her role as Artistic Director with Theatre Alibi following an invitation to return to Gardzienice as Assistant Director (Hodge 2017:14). For Hodge, it was a 'huge decision' but feeling much of their theatre making had been self-taught, she felt it was time for her to 'learn from somebody who knows more than I did' (2017:13). She did return to Theatre Alibi three years later for one production, *Helen's Passion* (1993), but this was as an associate director.

For MacDonald, the company's longevity was due to the way the artistic directors continued to innovate and take on different things which were often 'ahead of the curve' (2017:4). Throughout this time the company was innovative, exploring different theatrical forms and styles rather than being constrained to one specific mode. This is acknowledged by Spicer, now the sole Artistic Director, in his Artistic Director's report which recognised the growth and breadth of the company's work in the previous year (1991:3), including seven different productions and workshops, six of which were new performances and two were schools based. From its inception, the company, which had predominantly only produced children and family's work in the first four years, now saw this as a minor part of the programme. However, due to the increased duration of school touring programmes and larger audiences, the schools' programmes were still the principle way of fulfilling the company's core aim of providing theatre to as wide an audience as possible. Recognising its achievement of 36 productions over the previous ten years Spicer celebrated the company's development 'from its small beginnings to create work and build audience for studio theatres, schools, arts centres, village halls and community centres across the region and nationally' (1991:3).

As the repertoire of work grew, so had the number of performers working with the company. MacDonald recognised the impact of developing an ensemble of new actors and the continuity and richness it brought to the company. In the 1980s, as an Independent Theatre Council Approved Manager, the theatre

company's recruitment was limited to two Equity cards a year which made casting more difficult. Prior to 1987 Theatre Alibi provided a useful, but restricted, means for actors straight from college to obtain Equity recognition. The relaxing of this system in 1987 allowed for greater flexibility and for extended contracts to be issued (MacDonald 2017:5). Initially four newly graduated actors from the University of Exeter were recruited, Simon Crane, Rebecca John, Paul Allain and Lisa Shrimpton who formed the first company to tour *No Heroes, No Cowards* (Hodge 2017:11). When they resigned, Nikki Sved and Mark Randle were employed for *If Death Was A Train* (1988) and they were later joined by Daniel Jamieson and Emma Rice in 1989. Spicer recognised the value of the appointments in the company's aim of having a long-term ensemble:

In the next two years, the company aims to create a permanent core of performers and develop a pattern of ongoing actor training not only to maintain the high quality of company productions but to increase the company's flexibility to take advantage of touring opportunities regionally, nationally and internationally (1991:2).

Financial Survival

With expansion, increasingly the role of the artistic directors moved away from directing to running the company. Although Alibi had employed administrators to support the company, Hodge recalls that before leaving in 1990, 70% of her time 'was spent on the phone trying to make sure our funding base was okay... That creative pragmatism was absolutely what Alibi was about... We covered our bases; I had achieved City, Council and national funding by then, so we had a lot of people to please, a lot of meetings to go to' (2017:11). The late 1980s saw a time of financial difficulty for many theatre companies including Theatre Alibi. Hodge describes 'It felt like being in a war zone, as all around us, people were being cut. It was a big deal. You had to hold onto your funding' (2017:11).

The ACGB indicated a change in funding emphasis in *The Glory of the Garden Report* (1984) which recommended a review of funding to bring the regions closer to funding levels in London over the next ten years. The report also recommended the principle of partnership and supporting companies who could receive similar support from Local Authorities and private sponsorship. Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, which came to power on a promise of

cutting public spending, chose not to increase spending to the arts, despite high inflation rates of between 9% and 18% in the 1980s.

The Annual Report to the Theatre Alibi Board of Trustees (1990/1) provides a rich source for identifying the company's financial situation in its 10th year of operation. The annual budget was £110,848 which represented a £10,000 reduction from the previous year. The company's administrator recognised the constraints a reduction in funding placed on the artistic programme the company offered:

Financial constraints allowed for short performance runs and huge difficulties in remounting productions. We are unable to afford to hold over skilled and trained performers from one production to the next, and their continued availability is often a case of good fortune (Mole 1991:5).

He also recognised the difficult situation the company faced:

The challenge for Theatre Alibi in the future is not only to continue to survive in the face of change but also to develop. Managing and maintaining the level of work in the face of standstill funding eroded by inflation makes development a luxury, but one which the company has to make possible in order to continue to produce exciting theatre of high quality (Mole 1991:5).

When considering the longitudinal impact of Theatre Alibi it is important to consider how it has survived when other companies have not. Further scrutiny of the accounts illustrates the importance to the company of a collection of funders including the South West Theatre Consortium which provided almost half of the company's income. This consortium not only provided funding but also provided mutual support, as Hodge identifies 'We defended each other's corners, which was great, and helped protect those companies because we were doing valuable work' (2017:9). Despite ERA in 1988 and schools receiving devolved budgets, Devon County and Exeter City Councils continued to provide a third of the company's income. Income from school bookings and ticket sales made up less than 15% of the overall income signifying how much schools' bookings and tickets were subsidised. In 1991, Stephen Mole, the company's administrator recognised that it had been the strong reputation of the company's work in

schools that enabled it to adjust to major changes due to the introduction of a National Curriculum and LMS (1991:5).³²

MacDonald also re-enforces the view that the company's financial survival was due to the positive relationship the company fostered with schools, education officers and those who held the 'purse strings' that enabled the company to continue to offer the highest quality theatre to children in schools. One of her principal roles, since joining the company in 1987 and becoming Joint General Manager in 1994, was to fundraise nationally and locally. MacDonald emphasised the importance of not being tied to one source of funding but recognised that this took additional time to submit applications and meet the requirements of all funding bodies. Being pragmatic and strategic meant that they could attract small amounts of funding such as Exeter Health Authority supporting both *Lives Worth Living* and *If Death Was A Train*, part of health professionals training on grief and bereavement. The company did not let such funding opportunities dictate the artistic programme but did maximise opportunities when appropriate (MacDonald 2017:2-3).

An outcome-led culture was developing in arts funding that challenged Theatre Alibi's theatre-making style which relied on devising following a period of exploration. This is illustrated by the final statement from Kim Hager, Chair of the Board: 'In the future the company will be looking to funding bodies to recognise the importance of an investment in the process of theatre as much as in the number of performances achieved' (1991:1).

Return to storytelling – *The Goose*

The production of *The Goose* (1992) was the final primary school and family tour that Spicer created, although he remained involved with site-considerate festival work for two further years before relinquishing the role of Artistic Director in 1994. The stories within *The Goose* include the mime of a steer having its throat slit, liver extracted, cooked and served as a meal, a Minister and a horse having their heads cut off and placed on a post and an imposter princess being thrown down

³² LMS enabled schools to have budgetary autonomy, so choosing to spend their budget on other priorities rather than a theatre performance.

a mountain side as punishment. It is noteworthy that the story content in 1992 was far more gruesome than may be accepted today for primary-aged children. *The Goose* demonstrates the cultural influence in the use of physicality, voice and community storytelling of the visits to Poland, both the training visit to Gardzienice and a further visit to the Kurpie region in 1992. *The Goose*, which was largely created and rehearsed in rural Poland, brings together many elements explored over the previous ten years. It is a return to the storytelling foundations of the company and explores the relationship between the actor and the audience when making theatre as an event. Spicer explains the influence of Russian folklorist and scholar, Vladimir Propp and his work *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) when creating the production as it drew upon rural stories 'where nobody owns them [as] they come out of a communal psyche' (Spicer 2019:8). He recalls during the performance in a schoolroom in the middle of a forest in Poland how local villagers would turn up and there would be an exchange of stories and songs between the company and the audience so that 'towards the end we were deconstructing which bit was the audience and which bits were the artistic offering' (Spicer 2019:9). The last story in the performances in Devon schools, although told in English, was accompanied by the characters singing a traditional Polish song, in the native language, which added an additional texture to the storytelling. This cultural element was further enhanced in the 1993 re-tour with the inclusion of traditional Polish dances (Hulton 2017:4). Watching this performance may have extended the children's cultural and educational experience. It was received in a very different manner to the secondary school performance *Stamping, Shouting and Singing Home*, being more accepted by the audience. One of the reasons for this may be due to the performance being performed by an all-white cast.

The Goose also saw a greater emphasis on set, which was an abstract, architectural design created from recycled lorry wheel-arches brought from Poland. The everyday classroom, in which the play is performed, is transformed by the sculptural design which is adapted for each of the three stories. It is also the focus of an interactive discussion between stories with the actors and the audience reflecting on what the set could represent, how they might interpret what they see and encouraging them to develop their interpretative analysis

skills. During these transitions the actors also provide information on the link with Poland, speaking directly to the audience and sharing their process explicitly.

Funding changes in 1993/4 contributed to the greatest challenge the company faced when the ACGB insisted funding to organisations in South West Arts Region should be through a franchise process whereby Orchard, Kneehigh, Bristol based Public Parts and Theatre Alibi would all bid for funding. South West Arts would only agree to fund three of the four companies through the franchise process. In the end, they only funded two companies, Theatre Alibi and Kneehigh, but later gave some additional funding to Orchard Theatre. Public Parts ceased to exist (MacDonald 2017:11). This time of new funding coincided with Spicer wanting to relinquish his role as Artistic Director due to the tension of his role being 'more like a producer' (Spicer 2019:16), with other members of the company directing. The pressure of being sole director and the requirement to be continually creating led in 1994 to the decision by Spicer to leave the company and pursue a new career as a doctor. He accepts the decision was a very difficult one recognising:

It's very odd when you start a company to go out and find new Artistic Directors. It is very odd to then walk away from it...If you have spent a lot of energy creating an institution do you throw it all away? My answer was you don't. That was completely against the company ethos (Spicer 2019:19).

Dorinda Hulton, who was acting as an artistic consultant to the company in 1993-5 explained 'The change of leadership coincided with a change in funding and, with the change in funding, came a different kind of priority requirement in the company' (Hulton 2017:5). The franchising requirements required the company to set out its strategic direction within new ACGB priorities necessitating the new Artistic Directors, Sved and Jamieson, to identify their vision. To increase their overall audience, the company chose to specialise in primary school tours, creating them to be also suitable to tour for families in small and mid-scale art centres. In addition, they reconnected their adult work with rural communities to further build an audience. As MacDonald reflects,

What Dan and Nikki wanted to do was to create a show for primary schools every year, as we all thought that our children's work was exceptional and start performing it in theatres as well. The other new ambition was to take the adult work more widely

out into rural settings, rural touring but not so much to theatres (MacDonald 2017:8).

Despite the change of artistic directors, the company's core aims remained: 'Our philosophy has always been, "We are touring into schools because school is where we find the broadest range of children" rather than "Our work is educational". It's a fundamental distinction' (MacDonald 2017: 11-12). The change in funding requirements and appointment of new directors assisted Theatre Alibi's work to develop and a new distinctive style to evolve.

Part Two

4. Development and Distinctiveness (1994-present day)

To evaluate the distinctiveness of Theatre Alibi's schools work, my definition of distinctiveness focuses on the distinguishing elements of the company, the theatrical form and features which schools expect when booking a Theatre Alibi performance. After the change of artistic directors in 1994, storytelling, whether original or based on traditional sources remained a characteristic form, as well as the distinctive directorial style, their production features and the importance of design, and incorporation of music. This section will explore how these regular elements, when integrated within a production, support the emotional and creative development of children. Although the company has continued to make work for adult audiences this is not the focus of this thesis.

The importance and development of storytelling

When discussing Theatre Alibi's work, it is important to consider the processes and features which the company uses to create stories and plot the transition from traditional stories to new writing with new artistic directors, Sved and Jamieson. The company's storytelling tradition became reinforced and revitalised by the writing of new stories and a return to a particular form of storytelling based on Alfreds' techniques discussed briefly on pp. 64-66. For artistic director Sved, writing in the educational pack for *The Freeze*, the rehearsal process and 'the storytelling is very particular too, if not unique' (2002:51). As has been seen in earlier phases of the company's development,

storytelling has been at its core, whether this has been through adapting and re-telling traditional tales in its early work, or since 1995 new stories written by Jamieson, or adaptations of other well-known children's writers, such as Michael Morpurgo, Michael Rosen, Dick-King Smith or David Almond.³³ Unlike many companies, Theatre Alibi's work is initially story-based rather than script-based, particularly at the R&D phase, with the writer in the rehearsal room; therefore both Sved and Jamieson work together co-creating, selecting and deciding what works and will be included in the final script. This close partnership has developed as both Jamieson and Sved have worked together over the last 30 years. Theatre Alibi's stories are grounded in empathy and emotion. The stories are often told with sensitivity and gentleness but nonetheless deal with emotional and difficult issues such as loss, death and being an outsider, as well as hope, joy and friendship. Hulton, who has worked closely with the artistic directors since the 1990s, believes the company's distinctiveness comes from the writing, the selection and direction of storytelling which is a process of 'eye, ear and heart' (Hulton 2017:6). The process is one where what is seen, what is heard and what is felt are closely blended together.

The emotional stories, which may draw upon traditional stories from around the globe, or fantastical new worlds, take the children to new imagined realms beyond their experience and help them feel a variety of emotions. *Lost and Found* (2007), *I Believe in Unicorns* (2013, 2015, 2019) and *Why the Whales Came* (2001,2003) take them into a world of war and displacement; *Wild One* (2004), *A Flying Visit* (2010) and *Mucky Pup* (2014) illustrate feelings of being socially excluded and 'otherness'; *Bonjour Bob* (2005), *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* (2016,2018) and *Apple John* (2017) all deal with issues of loss, loneliness and mental health. Other themes which are developed in many productions are friendship, hope, the importance of creativity and imagination.³⁴ Derek Froom, an actor who has worked regularly with Theatre Alibi over the last

³³Michael Morpurgo's *Why the Whales Came* (2001, 2003), *I Believe in Unicorns* (2013,2015,2019); Dick King-Smith's *The Crowstarver* (2006, 2012); Michael Rosen's poems in *You Can't Catch Me* (2003); and David Almond's *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* (2016,2018).

³⁴ *How to Hug Trees* (2006), *High Muck-a-Muck* (2009), *Deep Down Cowboys* (2011), *Cabbage Heart* (2012) *Table Mates* (2018) all written by Daniel Jamieson are examples of stories which reflect hope, friendship and creativity.

20 years, identifies introducing children to content with emotional depth such as death, and 'pushing the boundaries is one of the distinguishing things about Alibi...We are dealing with real life situations and experiences we all have to go through at some point. It feels right that we are able to visit those things which give children an opportunity to discuss them in the classroom' (Frood 2017:1). Crucial to the storytelling success of the company is the integrity the actors bring to the role; as Frood continues, 'That's a particular way in which we work, is that we're not patronising...Everything we do is played with truth and honesty' (2017:3).

Through the form of storytelling, Theatre Alibi stories create a narrative which has a power and importance which would not normally exist in schools, as illustrated by a teacher after watching *High Muck-a-Muck* with her class:

The power of the story and the emotional integrity of the acting engendered an extra-ordinary and intense involvement in the children. In times when the affective dimension of education has been squeezed out to make way for the pursuit of targets and the 'magic ingredients that round us off as human beings' have been replaced by being constantly measured against national standards, the performance served to remind us all of the power and effectiveness of stimulating and harnessing children's imagination (TAFF Littleham 2009:1).

This comment exemplifies the interconnection between the performance, the children's emotional development and education; a key investigation of this thesis. It elucidates how a one-off performance educates children and complements their curriculum development. The way Theatre Alibi performances support children's learning by developing their imagination is regularly endorsed by teachers in Theatre Alibi's Feedback Forms (TAFF). The above example is noteworthy in an educational context of 2009, which was at the tail end of the DfE's National Strategies and a time of considerable day to day pressure on primary schools.³⁵ Similar comments continue to be made by teachers reflecting

³⁵ The National Strategies in education was a time of high involvement of National Consultants in schools, a time of continual change and insufficient time for implementation before the next change. There was a strong emphasis on accountability, focus on raising standards, expected progress, testing, and literacy and numeracy hours.

the pressure to deliver a narrow and functional curriculum at the cost of the arts and developing children's imagination ten years later.

Through careful writing, devising and direction, many of the stories in Theatre Alibi's children's productions are a subtle combination of humour and moments of sadness bringing the children to the brink of tears. One moment sad or 'crying on the inside'³⁶ and another moment laughing joyfully.

Why the Sky is Far Away and other stories (1991/2)

Theatre Alibi developed a playful, games-based approach to storytelling which was imaginative and inventive, interweaving enactment, characterisation and narration. Like Alfreds' work, Theatre Alibi at that time often employed well-known stories as a starting point for their devising; in this way, the child audience would have some understanding of the narrative and structure of the story and could recognise its playful reconstruction. Sved, recalls being introduced to Alfreds' work by Glendyr Sacks in her undergraduate storytelling project:

The first time I remember seeing the paper was indeed at University. I was working on my Practical Essay in my third year ...I was struggling with how to present difficult material in a way that openly acknowledged the theatre maker's attempt to understand and represent.... I certainly found it very helpful. For those first few storytelling shows at Alibi I used the Alfreds' paper as a bit of a bible – *Why The Sky Is Far Away* was created using many of his exercises, particularly those around gesture (illustrating, responding, contacting etc.), but also those exercises that explore the relationship between storytellers (Sved 2017:1).

Why the Sky is Far Away and other stories, which was the first production to be directed by Sved prior to her becoming artistic director illustrates the complementary style of Alfreds and Sved³⁷. The playful adaptation of well-known story patterns can be seen in the first story, 'The Little Old Lady', which adapts the repetitive pattern of the children's nonsense song "There was an old lady who swallowed a fly". In the Theatre Alibi version, the storyteller narrates and

³⁶ Comment from a Year 3 child after seeing *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* (FS-BM103-APS1).

³⁷ EDA-TA-2. Exeter Drama Department Digital Archive – *Why the Sky is Far Away* (1991/2).

directs the actions of the actress as a little old lady, providing simple props, costume, masks and physical manipulation to transform her repeatedly into a dog, stick, fire, water, ox, pig, stile, farmer, rope and rat. Time is given to establish the character physically, through gesture, mime and movement when introduced to the audience, and then abbreviated when having to change characters quickly. Once the clear theatrical conventions and patterns are established, the audience see the character with their imagination and do not require the extended actions. Storytelling and narration allow for a non-naturalistic and exaggerated style of performance. A process Alfreds refers to as 'focalisation', where the actor, once a character becomes established, can springboard from one character to another.

In 'The Little Old Lady' the performance starts with a very clear role of the actor/narrator, the audience sees him as separate from the story as he directly addresses the audience. The second actor is initially a passive accomplice, sitting beside the narrator until he brings her into the story by creating the character before the audience's eyes. The narrator produces a mop-cap, which he places on the other actor's head and instantly the character of an old lady is created. There then follows a playful 'game' of acceptance of the role and the story, with the narrator, through facial expressions, directing the actress and commenting on whether her characterisation is old enough and fits his image of the little old lady. This plays with the convention of the narrator playing the role of director from within the story and establishes the 'commenting' aspect of the role.³⁸

This playfulness between the storyteller, the actress and the audience is like the improvisation game, 'Yes let's', where the actress accepts the storyteller's suggestions and, within the rules of the game, is unable to say 'no'. There is further playful, and seemingly improvised interchange when the actress changes the story she has been given by the narrator. The digital recording illustrates the liveliness and engagement of the audience when a child is so absorbed in the

³⁸ Theatre Alibi Education packs for secondary schools refer to exercises of narration when storytelling by illustrating, commenting, responding, contracting which are attributed to Alfreds with Shared Experience. *The Freeze* 2002:61-65. Retrieved 31 July 2019 from <https://www.theatrealibi.co.uk/resources/>

performance that he joins in and involuntarily calls out “no”.³⁹ The narrator manipulates the actress by quickly offering a simple prop to re-inforce the action, by removing her cap and placing a stick between her teeth to transform her from a little old lady to a dog. The pattern of the narrator telling the story to the audience, the actress miming what is said and being manipulated into various characters, is further developed when the actress refuses to ‘play the game’, for a second time changing the rules and consequently, the power within the story. The audience can read what is happening and finds the change of status humorous. The narrator, who maintains his role throughout, is forced to offer a revised version of the original story but now becomes more integral to the performance by offering vocal sound effects which add an additional layer to the story and helps the audience imagine the action further.

Visual and physical storytelling are key to Theatre Alibi’s work as illustrated in the third story, a Nigerian traditional story, *Why The Sky Is Far Away*, where the diminutive female actress acrobatically jumps onto the front of the other actor to create the ‘fat belly’ of the greedy old man character who wants to eat the sun.

Direct Address with the audience

Sved notes how direct address to the audience by the storyteller helps the company approach darker issues in a responsible way. The storyteller using direct address can read the child audience,

and really pitch the show very particularly at them, it enables you to ... go to more challenging places in terms of the complexity of the story but also the subject matter. If you’ve got a story-teller present, or you build up a relationship with the children, you can go to quite frightening places and you can present things that are frightening in a way that becomes okay (Sved 2016:3).

I Believe in Unicorns (2013,2015,2019) which was set in the Balkan War of the 1990s, dealt with bombing, burning books and the deaths of farm animals and people, illustrates this point. Sved recognises consideration is given to their young audience by explaining how in theatre with older audience a line might be delivered to summon up fear. However, with Theatre Alibi:

³⁹ EDA-TA-2. Exeter Drama Department Digital Archive – *Why the Sky is Far Away* (1991/2).

you can say exactly the same line but you're saying it as if you are really sorry for the people who are there. It's subtle stuff but because you have that triangular relationship between the performer, the material and the children, you're mediating the story in a way that is quite hard to do if you are just a character from the inside of it (2016:4).

In Alibi's work, which is often performed by a cast of two or three actors, most play the narrator and multiple characters in each performance. Often each member of the cast has direct contact with the audience by describing the character in the third person before then becoming them. Such moments are described by Alfreds as 'weird, full Stanislavskian identification and Brechtian distancing at one and the same time' (1977:12). Sved reiterates that the children can accept the duality of the performance due to the storytelling approach of openness with the audience, 'The fact you're telling a story and coming clean that you are telling a story with actors' enables Theatre Alibi to deal with harsh material and 'go to quite extreme fantastical places' (2016:4). Fantastical places and stories which focus on the surreal are common features of Alibi's work.

New Writing - Storytelling with emotion

Sved has developed her own storytelling style that addresses her criticism of Alfreds, which is that 'he doesn't talk nearly enough about meaning and what is at the heart of the story' (2017:1). Both Sved and Jamieson have developed a close relationship between writing and direction to produce performances for children which have deep meaning based on the human experience. They are not frightened to approach challenging stories and difficult subjects. Hulton identifies the company's distinguishing features as the writing of Jamieson's stories and the directorial approach of Sved to staging them:

they are very moving stories, they focus on experience and issues which shift between the fantastical and the real. It makes the world of the story not one of social problem but one where social problem may be in that world but also dreams and wishes, and fears and hopes, all of these things. The emotional content within the stories is very full. That's quite a distinctive imagination and it comes largely from Dan, but also to an extent from Nikki, the process of selecting them. Dan would make a selection and Nikki would choose... She has a real eye and an ear and a heart for selecting. She does it with a sure hand (Hulton 2017:6).

For Thomson, one of Jamieson's teachers at Exeter with a specialism in new writing, it is not only the 'lovely' quality of Jamieson's writing, it is the way he speaks to children and does not patronise children in any way, it 'doesn't play down to children' (Thomson 2017:2). He also feels their work for children is specifically distinctive and of high quality.

Since 1994, of the 23 new productions for the primary school tours, 18 have been new writing by Jamieson and three further performances have been his adaptations of well-known children's books or poems. Jamieson's approach to script-writing for children was originally based on stories. Initially, he modelled his new stories around the company's framework of using traditional stories, 'making up a collection of stories that were linked by a theme. So, the first one was the sea, and I went quite abstract and generated contemporary folk tales and fairy tales about the sea' (Jamieson 2017:6).⁴⁰ Although it was an exploratory process to see what imaginative stories arose, Jamieson notes that often at the stories' core was 'quite a universal human experience that drove the way we approached subject matter' (2017:6). The importance of creating the most appropriate story for the company's style was supported by allowing Jamieson to generate numerous stories, 'The company would give me a degree of time in which to playfully generate ideas ... I'd write 13 stories and we would integrate three or four into a show (2017:6)'.

It is clear from analysing the digital archive of production recordings since 1994 that, not only does Jamieson's writing create emotionally rich stories adopting the distinctive storytelling style, there is also considerable humour which children from across the 5-11 age group find very funny. For some it is the visual physical humour, for others it is the characterisation or circumstances the characters find themselves in. Much of this creativity is not only due to Jamieson's writing but also the way Sved works in close partnership as a co-creator to the work. Jamieson provides the stories and has a strong understanding of the power of storytelling and visual understanding of what works on stage, whilst Sved has a skill in selecting the stories which provide artistic material to bring about emotional engagement. It is Sved who makes the stories a reality. There is a

⁴⁰ *All at Sea* (1994/5) is discussed further in relations to the design pp.71-72.

strong sense of trust and artistic respect between both director and writer which is at the heart of the company.

The core values of the company are exemplified by the extent of new writing being produced for a child audience and the importance that is placed on them as recipients. In the clear majority of the productions, child characters are central to the plot with the world being seen through the children's perspectives. Therefore, if the portrayal is not sensitive and honest and the stories are not believable, the children will not engage. Since its formation, Theatre Alibi has been very clear about their values of wanting to produce high-quality work specifically written and created for children. Jamieson believes new writing for children is a distinguishing feature; however, he recognises touring in schools does not provide the same status or publicity as performing in a theatre. He recognises, 'what you are doing is inherently of small value culturally because of the fact it is in a school and to children, which is a slight sadness... The kind of significance and import is often lost ... but I still think it is of inherent value' (Jamieson 2017:8).

Appropriateness for a wide age range

Theatre Alibi's primary school performances, until 2002, were based on a three story structure from a repertoire of four stories catering for the needs of the 5-12 age range. Of the four stories, one was age-specific to Infants, one for Juniors and two were generic to all children. Where there were all-age audiences, the company would perform the younger story but when they were doing two performances at the same school they would differentiate and use the older story in one of the performances. Theatre Alibi productions are multi-layered, working at differing levels of empathy and comprehension for all ages with many of the more mature aspects being understated so only adult audiences would know what was intended. The production of *Teapot* (2002) saw the first unified story created to be appropriate to all ages without additional stories.

From my research and experience in schools it is certainly unusual to find a company which creates work for the whole school. Sved recognises that amongst other companies working in Children's Theatre, creating theatre for the

whole 5-11 age range is 'not always approved of', and requires a level of sophistication but 'there is something really wonderful about going to the whole school community' (Sved 2016:2). As this has been a feature of the company's work since its creation she feels that to change would be 'quite a significant, strategic decision that would hold quite a lot of risk' (Sved 2016:2). Writing and performing to children of such a wide age-range is a distinguishing feature and an aspect of the company's work which is often commented on by Headteachers. They regularly delight in the opportunity to see a performance as a whole-school community, a time when the school can come together for a shared cultural experience (Gower 2016:4-5). This aspect of whole school engagement and cultural value will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Because of an established relationship, there is strong degree of trust between Theatre Alibi and schools developed over time. When speaking about the content of the stories for young children, Sved surmises 'that we can take them further than most people would guess...it's a real trust' (2016:14). Through effective storytelling, a balance of physical, aural and verbal communication supported by visual communication through design, children of all ages can find elements of the performances they can engage with. It is also possible to provide all ages with an opportunity to experience complex and sometimes difficult emotions in a safe space.

Design and high-quality production values

Design elements in the first Theatre Alibi productions were minimal, with a large fan being used to transform the utilitarian space of the school hall into the extraordinary space of the theatre. The actor's body with the addition of representational costumes, hats and masks was all that was required (Hodge 2017:6). The exception, as cited previously, was the installation of *The Victorian World* (1987) in Emmanuel Hall where designer Rona Lee transformed the whole building into a distinctive imaginative space.

Since 1992 design, including set, props and puppets has become more prominent, and these are distinctive elements of the primary tour arousing curiosity, excitement and joy from the moment the children enter their school or

village hall. As well as transforming the space into something inspirational for the children and complementing the stories, the designer needs to consider the practicalities of performing in multiple school locations. The set must be portable to fit in a transit van, and robust and simple enough to be assembled and reassembled by the actors in over 85 different schools during the tour.

Design was, and still is, an integral part of Theatre Alibi's shows, with the designer being considered a crucial collaborator in the early creation of the performance. As part of *The Goose* (1992) production, designer Dominie Hooper accompanied the company to Poland.

Design and *All at Sea* (1995)

An illustration of the importance of design and the emotive atmosphere it creates can be seen in the production of *All at Sea*, another production where Hooper was the designer. The basic set is abstract in composition consisting of three tall, metallic, grey blocks with jagged edges looking as if they have been ripped apart from each other. In many ways, the set does not suggest anything to do with the sea, but its metallic reflective material is parallel to the content of the first story concerning the many, ever changing colours being reflected in the sea. The design also includes the company's first use of a floor cloth which is a common feature of all primary shows after this time. A sand coloured sheet as floor cloth was crumpled rather than stretched giving the impression of a sandy beach which changes as the barefooted actors step on it. Between the three story format, the seemingly abstract jagged blocks are moved to create a new arrangement for each story until finally, the apparently random blocks fit together to reveal a terrace of houses for the final story of two neighbours, Milton and Mowbray. The second story features a beautiful puppet albatross, cradled in the arms of the actor who manipulates it, allowing it to swoop across the scene and causing the other actor who is storytelling to duck out of the way. The puppet and puppeteer become transformed into one being, creating a 'living' full-sized albatross, adding emotion and intensity to the albatross's last flight. In the final story, 'Milton and Mowbray', there is an increased use of representational props: a nightcap signifies time passing and Mowbray's bedroom; two decorative parasols and a stick for limbo-dancing quickly transport the audience to Trinidad; a garland of flowers, symbolises Bora Bora Island; and a beautifully crafted fish

metaphorically conveys the audience to Neptune's subterranean kingdom. It is the attention to detail and production of high-quality objects and puppets which may only be used for a split second which makes Theatre Alibi's work distinct, particularly when taking the work into schools.

What is unusual and surprising with Theatre Alibi is the continuity, consistency and longevity of designers from 1992 to current day. Over the last 27 years there have been three designers for the primary tours, Dominie Hooper (1992-2002), Jenny Saunt (2002-2004) and Trina Bramman (2004-2019), all of whom completed a BA in Theatre Design at Nottingham Trent University, although recruiting designers from the same course was not a conscious decision (Sved 2016:9). Continuity is further provided as most designers served as an assistant with the company prior to becoming designer.

The set design is varied for each production: abstract, in *I Believe in Unicorns* (2013); sculptural, in *Lost and Found* (2007); literal, in *How to Hug Trees* (2005); representational, in *Deep Down Cowboys* (2012); pictorial, in *Olive and the Dream Train* (2015) with large lips and a giant eye peering at the audience; or aesthetically pragmatic, in *High Muck-a-Muck* (2009) which incorporates a large musical instrument, a cimbalom, within the design.



Fig. 5 *High Muck-a-Muck* (2009)

Design is important in the selection process. Sved explains: 'Part of choosing the story will, of course, be whether it will work theatrically and visually' (2016:7).

She continues to clarify the importance of the designer's artistic skill in the process: 'I think it is particularly a feature of the 5-11 work, design and visual interest is really important and often some of the most exciting moments in the show emerge from the design' (Sved 2016:7). From observations of more recent performances I have noted the awe and curiosity of children entering their familiar space of the school hall and seeing it transformed. They become engaged, pointing and chatting to their neighbour with a heightened sense of excitement.⁴¹



Fig.6 *Deep Down Cowboys* (2011)

Although different in design there are always commonalities. Rachael Duthie, who joined the company as Production Manager in 2017, and has extensive experience of working with other companies producing work for children, notes it is unusual to have such high production values such as set, props, music and level of detail in work presented to children, particularly work in a school setting (Duthie 2017:2). She also acknowledges the unusual continuity of employing the same designer for the last fifteen years, which may account for the consistency of some production features, such as the luxury for actors of being able to work with the set from the beginning of the rehearsal process (Duthie 2017:2).

⁴¹ Field study observations of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* (2016, 2018), *Apple John* (2017), *Table Mates* (2018).

Enabling the performers, actors and musicians, to explore, work with, and when necessary, suggest modifications to the set and props throughout rehearsal process ensures the highest level of confidence and integration between the physical elements and the creative processes. All aspects of the production are 'historically honed' following rigorous evaluation during and at the end of the production to assess what has worked and what has not.

Puppetry and Objects

The company is very particular about using props for a clear purpose. As Sved confirms, props are not used unnecessarily:

Sometimes you want to leave it to the child's imagination, but a delicious prop can be a joy and a pleasure, and a fairly straightforward prop can simply help tell the story. Whatever, there is a real belief in the importance of production values and the quality of the prop. For me that really matters (Sved 2016:9).

Theatre Alibi often uses objects to exploit a sense of scale, moving from small-scale to large-scale as in *High Muck-a-Muck* (2009) when a small puppet was transformed into a full-sized character played by an actress. Scale through puppetry is often used to make the impossible possible. In *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* (2016) the use of a small rod puppet of Paul with a ladder creates the image of climbing from the top of a high-rise block of flats to the moon.

Theatre Alibi does not always use puppets in their productions but they do feature prominently. Again, in *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* (2016) both child characters were puppets which enabled a particular form of emotion and empathy to develop which may not be created by actors playing children. Employing a specialist puppeteer also confirms Theatre Alibi's attention to quality. For Sved, the inclusion of puppets was important: 'There is something magical about an object becoming a character that is exciting and wonderful in itself' (2016:14). She also recognises the puppets' longevity, 'If you talk to children about shows four or five years ago, it's the puppets they will talk about' (Sved 2016:14). This observation is confirmed in my research findings discussed in Chapter Six.

In *I Believe in Unicorns* (2013,2015,2019) the puppet of 'The Little Match Girl' evokes considerable emotional connections for both the adults and the children in the audience.



Fig. 7 'The Little Match Girl' in *I Believe in Unicorns* (2019)

Live music and original composition

The place of live music within Theatre Alibi's work has developed over time. In the period before 1992 it was an additional aspect of the work and used periodically rather than as an integral feature. Music was created and performed by the actor/musicians, often using traditional songs to creatively reinforce or set the cultural environment. In *All at Sea* (1995), percussion bars and vocal sounds are interwoven by the storyteller to build rhythm, intensity and the imagery of an albatross, soaring on the wind in the telling of the epic tale of 'The Forgetful Albatross'. Additionally, the personification of the sea is created by a sand tray; an iceberg through a megaphone; and acapella singing by the actors create the setting of a Caribbean island.

Since 2001, when Thomas Johnson became the regular composer and Musical Director, live music has become a distinctive aspect of Theatre Alibi's work. It is an integral part of the storytelling and design process; composed in the rehearsal room alongside the story-making and creating; with the musicians having a visual presence, being 'passive storytellers' (Johnson 2017:2) within the performance. The design and the unfamiliarity of instruments brought into schools, is an important factor when selecting instruments. As Johnson explains:

The first thing I do is to think about the instrumentation... There are all sorts of things which come into play. You have to think about period or if you are thinking about design, what instrument might look good. So, in *Why the Whales Came*, years and years ago, the reason I thought about the cello wasn't because of the sound of the cello but because it had a spike at the end like a narwhal's tusk (2017:3).

The cello and accordion are regularly used but also less familiar instruments, such as a harp in *How to Hug Trees* (2006); the cimbalom in *High Muck-a-Muck* (2009) creating an Eastern European texture; and a hang-drum adding an imaginative lunar tone to *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*. As MacDonald identifies, the choice of unfamiliar instruments is significant, 'It's such a strange thing to have in a primary school. We often think about the music in relation to set. Very unusual' (MacDonald 2017:8).

Music provides a unifying contribution to the production's storytelling objectives, as Johnson explains, 'The unique thing about *Alibi* is the way all of the elements come together towards that one stated goal of storytelling. So, everything is narrating in a way. Music is just as much a narrator as anything else within that mix' (2017:1). Unlike many other companies, this additional musical layer of storytelling can be attributed to Johnson's 'organic, on-going process' (Johnson 2004:68) of composing following close observation of the director and the actors' work within the rehearsal room. He sees this as being crucial, 'so the music is pinging off everything else which is happening in the room. It's pinging off what Nikki is directing, pinging off the actors. At times, it may be pinging off the design and it seems to me that is absolutely at the heart of my process'(Johnson 2004:2). As production manager Duthie, suggests:

Other companies do create music coming from the rehearsal process but Tom is in tune to the storytelling, having a very good eye for story. He is very aware of what music can add to the storytelling process. It is also unusual for the composer to also participate as a performer on the tour (2017:2).

Although Johnson has been a musician on many tours, he does not always play on tours, depending on the instruments required for the musical tone of the performance and availability. Sved also attributes the distinctiveness of the music to Johnson, 'composing from the action' and 'composing to the second'

(Sved 2016:4). However, Johnson's process is unusual for some actors when new to working with Alibi, as, once composed, the music can drive or constrain the actor's response with lines or action being specifically placed within the music, on a particular note or phrase. As Frood explains: 'For some actors, it can be an issue, because it doesn't allow you as an actor to be as flexible as you want to be and so you are constrained by the music ...so, as an actor or performer it gives you little space to breathe' (Frood 2017:1).

For Johnson music is visceral, becoming easily absorbed into the overall emotion of the performance and therefore may not be easily remembered over time, 'Music acts on a very deep emotional level, not just with children, but with everyone. Because it is not an intellectual reaction; they have to feel it, they don't store it in their brains' (Johnson 2017:1). However, Sved warns, 'you have to be very careful with music as you can be dictating to an audience feeling. It's interesting that you are getting another line of storytelling happening in parallel – so it's storytelling with another layer' (2016:5). The music complements the storytelling, contributing a further layer of expressive and affective content, both by the tone of the instruments playing, as well as the musical content. It can set the scene, set the historical or cultural context, add humour and sadness. All these qualities can be seen regularly in Theatre Alibi's work.

Conclusion

Since its creation in 1982, originality, aesthetics and the emotional connection of theatre to its audience rather than instrumental educational content have been Theatre Alibi's core aims and principal objectives. There is consistency of view from all key members of the company, Alison Hodge, Tim Spicer, Nikki Sved, Daniel Jamieson and Annemarie McDonald that educational issues or themes have 'never been in the driving seat' and central to the company's work are stories:

In traditional stories, fiction reflected human experience in ways that were almost beyond rational thought... We were really interested in stories that didn't appear to be driven by issues or topics but arose more out of something more primal but that, along the way, might take in all sorts of other things. Stories that connected with human experience in seemingly quite a fantastical way (Jamieson 2017:5).

The setting for the theatre performance is often in a school but the company is not in the service of the school although teachers can choose to follow-up and develop the performance to their own ends or not.

There is a passion within Theatre Alibi to produce the very best for children in their own school environment. New writing, new musical composition performed live, high quality acting, design and production values all create a form of imaginative and heartfelt storytelling which combine to create an exceptional and memorable experience for children.

The principal focus of the company's work is to encourage imagination and to take children to extra-ordinary places and as MacDonald concludes 'There is something magical about having a piece of art, any art coming into school, just for itself' (2017:10).

Many of the individual elements of their performance style, storytelling, writing, direction, music and design, are also seen in other company's work but it is the integration of these elements which combine to make distinctive theatre with affective impact for children in their own school. For one actress who has worked with the company during the last three primary tours it is summed as:

A lot of what makes Alibi's work special is the detail, the way that everything, set, costume, music, script and performances (actors and musicians) all combines to paint a picture for the audience. The level of detail and thought that goes into each production is amazing. And that is really down to the way that the company works and the way that the show is rehearsed – the fact that the music is composed as we are devising, so the music fit the show like a glove and the detail and choices that are made for each movement and moment in the piece. Every show is very "full" ...and there is a lot of love in it (Cox 2017:1).

From its conception through to the present day, Theatre Alibi has provided thought provoking, emotionally engaging and at times provocative theatre in pursuit of the core values and passion to produce a memorable theatrical event for all ages whether this is in a school hall or a hill fort on Exmoor. Their theatre is concerned with transformation not only by the set but also by the way the actor transforms their voices and bodies into different characters. Niamh Flynn, now

an adult, recalls how much she loved Theatre Alibi coming into her primary school, 12 years earlier, 'I enjoyed it being in our school... You thought that they had come to our primary school for you, and that was special... you know that they care' (Flynn 2017:2). Throughout my research, children have appreciated the company's performances, which make them feel special, believing the company have made the show 'just for them' and brought it to their school. Children from a broad age group are presented with imaginative and sensory elements which help them explore a wide range of emotions and help them learn and develop. I propose that the importance of the affective aspects of the work may be significant for children's emotional development, but how can a researcher capture evidence and evaluate this proposition? This will be the focus of the next chapter which explores the methodological approaches adopted.

Chapter Three – Methodology: Measuring the hard to measure

To meet the research aims of exploring child spectatorship, learning and the longitudinal impact of performance, this chapter will draw upon existing multi-disciplinary methodological approaches to provide new knowledge and fill gaps in existing literature. There are four parts within this chapter: Part One discusses the research context: the theories and literature which currently exist that have informed my study and the gaps this thesis aims to address. Part Two explores the methodological tensions and challenges of inter-disciplinary research with differing philosophical approaches, methods of enquiry and research designs. As a key focus of this research is the exploration of emotional well-being, this chapter will also survey the methodological challenges when measuring well-being. This section concludes by exploring the practical and ethical challenges which occurred when conducting my research with primary age children in schools. Part Three outlines the methodological framework adopted, including how methods were mapped onto the research questions and integrated into specific Theatre Alibi case-study performances over three years. Part Four clarifies key words, concepts and terms used throughout this thesis.

Part One: Research Context

1.1 Existing Research on Theatre Spectatorship

The audience is an essential ingredient of performance. Creative energy flows both ways between audience and performers, particularly in children's and educational theatre. In 2009, Helen Freshwater claimed, 'What a review of existing literature reveals is that academic publications which address the question of theatre audiences exclusively and directly are relatively few and far between' (2009:11). Since then there has been an increase in research into audience reception studies, particularly Reinelt et al's *Critical Mass: Theatre Spectatorship and Value Attribution* (2014), and Kirsty Sedgman's *Locating the Audience* (2016), yet Freshwater's assertion still stands. Where there are additional studies of audience reception these focus on adults or theatre venues. This makes my research with children in a school setting important.

Critical Mass, an AHRC funded study from the British Theatre Consortium of Janelle Reinelt, David Edgar, Chris Megson, Dan Rebellato, Julie Wilkinson and Jane Woddis, was a nine-month project on audience engagement. The researchers collected 317 questionnaires from three theatres across England: The Theatre Royal Plymouth (Drum), the RSC in Stratford and The Young Vic in London. Engaging with participants over the age of 16 and predominantly adults, the research explored at least three shows from each venue, including classical, new, experimental theatre and adaptations investigating how audience members experienced and attributed value to theatre through phenomenological self-description and analysis (Reinelt et al 2014:5-11). Questionnaires were conducted before the performance, the day after performance and two months following the performance to evaluate how value attribution changed over time. As part of a further longitudinal study looking at additional performances produced before the study commenced, participants were contacted a year after the original performance and asked to complete a telephone questionnaire exploring how their memories and relative importance of aspects of the production had changed over time (Reinelt et al 2014:46). In their conclusion, the consortium reflected on the need for further research, particularly longitudinal studies into audience engagement and value attribution over a period of years (Reinelt et al 2014:91-92). This methodological approach provided a starting point for my investigation into the longitudinal impact of a performance over a two-year period. This will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

Another extensive study, involving 800 questionnaire responses and 40 interviews of non-theatre and more regular theatre-goers, is illustrated in Sedgman's *Locating the Audience*, which considers the way different people reacted to two contrasting Theatre Wales performances. Sedgman asserts, 'audiences do not necessarily have to be "experts" in order to respond to art, and art does not need to be understood in order to be meaningful, yet people do need to feel able to grasp how they are meant to be orienting themselves (physically, cognitively, emotionally) towards an experience in order to gain value.' (2016:316). She argues all opinions are equally important in the capture of audience engagement research and the response of those with no theatre knowledge 'should be valued as highly as that of the expert' (Sedgman 2016:316). Within my research, the children's opinion will be paramount, taking

centre stage in Chapters Four, Five and Six and therefore acknowledging the views of a broad range of participants with varying knowledge and experience of theatre prior to the performance.

1.2 Spectatorship amongst young audiences

Where studies of audience reception exist (Bennett 1997, Freshwater 2009, Reinelt et al 2014, Sedgman 2016, Walmsley 2013, Wilkinson 2015), they tend to focus on adult audiences in a theatre setting. However, Matthew Reason, Karian Schuitema and Tom Maguire are amongst a small number of researchers who focus principally on children as audience members. In *The Young Audience* (2010), Reason states that not only is there little research into what children think about the performance, what does exist mainly focusses on anecdotes from teachers, into the benefits, social and emotional, of the child watching theatre (2010:45). His extensive research on how young children can have an enhanced learning experience from watching theatre is a valuable resource and starting point for my interviews with children (Reason 2006a; Reason 2010). He makes a strong case for children watching theatre and how the experience can be developed and enhanced by talking to children about their understanding, what they value and what they remember. Reason suggests that the arts are not only entertainment but also educational, enabling children to engage developmentally within the world in which they live:

The relationship between young people and the arts is rarely perceived as simply a matter of enjoyment. It is almost always about something else too. Often that something is learning, the education, the benefit (or harm) children might gain from the experience...part of their ongoing developmental engagement with the world (2010:3).

He adopts a participatory, arts-based methodology which allows children of all ages the freedom to draw their interpretation of the performance whilst talking to the researcher (Reason 2010:49-52). Drawing is used as a reflective tool and helps the child interpret and make sense of the performance. However, Reason's research focuses on child audience reception within the context of a theatre venue and does not consider the context of the performance taking place in a familiar space, the school hall. Located within the school environment, I explore

the learning that takes place from seeing the performance in a school hall and subsequent learning instigated through teacher intervention when the children return to the classroom post-performance.

Reason's *The Young Audience* (2010) and John Tulloch's *Shakespeare and Chekhov in Production and Reception* (2005), provide insight into children's thoughts about performance, although Tulloch's work is generally concerned with 'set texts' or classical texts, studied as part of English Literature or Theatre Studies. As well as quantitative data, both Tulloch and Reason use qualitative surveys and interviews within a case-study format. Both researchers use discussion with focus groups to illuminate not only what has been seen and understood but also what has been felt. Reason's research particularly focuses on the use of arts-based methods to encourage children to talk without the awkwardness they might feel when talking face-to-face with a stranger (2010:119).

Other researchers working in theatre venues are often more interested in how the audiences interpret what they have seen, or are interested in quantifiable data such as age, demographics or frequency of attendance and only 'a small minority of theatre studies scholars to investigate audience' (Freshwater 2009:32-33). Beyond these, however, there remains a lack of specific methodological frameworks to draw upon. As Sedgman recognises, when considering children as audience members 'little effort has been made ...to listen to their reflections on their theatre-going' (2015b:125).

Research involving children as young audiences presents challenges. In the case of Theatre Alibi, and other companies working in the field of TfCYA, the theatre company members are only short-term visitors to the school, being limited to, at most, a few hours covering the performance, get-ins and get-outs before moving on to the next school. Therefore, any kind of meaningful discussion with children is restricted due to time constraints. Teachers may be asked to reflect on the experience through post-show questionnaires but there is little opportunity for children to express their views despite the performance being created specifically for them.

My research into child audience spectatorship explores the performance as an embodied experience. When children are members of an audience they bring their whole bodies to the performance not just their eyes or ears. They see it, hear it and can become physically and emotionally involved with the performance, copying the actions of the actors, jumping at moments of shock and expressing their emotions visibly through facial expressions. Observation of their reactions in any kind of evaluation of impact is therefore important. Younger children will often 'act-out' scenes from the performance immediately afterwards in the playground or incorporate the ideas from the performance into their 'play' activities. As Freshwater points out, "'gut reactions" are integral to the experience of theatre-going' (2009:19), but there is 'little consensus on methodology' (2009:27). For Freshwater, this lack of research is due to many theatre scholars being wary of entering the fields of psychology and sociology, believing audience research would present them with considerable methodological challenges (2009:36).

1.3 Drawing from the field of audience studies and reception theory

In contrast to theatre studies in the field of film and television, audience reception is a regular feature of researchers' work (Reinelt 2014:338). Reinelt, in her article *What UK Spectators Know*, suggests this lack of attention 'to the kind of research that tells what spectators experience, how they make meaning or feel feelings in relation to theatre' (2014:337) is due to three main reasons. These are summarised as a possible 'contempt' or 'fear of audiences' on the part of artists and scholars when focussing on the 'non-expert' audience; a lack of knowledge regarding the required methodology drawing upon quantitative and qualitative techniques more commonly used in social science analysis; and a disregard for research being too closely connected to market-research and therefore used commercially for instrumental purposes (Reinelt 2014:337-339).

Bennett in her seminal book *Theatre Audience – A Theory of Production and Reception* (1997), acknowledges the audience's presence in the theatre but not its opinion or voice. She focuses on what the audience *does* during a performance, what cultural experience and expectations audience members

bring to a performance and, once inside the auditorium or performance space, *how* they interpret the production. Bennett offers a theoretical framework for theatre reception with an 'outer frame' concerned with the cultural elements which inform the theatrical event, and 'inner frame' concerned with the dramatic production of signs which the spectator receives and subsequently interprets (1997:139-140). She emphasises the inter-relationship between the production, the collective audience and the individual spectator both pre, during and post-performance. However, Bennett does not focus specifically on the performance impact on the audience or the audience voice, and therefore, in my research it is necessary to draw upon audience engagement researchers from a complementary field of cultural studies: audience studies.

In her article, *Audience Experience in an Anti-Expert Age*, Sedgman defines audience studies as an 'attempt to uncover, not the essential nature of cultural value, but rather the varying ways our assessments are bound up in our subject positions and systems of knowledge' (2017:318). Unlike reviews by professional critics, it is not only concerned with 'expert positions' or people ratings or commercial theatre marketing of 'giving the audience what they want', but more importantly the views of the "ordinary" theatre-goer (Sedgman 2017:318). She argues for the benefits theatre studies might gain from not only listening to experts, but paying greater attention to the 'non-expert' by employing 'audience research approaches to investigate more deeply how people come to differing viewpoints;'...and to '[refocus] attention on the pathways that bring people to alternative understandings of the same event.' (Sedgman 2017:318-319). Therefore, in my research, I hope to show that theatre practitioners, educationalists and academics may benefit from listening to children's views and their differing learning perspectives.

Sedgman suggests within the arts context, 'the use of this word "expert" is not unproblematic' and is keen to avoid seeing the audience as a homogeneous group, or dividing them by their expertise, as critics, academics, practitioners and so on (2017: 309). However, recognising Sedgman's concerns, central to this thesis is the recognition of the collective response of a child audience watching theatre as part of a "whole-school" event as well as considering the circumstances and impact of live performance on the individual child. Applying

terminology to non-professional theatre attenders, or members of the public is equally problematic for audience researchers: Should they be referred to as “ordinary” audience members, “anti-expert” or “non-expert”, which is the terminology Sedgman and others use? For the purposes of this analysis, I also refer to the “non-expert” audience, but recognise this is a generalised, uncontextualised term which refers to a homogenous cultural group which may encompass a breadth of expertise or none.

1.4 Performances for children with an educational intent

Evaluations of Punchdrunk Enrichment’s programme for secondary-aged children, *Prospero’s Island*, by Teresa Cremin, Joan Swann, Angela Colvert and Lucy Oliver (2016), and evaluation of their programme *The Lost Lending Library* (2015) for primary-aged children by researcher Emma Miles, offer a useful foundation for exploring how teachers engage and follow-up an immersive performance in a school setting. *Prospero’s Island*, an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, aimed to enhance literacy skills through increased engagement leading to improved standards in English, as well as wider enrichment and social learning. The evaluation report showed that for those children who had experienced *Prospero’s Island*, the improvement in written standards was positive but did not result in higher levels of achievement in SATs. It also found the most able and the least able classes made most progress. The evaluation of *Prospero’s Island* through quantitative data only told part of the story but richer value, both educational and cultural, was gathered by talking to children. The use of both quantitative and qualitative data was important to provide greater depth of understanding, particularly when assessing literacy beyond functional accuracy. Whilst Cremin’s research offers evidence of the impact on literacy levels there was little consideration of the child’s voice. There was also some disparity between the evidence provided by quantitative data and the opinions of children and teacher observations (Cremin et al 2016:70). Thus, my research seeks to foreground children’s opinions alongside teachers, and explores learning in a broader context beyond an instrumental curriculum focus.

Live theatre performance can be an engaging way into literacy and other forms of social, emotional and critical learning when children are asked to write in role.

Evidence from Marie McNaughton's research into the reaction of primary age learners who write after engagement in drama showed 'pupils wrote more effectively and at greater length, using richer vocabulary that contained more emotive and expressive insights' (Cremin et al 2016:23; originally McNaughton 1997:79). I was therefore interested to see whether McNaughton's findings on an enhanced vocabulary, and Cremin's contradictory finding between qualitative and quantitative findings and difference in groups of children, were confirmed in my research.

Miles, in her evaluation of *The Lost Lending Library* illustrates the clear educational aim of the programme 'to explore concrete links to curriculum and learning' (2015:1). Her evaluation, based on teacher comments and interspersed with quotes from the children, emphasises the statistical benefits of the programme based on student motivation in reading and writing, vocabulary, oracy and a deepening understanding of storytelling. Her conclusion shows a positive impact of the project where the teacher and the company work collaboratively on shared educational goals: '*The Lost Lending Library*, in combination with a teacher who is attuned to the children's experience, can lead to inspiration that results in excellent writing' (Miles 2015:6). This research bears relevance to my own as it was concerned with children across the 4-11 age range and took a broader view across the school curriculum rather than purely literacy. Miles also provides a useful resource for expanding academic debate in the field through her PhD thesis *Theatre for Early Years Audience at Polka Theatre: Performance, Reception and Pedagogy* (2016). It is complementary to my research, focusing on Early Years Children, under the age of five, and investigating responses and learning from children's theatre which was venue based.

A more recent international study is supplied by educational scholars Jay Greene, Heidi Erikson, Angela Watson and Molly Beck in their article 'The Play's the Thing: Experimentally Examining the Social and Cognitive Effects of School Field Trips to Live Theater' (2018). They recognise there is little research into the benefits of school trips to the theatre despite this being a regular school activity. Their two-year study with secondary aged children from Arkansas found 'significant educational benefits from seeing live theatre, including higher levels

of tolerance, social perspective taking, (SPT) and stronger command of the plot and vocabulary of those plays' (Greene et al 2018:246). The research included comparing results from children who were taken to the theatre, children who saw a film of the same text and a control group who studied the performance but had no visual intervention. Although based on known plays performed in a theatre setting, their research was useful as it examined the liveness of theatre and its impact on social and emotional development. When considering the impact of live performance, Greene et al's results suggested that watching a film did not have 'a robust effect on any outcomes' additionally from normal classroom activity, whereas theatre provides an 'in-person experience [which] may create greater emotional connections' (2018:253). My research findings are consonant with this research, as from re-interviewing children eight to ten weeks after the school-based performance, I argue the one-off performance is a valuable experience and has a lasting impact, whether the teacher 'uses' the performance or not.

Practitioners working in the fields of applied theatre and arts and health offer a further rich source of research. Theo Stickley provides a useful collection of literature in *Qualitative Research in the Arts and Mental Health* (2012) acknowledging the use of art-based methods, ethnographic accounts and narrative research. Both arts practitioners working within health settings, and arts practitioners working in education settings, face the additional tensions of being driven to meet transactional targets and provide evidence of transformational change by funders such as the NHS or DfE. Edward Sellman and Alma Cunliffe's account of their work as artists working in four schools to promote mental health and well-being provides pertinent research into the complexity of evaluation frameworks used for assessing and measuring social skills, focussing on 'soft' outcomes centred on personal, interpersonal and self-confidence development. They also ask whether the arts or well-being interventions can be a complementary part of holistic approaches to children's development (Sellman and Cunliffe 2012:141-169). My research, therefore considers whether measuring well-being as an embodied experience as an audience member is possible or desirable.

1.5 Gaps in research which this thesis aims to address

Whilst most studies have focused on the importance of children attending performances in traditional theatre venues (Reason 2010), I have placed my research primarily within a state-school setting which is, arguably a more egalitarian space, where every child in the school has access to the performance irrespective of their family's income. For many children, the Theatre Alibi performance may be their first experience of theatre. The lack of research into school-based performances in favour of research focused on theatre venue performances may exclude the voice of children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, this research involving all children, regardless of their background, offers new insights into the children's reception of theatre performance at an early age.

When considering the impact on wider learning, research from Cremin et al (2016), Miles (2015) and Greene et al (2018), discussed above, tends to focus on the impact of performance on literacy whilst I concentrate on more "holistic" impact in areas such as critical thinking, personal and social development, emotional well-being as well as literacy. Previous research into school-based performance has also focused on the educational impact of Theatre in Education in the 1970s–1990s, conversely, my research examines the educational impact of TfCYA.

With the emphasis on core subjects, English Baccalaureate, functional literacy and testing there is an urgent need for evidence of the impact performance can have on learning. The place of drama, theatre and the arts within the curriculum has been significantly diminished over the last nine years (Warwick Commission 2015:43-45, Durham Commission 2019:6, Serota 2019:4). My research findings may offer teachers increased justification for booking school-based performances, recognising the contribution the performance makes to arts education and the informal curriculum. These research findings may provide valuable evidence of the hidden benefits of a school-based performance, by demonstrating what impact this embodied experience has on young people's emotional development and suggesting ways in which teacher intervention may enhance the impact and increase the performance's value. Teachers and

practitioners may be more able to justify the value of live performance, particularly in terms of the personal, social and emotional curriculum.

Researching performances located in schools rather than traditional venues provided distinct investigative opportunities including access to a wide range of participants from across the 5-11 age range and from varying backgrounds including non-theatre going families. With teachers' guidance, I also had access to children of all abilities and could place the children's reactions in context with routine learning. Other studies investigating the impact of applied theatre practice with young people are often short-term, being time limited due to resource implications. They often conclude their findings have been limited by not being able to measure long-term impact (Cremin et al 2016; Beswick 2016; Prentki and Preston 2009:305). However, conducting my research over three years, in many of the same schools, enabled me to meet many of the same, as well as new, participants. This provided opportunity for research into the longer-term impact of the performance on children's learning, well-being and recall. Therefore, access to longitudinal research over three years provides an opportunity for new research knowledge which is not common in the arts.

Part Two: Challenges and Tensions

Methodological Challenges

This inter-disciplinary thesis draws upon research from audience studies, applied theatre, education studies, health and well-being, and memory studies and therefore uses established methodology from these fields. The principal challenge was to develop a methodological framework which incorporated a conventional paradigm from the fields of both humanities and social science. Research in humanities, particularly theatre studies, is generally situated within a constructivist, critical or interpretative philosophy with an emphasis on critical discourse, interpretative enquiry and the use of arts-based methods, whilst studies from social sciences, particularly education, health and psychology may reject any form of interpretative epistemology, preferring empirical data from a positivist ontological position. Therefore, challenges and tensions arose when considering my methodological approach, particularly whether one position should dominate; should my methodological standpoint be grounded in a social,

scientific, and quantitative methodology or a constructivist, interpretative, ethnographic, and qualitative methodology?

2.1 Tensions between positivist and interpretivist or constructivist design

The first challenge concerned the field of education, which principally draws from positivist scientific methodology although accepting, with lower status, more qualitative and interpretative methodologies. Much of the current schooling system could be seen as residing in a performative culture with a positivist approach to accountability and assessment of a functional national curriculum. School leaders are often influenced by OFSTED judgements, achievement measures, performance outcomes driven by government and other external agencies (Warwick Commission 2015; Durham Commission 2019). Because of educational reforms, including published performance tables since 1996 and academisation since 2010,⁴² arguably many schools are placed in a positivist culture relying on 'correct' answers and quantitative data, providing a reductive curriculum where everything can be judged against 'reliable', easily assessed criteria. To add credibility for educationalists, recognition needed to be given to a more positivist approach and quantitative, numerical data. However, this would

⁴² With the aim of raising standards Education Policy in England from 2010 has included legislation promoting the conversion of Local Authority (LA) maintained schools to become Independent State funded schools such as Free Schools, Academies or part of a Multi-Academy Trust (Academies Act 2010, Education and Academies Bill 2015). This has led to a major shift in the governance, accountability and organisation of schools in England. Schools which convert to Academies receive funding direct from the government and are run by an Academy Trust resulting in increased autonomy on use of funding, curriculum, ethos and governance than LA Community schools. Since 2015, the Conservative government has promoted the establishment of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) where a Trust often decide the strategic vision, priorities for raising standards and allocation of resources for all schools within the MAT. Within the context of Theatre Alibi provision, individual schools who become part of a MAT may not have the autonomy to book a Theatre Alibi performance without the agreement of the Trust. Additionally, if the philosophy of the Trustees within the MAT is less 'arts-friendly' than the individual school when it was maintained by the LA and its own Board of Governors, the school, which previously had an established relationship with Theatre Alibi, may not have the autonomy to engage the company.

not provide me with the rich, ethnographical and deep research I required. Jürgen Habermas, although writing in 1972, in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, criticises the dominance of scientific methods in social science, and argues that the 'scientific mentality has been elevated to an almost unassailable position... to a level of religion' (1972:300). He posits that scientific knowledge neglects hermeneutics, aesthetic, critical, moral, creative and other forms of knowledge, all of which are the central focus of my research into children's educational experience.

Following Habermas, I considered an interpretative approach using qualitative methods, as recognised by researchers in theatre studies and by art educators, which offer rich and complex understanding that can be contextualised. However, as reported by Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Bell in *Research Methods in Education*, qualitative data analysis may be less rigorous and more subjective in education studies due to the bias advocacy of the researcher (2011:5). Findings from qualitative research can also be more individualised and lacking in opportunity for hypotheses, generalised predictions or patterns (Cohen et al 2011:13). In the applied arts, impact findings may be more open to interpretation through analysing subjective responses. A counter argument to the positivist view is presented by Katie Beswick in her research *Ten in a Bed* (2016) evaluating the value of low-tech technologies, play and performative storytelling to enhance Literacy with under five-year-olds. She stresses the importance of allowing children to 'perceive differently' and develop critical literacy to understand themselves and the world in which they live. However, like other applied theatre scholars, she is reluctant to judge the success of the artistic work purely in terms of quantitative outcomes:

Projects such as 'Ten in a Bed' while unable to offer 'measures' to 'prove' the benefits of progressive approaches to critical literacy, demonstrate how the mixed, low tech technologies can enhance individual children's enjoyment of literature, offer the safe, creative spaces to experiment with 'getting it wrong' and give families methods with which to support children's play and learning beyond the confines of the classroom (Beswick 2016:346-7).

The evaluation employed an ethnographic methodology to capture the success through verbal feedback as well as evaluation forms, recognising the richer responses offered by qualitative data.

Assessing the difficult to measure

In the current school system, there is a danger that only those aspects of the curriculum which can be easily and scientifically measured are given importance and value-rich aspects of the curriculum are ignored. Cohen et al, highlight the criticisms of the scientific method as mechanistic and reductionist as it defines 'life in measurable terms rather than inner experience, and excludes notions of choice, freedom, individuality and moral responsibility' (2011:14). They cite Habermas and Max Horkheimer's argument that 'scientism silences important debates about values, informed opinion, moral judgements and beliefs' (Cohen et al 2011:15). This anti-reductionist argument may also be applied in today's curriculum where there is a perception that core subjects of English, Maths and Science are privileged over other subjects. Schools are also required to teach a broad and balanced curriculum which supports children to develop their own values, opinions and beliefs, as argued by Habermas and Horkheimer above, and provides experiences which develop skills preparing children for adult life. This 'holistic' provision is not as rigidly 'controlled' or statutory assessed as core national curriculum subjects. There is no regulation on impact, assessment criteria, programmes of study, specific schemes of work, or established systems for evaluation, only the requirement that schools create their own ways of meeting the statutory requirements. Therefore, in my methodology, I identified the need to create a framework which ensured flexibility and could be responsive to specific school ethos and a broader curriculum.

A mixed-method approach proved more appropriate and beneficial as 'Mixed methods research addresses both the "what" (numerical and qualitative data) and "how or why" (qualitative) types of research questions. This is particularly important if the intention of the researcher is really to understand the different explanation of outcomes' (Cohen et al 2011:25). This methodological approach offers the opportunity to focus on the collective impact as well as the individual's experience, whilst ensuring the interpretative and qualitative methods did not outweigh the scientific methods.

Methodological Framework

My methodology explores the social and emotional function of theatre, measuring the affective and effective outcomes of the performance and therefore

adopting a holistic and responsive approach. Developing emotional skills and knowledge which builds empathetic understanding is important if children are to effectively interact with others and understand the world around them. Being concerned with the lived experience of children as audience members and how they make sense of the themes of the performance in relation to their own lives requires interpretative phenomenological analysis. In *Qualitative Psychology: A practical guide to research methods*, Jonathan Smith defines interpretative phenomenological analysis as 'an approach which is dedicated to the detailed exploration of personal meaning and lived experience – exploring in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world' (2015:25). Whilst I acknowledge that the children watching a performance are not directly 'living the experience', for some children it does become a 'lived' or embodied experience when they unconsciously join in with the actions or involuntarily mimic performers facial expressions.

Through conversational analysis, my research interprets the children's responses to discover commonality and develops in-depth understanding beyond the quantitative data. It was also possible to assess how Theatre Alibi's performances connect the child with the world in which they live and allow them to see things differently. The performance and subsequent discussion allows the children to form a new kind of understanding of the world, people's lives and foster new connections. Arts-based researcher Patricia Leavy comments on the particularity of the arts to encourage people to see things differently and build new connections due to their artistic encounter (2009: viii). Within my research, it was possible to elicit children's views on how the performance affected their perceptions of themselves and the world in which they live. Leavy recognises the prejudice or scepticism many academics from Social Science have for qualitative arts-based methodologies, seeing them as 'experimental' (2009:vii). She advocates, and I accept, that 'art-based approaches to research offer researchers new pathways for creating knowledge within and across disciplinary boundaries from a range of epistemological knowledge and empathetic understanding, raising critical consciousness and theoretical perspectives' (2009:ix).

2.2 A mixed-method approach drawing upon research from audience studies

As outlined, I have employed a mixed-method approach to allow for variable data sets: quantitative, numerical analysis of the teacher's survey sent out by Theatre Alibi as part of their evaluation process; and qualitative and arts-based approaches to gather more subjective, emotional responses from children recording the impact of the performance. This enabled me to collect simple data on the teacher's overall assessment of the performance's contribution to well-being, its contribution to other curriculum areas, use of curriculum resources and impact of the performance on learning. Data from Theatre Alibi provided more general statistical information about the number of students who saw the performance over the Autumn Term, the number of schools who booked the tour, their overall evaluation of the performance and specifically whether they used the Teacher Resource Pack. Whilst useful for statistical analysis and for providing data for comparative purposes with previous productions, the data did not provide the children's perspective on the performance, how their well-being was affected or the impact on their learning. I therefore utilised research methodologies from audience studies to provide systematic, rich and authentic data.

Audience studies draws upon a more 'holistic' researcher discourse, recognising the importance of both quantitative and qualitative data within the sense-making process. Often using semi-structured discussions with individuals or focus groups, there is an openness, giving the respondents space to pause as well as speak and taking note of not only *what* is said but also *how* it is said, observing facial expressions, hesitations and turn of phrase. This provides the broadest context for what is said, or not said. This deep contextualised research method is considerably richer than the standard quantitative questionnaire used by many theatres or companies, for example, reporting 80% of audience members thought the performance was 'good or better'. I recognise that quantitative surveys as part of arts marketing or audience feedback research for theatre companies can be used to capture a specific kind of evaluative data, such as Arts Council annual surveys or impact reports, but may be limited in their longer-term usage: what, for example, does it tell you about the 20% of respondents

who did not think the performance was 'good'? Both qualitative and quantitative research have strengths and limitations: the respondents, including children, may wish to please the researcher and therefore the responses may not be fully reliable or valid. Audience study researchers often refer to quali-quantitative analysis (QQA) (Sedgman 2017:315, Barker 2018), which combines quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously, for example using a verbally-led or written questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions allowing for statistical and interpretative analysis rather than as a separate mode of research. A QQA approach is contextually richer and may allow for meaningful data. When conducting research with children, attention needs to be given to the language used and whether it is fully understood by the child, or interpreted accurately by the researcher. Young children may not be familiar with some theatre terminology and may not have the extended emotional vocabulary to express what they wish to convey. In my research, I was particularly mindful of language when referring to emotional expression. The use of a QQA research approach usefully draws out the nuanced interpretations of emotions and feelings and the deeper context. This crucially examines what the children thought of, and what value attribution they placed on, the performance.

In the collection and interpretation of all data, consideration needs to be given to who it is for, what is its purpose and how will it be used, particularly if instrumentalisation of research findings are used to justify or meet funding providers' objectives. However, as Sedgman suggests, it is 'not the research approach itself that necessarily poses a danger but how its findings might be used' (2017:317). She advocates the importance of capturing and understanding the context in the QQA approach: 'It is for this reason that it is so important for audience researchers to analyse discourse in context. This is the epistemological heart of the approach, and means asking very specific kinds of questions' (Sedgman 2017:314). Understanding the children's response in context was important to ensure I interpreted their views which were central to my research as accurately as possible.

When considering audience responses, I was eager to acknowledge negative as well as positive opinions, wanting to explore the reasons why a child expressed feeling 'sad' or 'angry' after the performance, as well as a child expressing feeling

'magnificent'. Within audience surveys, some theatre companies may develop a 'cherry picking' model of evaluation, which supports their funding objectives. They may also select targeted responses that provide positive impact information to justify funding organisation criteria. Consequently, audience surveys within arts administration may be used for market research purposes rather than investigating audience opinion. Choosing statistics selectively, knowing which 'buttons to press', using hard to penetrate language or not 'telling the whole story', is not a new concept or one which is distinctive to the arts to achieve greater funding. Eleanora Belfiore in *On Bullshit in Culture Policy, Practice and Research* highlights how Ministers would be selective when claiming benefits of educational value, economic value and wider participation to secure additional funding for their department (2009:349). Belfiore discusses how Chris Smith, when Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, employed 'shrewd and selective use of dubious statistics' to build a case for additional funding for the arts, so 'side stepping the controversial matter of cultural value which was more difficult to measure' (2009:349). She argues:

one of the problems with large portions of research that has so far been carried out into the social impacts of the arts is its being marred by a profound confusion between genuine research and research for the sake of advocacy. The temptation to articulate research questions in policy – or advocacy-friendly terms is evident in this field, so that research has often focused on asking how the presumed positive social impacts of the arts might be measured or enhanced, rather than in asking whether the arts have social impacts of the sort claimed for them (Belfiore 2009:350).

Within my research, I have endeavoured to adopt a neutral, unbiased, non-advocacy approach. It has been made clear to teachers and children that I am independent of Theatre Alibi, which has allowed for an unrestricted exchange. Theatre Alibi have been open by providing feedback forms for analysis. However, I recognise classifying teacher participants in my research as being independent or neutral maybe problematic. Having regularly booked Theatre Alibi because they appreciate their work may lead them to be predisposed to be positive towards the company. As audience researchers Katya Johanson and Hilary Glow highlight, the frequent criticism of qualitative research in arts impact surveys is 'that audience evaluations are almost always positive' (2015:254). They suggest audience research participants, having chosen to attend the

performance or through advocacy of seeing a company they enjoy, are invariably likely to contribute to 'a positive evaluation phenomenon' (2015:256). Many teachers have loyalty to Theatre Alibi, investing time to support the company by completing feedback forms and consequentially may inadvertently contribute to a more positive evaluation culture. Therefore, within the scope of my methodological design, I needed to ensure I had a range of first-time bookers of Theatre Alibi as well as regular bookers. Prominently positioning children's voice within this thesis has enabled a more neutral and inclusive research base by collecting the views of non-traditional theatre goers; children who may not be constrained by the politeness of regular adult audience members or unconscious bias.

Throughout I have been mindful to conduct my research responsibly, handling data and findings sensitively, honestly and ethically.

2.3 Crossing the boundaries between Health, Applied Theatre and Education -The challenges of assessing well-being

As an inter-disciplinary study, a further methodological challenge was presented when assessing social and emotional well-being. I am using the term 'well-being' in its broadest form, incorporating a wide range of emotions including empathy, consideration, happiness, anger, sadness, anxiety etc. Understanding and being able to express their emotions contributes to a child's emotional and social development. The importance of good mental health and schools' responsibility to ensure they are providing a safe and healthy environment for children to learn has become an important and growing issue within the education system. The DfE and schools have recognised their role in developing a positive mental health environment across the school (Weare 2015; Stirling and Emery 2016; Daykin 2016). Recent changes in the OFSTED Education Inspection Framework, which came into effect in September 2019, demonstrates a growing responsibility for schools to provide a safe and healthy environment that is mindful of children and staff's mental well-being.⁴³ In Chapter Four I offer a

⁴³ The 2019 Education Inspection Framework (EIF) references school's responsibility to well-being and mental health within each of the four key

literature review, practice and definitions on emotions and well-being from the field of arts and health and psychology; in this section, I focus less on what well-being is, and more on how it can be measured.

A range of psychological scales have been designed to derive quantitative measures of well-being, including data collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) since 2010. In their 2018 report, *The Importance of relationships to children's well-being*, they identify, 'Children's well-being is an important part of the nation's well-being. Not only does childhood set the foundation for a well-functioning and healthy adulthood, but children ought to be able to experience life and flourish as individuals' (ONS:2018). In 2017, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Well-being (APPG) was established with the aim 'to improve awareness of the benefits that arts can bring to health and well-being, and to stimulate progress towards making those benefits a reality all across the country' (APPG 2017:4). In their Inquiry Report, *Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Well-being*, they also recognise 'Engagement with the arts can aid physical, cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development (APPG 2017:86). This is complementary to my research, as central to my argument is the exploration of how a performance can benefit children's well-being and learning.

Chief Medical Officer, Professor Dame Sally Davies, in her 2013 Annual Report, recognises that well-being can 'mean different things to different people. Each approach has inherent strengths and weaknesses, but one thing is obvious: there is no clear consensus on the best ways to define and means to measure well-being within mental health' (Davies 2013 in APPG Report 2017:18). This lack of consensus is due to the methodological tensions between clinical research adopting a positivist philosophy and giving higher status to impact assessments based on Randomised Control Tests (RCTs) and more qualitative evaluative approaches. A RCT approach to my research would require two sets of data for comparative purposes, where one group would form a 'control' group, who have not been part of the Theatre Alibi experience or teacher intervention.

judgement criteria, specifically p53: 209. p54: 215, p60:215, p63:225, p65: 226.
Retrieved 8 July 2019 from:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework>

As all children within a school were part of the audience, it was not possible or desirable to establish a 'control' group for assessing the impact of the performance on children's well-being. However, using a Visual Questionnaire (VQ), asking children to identify how they were feeling 'before' the performance, also provided a form of control sample. Going to a school who did not book Theatre Alibi would be inappropriate as the context and groups of children would be too variable. It was only possible to compare subsequent teacher intervention following the performance, such as the use of discussion or further integration of the performance into lessons. In this way, there was an opportunity to compare classes where there had been intervention with similar classes where no further intervention had occurred, although I acknowledge the age of the classes and the context may differ.

Forms of evaluation are varied with no 'one size fits all' method of assessing or reporting. Norma Daykin in *Arts for health and well-being – An Evaluation Framework* states 'To date, there are no clearly established evaluation frameworks for arts in health and well-being. Evaluation draws on methodologies from arts practice, social sciences as well as health care' (2016:5). In her evaluation framework, which does not include clinical evaluation, Daykin identifies types of evaluation design, including: quantitative evaluations; qualitative evaluations including detailed ethnographic research; participatory action research; case-studies; arts based methods and economic evaluations such as social return on investments (2016:9). She also identifies tools, questionnaires and scales commonly used in the fields of arts and health (Daykin 2016:13-15).

One of the most commonly used measures of well-being within health is the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS).⁴⁴ This self-reported, largely subjective, non-clinical tool requires the participants to grade themselves on a series of questions focusing on how they feel about themselves and their risk of psychological harm. In *Measuring and monitoring children and young people's mental health: A toolkit for schools and colleges* Anna Freud identifies

⁴⁴ See Appendix A for a copy of the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale and other Happiness Scales.

that the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale has been used with secondary age children aged 11 years or above (2015:77). Although widely used with adults and some secondary aged children, I do not feel this to be an appropriate tool for my research as its construction of either a fourteen-item questionnaire or a shortened seven-item version is too generalised, too extensive and not specifically designed for primary-aged children.

As explained above, an RCT approach is not possible and therefore non-clinical methods will be employed. As schools have become increasingly encouraged to monitor the well-being and happiness of their staff and children by central government, there are now a significant number of resources and measures used to assess well-being and happiness. The ONS published Theodore Joloza's *Review of available sources and measures for children and young people's well-being* in 2013. Joloza asserts children's well-being is at the heart of policy making and defines an individual's well-being as 'one's self-reported assessment on how they think and feel about their own well-being' (2013:6). Interest in well-being and positive mental health has increased with many schools promoting well-being as an element of The Healthy Schools Programme, a framework used by schools wishing to achieve the Healthy School's Award or Healthy Schools Status. Therefore, my research focussing on well-being may be of particular relevance for some schools. In 2015, Public Health produced a summary of further resources and measurement which could be used in *Measuring and monitoring children and young people's mental health: A toolkit for schools and colleges*. Analysis of the available surveys found they were mostly quantitative in style, but not always accessible to younger children of seven or eight years old or those with additional learning needs. Most surveys required children to assess themselves on a 5-point scale (strongly disagree 1, disagree 2, neither agree or disagree 3, agree 4, strongly agree 5), reflecting on how they have felt over the last two weeks on many areas of their life including family life, relationships with family and friends, their satisfaction with life, including whether they felt their life is worthwhile, money and possessions, health and home. The most commonly referenced is the Huebener Scale for Life Satisfaction Scale which includes statements such as:

- My life is going well
- My life is just right

- I wish I had a different kind of life
- I have a good life
- I have what I want in life (Joloza 2013:8, Freud 2015:55).

Asking children generally about their life satisfaction would raise ethical difficulties and be inappropriate for my research purposes without being able to offer sufficient support and follow-up. The APPG also recognises that Life Satisfaction can be assessed by well-established measures whilst well-being is more difficult to assess (APPG 2017:19).⁴⁵

Arts practitioners working with young people (Hanna and Moseley 2012:110; and Sellman and Cunliffe 2012:143-4) have evaluated their projects by using the New Economics Foundation (NEF) *Five Ways of Well-being* (Aked et al. 2008). NEF suggested well-being is positioned in feeling good and therefore functioning well:

Well-being is considered with how people experience their lives and is desirable for the flourishing of individuals and communities as it correlates with increased productivity good relationships with others, good physical health and longer life expectancy (Aked et al. 2008:111).

NEF focused on five ways to achieve more positive well-being, recommending we be active, take notice, keep learning, give and connect with others. Almost ten years later the APPG suggested well-being would be further enhanced by a sixth way – ‘be creative’ (APPG 2017:18).

One tool which Sellman and Cunliffe used to support their interviews on well-being was ‘feeling trees’ where children position themselves at the beginning and end of the project (2012:156). Further explanation will be given below on the adaptation of their method and the creation of a visual questionnaire employed extensively in my research to assess the impact of performance on children which was child-friendly, easy to administer and able to be completed quickly in the classroom.

⁴⁵ See also further discussion in Chapter Four:149.

Part Three: Addressing the Research Challenges

3.1 Case-study Performances

Over the course of my study, I have explored the impact of three different Theatre Alibi primary schools tours. The first field-study in Autumn 2016 was the tour of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, an adaptation of David Almond's well-known children's book, which focused on resilience, using your imagination, child empowerment, friendship and loss. I initially used this performance as a preliminary study and an introduction into my research, allowing time for me to refine my research questions, methodology and establish links with schools. The retour performances of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* to a small number of schools in March 2018, allowed me to use methods adopted in Autumn 2017 during the *Apple John* tour and provided comparative data. The original performance and the retour allowed me to follow children over a two-year timespan and provided opportunity for longitudinal research.

Apple John, the second case-study, was very different in style from other Alibi productions, being a non-verbal piece of storytelling, relying on physical theatre, projection and visual image rather than spoken language and aimed at Deaf⁴⁶ as well as mainstream audiences. This performance explored themes of life and death and growing up, taking a metaphor of the life cycle of an apple tree to explore the life of a boy from birth to death, transition and transformation, well-being and relationships.

The final case-study performance, *Table Mates* (2018), is again contrasting in style to the other case-study performances, using dance and song as an additional layer of storytelling and focusing on food, friendship, childhood and community.

Each case-study performance provides a vehicle to examine specific research questions. Chapter Four, *Apple John*, analyses the impact of the stand-alone performance on children's emotional well-being and development; Chapter Five,

⁴⁶ Throughout this thesis, I have consciously used Deaf rather than deaf, as this is more acceptable to Deaf communities as explained by a Deaf actor employed by Theatre Alibi during the R&D process of *Apple John*.

Table Mates, explores how teacher intervention alters or enriches the learning from the performance; and Chapter Six, *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, focuses on the longitudinal impact of the performance. Overall, I evidence the ways in which Theatre Alibi performances help children learn, contributing to children’s emotional development and consequently well-being.

3.2. Mapping the methods onto questions

Throughout the case-study research I was keen to ensure I used a broad range of participants from different types of schools, different socio-economic backgrounds, abilities and from across the 5-11 age range. The range and scope of my research became more extensive than I had originally planned as I developed an opportunist attitude when schools agreed that I may work with children, not sure whether the next school would respond as positively. When I planned my methodological design, I had intended to work with small groups of children, but for pragmatic reasons most teachers preferred me to work with the whole class. A summary of the scope and range of the research over the different case-studies is given below.

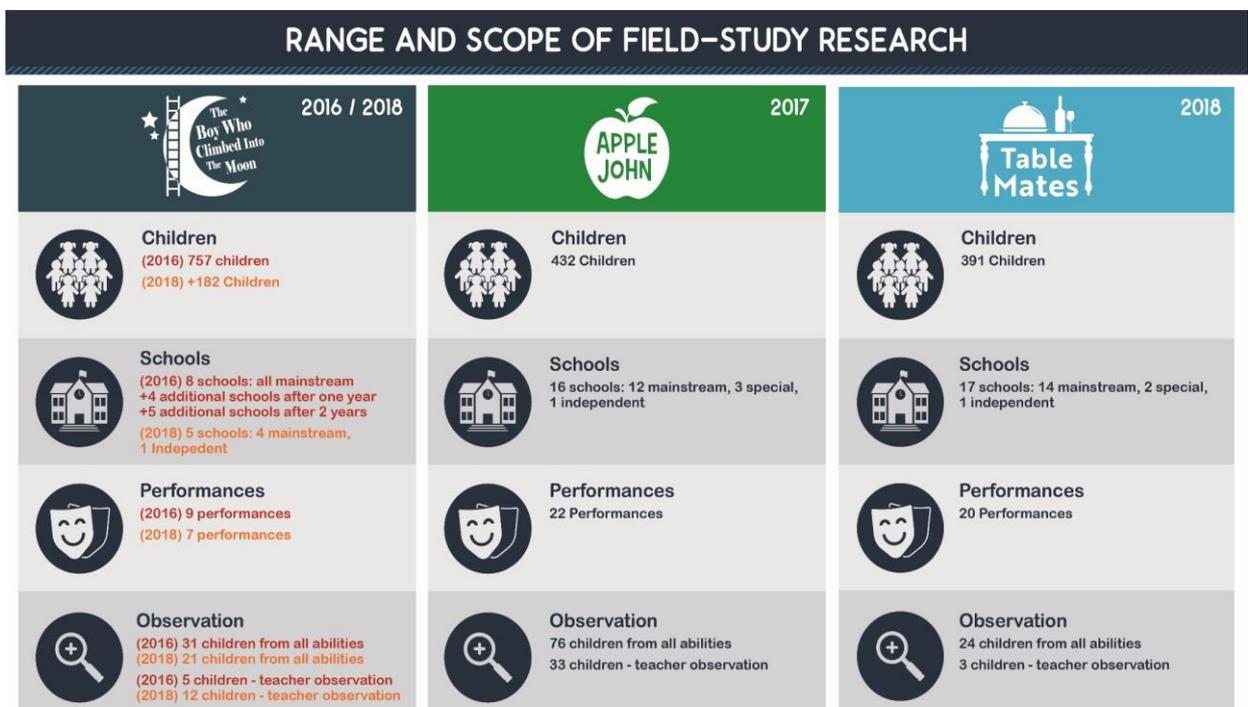


Table 1. Summary of Range and Scope of field-study research.

Time spent with the children was also a changeable factor, often dependent either on the children’s age and concentration span or, in the case of older

children, whether curriculum time could be spared to allow for my research. Therefore, my methodological framework needed to be flexible for those schools who were time-limited, allowing no more than ten minutes before and after the performance, and other classes where I could be more expansive allowing for more ethnographic and arts-based methods to be employed.

The longitudinal design was also an important feature of my research, with return visits following the performance organised as follows:

LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH		
2016	2018	2017
 Children 757 children - over 2 years	 Children 182 children - post-performance	 Children 432 children - post-performance
 Time: 1-3 Months 41 children	 Time: 1-3 Months 104 children	 Time: 1-3 Months 173 children
×	 Time: 3-9 Months 28 children	 Time: 3-9 Months 29 children
 Time: 1 Year 341 children	 Time: 1 Year 58 children	 Time: 1 Year 260 children
 Time: 2 Years 340 children (53 children seen at all stages)	×	×

Table 2. Longitudinal Design of case-study performance and return visits.

I needed to be flexible in my design, with the first return visit, one-three months after the post-performance visit, often being determined when my visit was most appropriate to the class teacher's timetable.

Core Methods

Visual Questionnaire

Drawing upon the work of Sellman and Cunliffe in *Qualitative Methods in Arts and Health* (Stickley 2010:156) I adapted and developed a child-friendly 'feeling tree' to use across each field-study. The children were asked to complete the Visual Questionnaire (VQ) by identifying which 'apple emotion' best represented how they felt before the performance, as soon as possible after and following

any significant intervention such as class discussion. This method aimed to evaluate the impact of the performance on the children's emotional response. Following completion of the questionnaire the children were asked to explain any changes in feelings as identified on the VQ. As the research progressed the children were asked to provide more detail on the context of their emotional responses. From talking to children before the performance I noticed a high level of positive expressions, such as 'happy' or 'excited' which the children explained as being due to the anticipated pleasure of seeing the performance. Therefore, I adapted my instructions by asking children to identify if their emotion was influenced by the play.

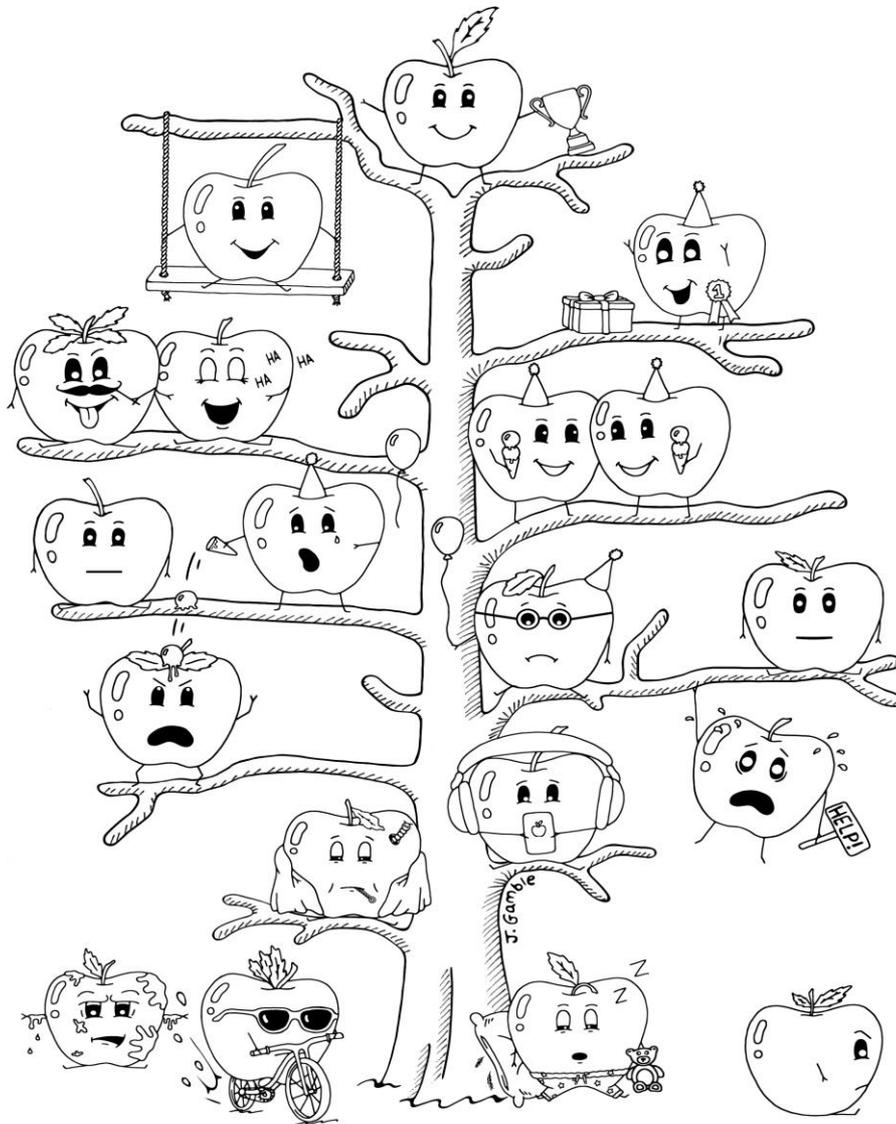


Fig.8 Visual Questionnaire

Findings from this visual method enabled me to analyse and compare children's response from different ability groups, schools and case-study performances.

To create a 'control' group of children for comparative purposes, I ensured there was a selection of classes where there would be no further intervention by the teacher to assess the children's emotional well-being and act as my base-line assessment measure. The completion of the VQ before and after the performance provided a simple way to assess the emotional response to the performance. The VQ became a core method which was used with each case-study performance both as a short-term and long-term assessment evaluating beyond the performance alone.

Observation sheets

To provide further reliability and validity to my results I used two forms of observation: researcher observation and teacher observation to capture the child's reaction to the performance. Researcher observation sheets recorded the children's level of engagement, emotional responses and concentration from no more than five children, who had been pre-selected by the teacher from differing abilities, boys and girls, and from a socio-economic range. Part of this observation included a 'wriggle chart', where incidences of disengagement were noted. I also noted heightened engagement, where the identified children became totally absorbed within the performance. Through this method, I hoped to capture what Jeanne Klein describes as the two categories of spectator attention; the 'ritualistic viewer' who watches for entertainment and escapism, watching passively with little effort, and the 'instrumental viewer' who watches actively, with curiosity, seeking new information (Klein 2005: in Reason 2010:112). Although I mainly focused on a small group of children, where appropriate I broadened my observation to include more general details from the collective audience and significant responses from individuals.

Teachers were asked to complete a brief observation sheet, focussing on the responses from different ability groups, assessing whether they appeared more, less or as expected in terms of enjoyment, engagement and concentration.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ See Appendix B- Teacher Observation Form.

Through this triangulation of the child's response with the VQ, teacher observation and researcher observation there was greater opportunity for reliable data.

Semi-structured discussion

Semi-structured group or class discussion occurred post-performance or within the next 24 hours when teachers did not want to conduct a discussion with their class themselves. Initially, when time allowed, I selected questions from Reason's resource 'Talking *about* Theatre' (2010:154–166). I found the more interpretative questions, such as "If the performance was a colour, what would it be? Why?" particularly useful as it allowed for more diverse and richer responses. When I returned to classes longitudinally, the questions were freer, often reflecting on the children's recall of the performance. At times discussion was accompanied by other arts-based methods, where children were questioned more individually whilst they were drawing or writing a personal response to the performance. Through discussion, whether individual, small group or whole class I investigated how the content and themes explored in the performance impacted on children's social and emotional development.

The class teacher was asked to provide feedback on the children's responses in the discussion, assessing how this differed from usual classroom activities. The post-performance discussion provided a deeper research opportunity for capturing the children's thoughts, as Reason exemplifies: 'With theatre, therefore, what is important is not just what happens on the stage but also what happens within the minds, imagination and memory of the watching audience' (2010:112). Providing opportunity for children to speak and listen to others is a crucial part of the English curriculum. As Jean Gross highlights in *Time to Talk*, language development is an essential part of learning: 'Vocabulary age five is one of the most significant predictors of the qualifications pupils achieve when they leave school' (Gross 2014:1). This method aimed to evaluate the additional impact of providing opportunity to 'talk about the performance' on the enjoyment, social and emotional well-being and engagement of the children beyond the impact of the performance alone.

Through observation of discussion and semi-structured interviews I could explore how the performance helped children understand the world in which they live; developed aspects of emotional and social well-being, including empathy and critical thinking; as well as developing an understanding of theatre performance.

In conducting semi-structured interviews, I established a supportive, trusting and conducive environment where the children overcame any reticence to speak and share their views without being influenced by peer pressure. Questions were adapted to an appropriate level to meet the needs of the age of children being interviewed. I also ensured individuals did not dominate the discussion and often asked children to talk to a partner before sharing their ideas. This was particularly the case in longitudinal discussions where children were asked to recall a performance they may have seen two years earlier. Whenever possible using an audience research response, I also noted pauses and non-verbal responses.

Arts-based methods

Although class discussion and group interviews captured the collective 'after-life' of the performance, I was keen to discover more of the individual child's perspective. Therefore, when sufficient time was allowed, I used arts-based methods where children initially drew their response to the performance, and longitudinally their recall and what was important to them. I found some older children were more intimidated by the level of their drawing ability and wanted to go beyond representational aspects of the performance, and therefore I extended the agency of the activity inviting the children to write and/or draw their response. Using arts-based methods, particularly when accompanied by an interview whilst they drew, allowed greater depth and insight to emerge illustrating how the performance had developed in the child's mind over time. It was through this method that growing connections between the child and the world in which they lived and the longitudinal impact of the performance emerged.

My Methodological Framework, below, summarises how methods were used with each case-study performance, research focus and longitudinal nature of the research.

Principal research focus	Assessing the impact of the one-off performance on children's emotional well-being	Assessing the impact of teacher intervention when using the performance as a resource for learning	Assessing the longitudinal impact of the performance, recall and emotional memory and how it changes over time	Exploring the background, impact and distinctiveness of Theatre Alibi
	Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 6	Chapter 3
Case-study performance and subsidiary tours for comparative purposes	<i>Apple John</i> -Autumn 2017 Re-tour of <i>BM</i> Spring 2018 - <i>Table Mates</i> Autumn 2018	<i>Table Mates</i> Autumn 2018	<i>The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon</i> Autumn 2016 Re-tour Spring 2018 <i>Apple John</i> 2017	Digital archive sources of performances
Methods Employed				
	Visual Questionnaire - Before, after, post-discussion, over time	Visual Questionnaire – Before- after, after only, post-discussion, after teacher intervention, over time	Visual Questionnaire - After four-twelve weeks, after one year, after two years	Analysis of Archive material
	Observation of Performance - including identified focus children	Observation during teacher intervention - discussion, literacy work, PSHE, use of resource pack	Group and whole class discussion	Performance Analysis
	Teacher observation of focus children's reaction sheet	Semi-structured interviews with teachers and children	Semi-structured interviews with adults and children	Semi-structured Interviews with company members and adults
	Observation of Post-Performance Discussion	Arts-based methods - Write/ Draw	Arts-based methods - Write/ Draw	
		Analysis of Teacher Feedback Form		
		Q methodology		

Table 3. Research focus, methods and longitudinal aspects

As well as core methods, additional methods and attention were given to specific research questions, as identified above.

3.2.1 Question One – How does Theatre Alibi’s performance help children learn by enhancing personal, social and emotional well-being?

My first question concerns how the performance alone impacts on the child’s learning. One aspect of this is emotional well-being. To evaluate the impact of the performance, I need to assess the child’s well-being prior to performance and after it has finished. As I have explained above, assessing well-being using existing resources and making it appropriate to a one-off moment is challenging and will be discussed further in Chapter Four.⁴⁸ A range of methods were employed to triangulate the data collected to give greater reliability and robustness.

3.2.2 Question Two – How does teacher intervention confirm and enhance learning?

This second question is multi-layered and therefore approaches were employed to uncover the impact of specific types of intervention: class discussion; the use of the Theatre Alibi’s Teacher Resource Pack; or integrating the performance into the curriculum. A more reflective approach was required to incorporate the most appropriate method for different purposes.

The impact of post-performance discussion

The approach was similar to assessing the impact of the one-off performance, however, it would also include a further return to the visual questionnaire with the children being asked to reassess their emotions a third time. Using the same questionnaire, the children identified their responses numerically; for example, putting a ‘1’ after their pre-performance emotion, a ‘2’ after their post-performance emotion and a ‘3’ after the discussion (or other intervention). As a researcher, I observed and noted the children’s comments during the discussion which was then compared with the response when I visited after one-three months or after one or two years (see Fig. 8 above). The children were also asked to recomplete the questionnaire, and I could analyse the individual child’s

⁴⁸ See pp.160-2.

response and assess how each child's emotional response had changed, if at all, over time. In many cases I also conducted a semi-structured interview with a group of children after the discussion to capture their opinions on the performance and the discussion.

The Impact of enhanced teacher intervention through partnership with the performance -Theatre *with* Education

To investigate the relationship between Theatre and Education when teachers choose to use the performance as a stimulus for further learning I developed a more extended partnership with seven schools who provided case-study classes who were central to my research. The teachers allowed greater access to the children not only on the day of the performance but also longitudinally, permitting to me to revisit after two weeks, a month, three months or six months.

Working with teachers enabled me to assess the effectiveness of the use of the performance as a classroom resource for additional learning, including links to the national curriculum. I was also able to explore whether the enjoyment and impact of the performance had been compromised by 'educationalising the experience' (Klein 2005 in Reason 2010:114). Using a range of methods, including Q methodology it was possible to evaluate whether the learning was enhanced, enriched or altered detrimentally for the children.

Q methodology

To further evaluate the impact of the teacher's intervention by considering the children's views an adapted form of Q methodology, a card-sort ranking method, was used with a small number of schools. Q methodology offers an alternative interpretative method of data collection from the field of Social Science aimed at gauging a person's view on a topic or issue and offers an alternative to tick box questionnaires or open-ended questions.⁴⁹ In this research it was employed to further probe the responses from the children to the performance, elements of the work, and their opinion on where they saw performances. Using Q methodology, I could see if the comments were consistent with those given in

⁴⁹ Further information on Q methodology can be found in Chapter 5:248-250 and in Appendix P.

the VQ or the discussion which added additional robustness to the research. Due to time constraints and the age of the participants, this adaptation of Q methodology, relied on a much smaller choice of statements cards. The children were given ten statement cards related to the case-study performance, such as 'I remember the performance of *Table Mates*' and an additional trial card not related to the performance – 'I enjoy eating tomatoes', and asked to rank the cards on a five-point scale by the strength of their opinion from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

When the ten statements were processed, a mean score was derived from the collective score of each statement card divided by the number of participants. An aggregated score between 1-1.99 demonstrated strong disagreement with the statement, 2-2.99 milder disagreement, 3 was neutral neither agreeing or disagreeing, whilst a score of 3.01-3.99 demonstrated agreement and, 4.00-5.00 very strong agreement response. Therefore, a score below 2.99 demonstrated a negative response and a mean score above 3.01 was positive. Therefore, it was possible to access the depth of feeling from the central position of 3 (neither agree or disagree).

The impact of the Teacher Resource Pack to enhance learning

Theatre Alibi, like many companies working with schools, create a potential learning dialogue with schools through the production of an education resource pack to accompany the schools' tour. The pack provides a range of learning materials and suggestions for teachers to use with children in KS1 and KS2⁵⁰. As Theatre Alibi is unusual in creating their performances for a wide age range encompassing the whole primary phase, they are diligent in ensuring the learning materials are age appropriate and digitally accessible months before the tour so teacher may use the resources before and after the performance.

Analysis of the Teacher Resource Pack, scrutiny of the Schools Feedback Forms received by Theatre Alibi post-performance and subsequent follow up visits to schools where the pack had been used, enabled me to evaluate how the

⁵⁰ I am employing commonly used nomenclatures in education, KS1 representing ages 4-7 years and KS2 ages 8-11years.

company supports further learning.⁵¹ Quantitative and qualitative data from the teachers' comments provided a more extended analysis on the educational resource packs usage and effectiveness which complemented field-study visits alone.

3.2.3 Question 3. What is the longitudinal impact of the company's work?

As has been shown in the previous chapter, to answer this question I drew upon a range of archive and ethnographic material based on oral history to describe the history of the company, its work and contribution to the emotional development of young people from their work in schools.

One of the more unusual aspects of this research has been the opportunity to investigate how the impact of a Theatre Alibi performance changes over time. To answer the question, 'What is the longitudinal impact of Theatre Alibi's performance with children?' I used the performance of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* as a case-study and explored how it changed in children's memory over two years. As can be seen in Table 1 and 2 above, the range of participants who contributed to research into this question was extensive. To separate myself from the children's memory at each longitudinal phase (after one – three months, after a year and after two years), I ensured I visited a range of schools, some where the children were familiar with me and others where my visit was their first encounter. This ensured there was a balance between a core of children who were consistent throughout the research, but where my revisiting annually as a new tour was brought to the school may have acted as a memory aid, and new children whose memory was not affected from seeing me before. To capture the memory and emotional impact, the visual questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and arts-based methods were used. A catalogue of all schools who have participated in this research is provided in Appendix P.

⁵¹ A copy of the Theatre Alibi Schools Feedback Form for 2016 is provided in Appendix C.

Part Four: Key words and concepts

4.1. Theatre *with* Education - Applied Theatre concepts of *in, for, by, with*

Applied Theatre is an umbrella term widely used to encompass the practice of theatre working in, with or for other fields such as Health, Education, Development, or the Community (Nicholson 2014:4, Prentki and Preston 2009:9). Within the field of applied theatre this connecting of theatre or arts with other disciplines is common practice. For example, in the fields of Arts and Health, practitioners refer to Arts *in* Health, where the arts are the predominant focus and Arts *for* Health where the arts are used as a tool for improving health outcomes. Katherine Baxter and Veronica Low define the difference as follows:

When considering the field of Applied Theatre and performance around health, two strands, “arts *in* health” and “arts *for* health”, emerge. In the arts *in* health category we see the art-making to be the primary intent of the arts activity, with any health benefits or education emerging as a welcome outcome. In the arts *for* health strand, the arts are viewed as the medium of engagement with the health issue with direct pedagogical intentions (Baxter & Low 2017:5, *my italics*).

Similarly, the relationship in applied theatre between theatre and education has developed over the last sixty years.⁵² This relationship within the broader term of Educational Theatre will be explored further within Chapter Three on Theatre Alibi’s longitudinal contribution to the field of Educational Theatre.

Theatre *with* Education

When thinking about how theatre might work with education, the term Theatre *with* Education offers a useful way to position this relationship, inferring a discrete but linked partnership, which is mutually beneficial. Theatre is concerned with developing the imagination through creative storytelling, and developing an aesthetic and affective experience; and education is concerned with using the

⁵² Nicholson suggests the term ‘applied theatre’ arose during 1990s, mainly in universities, as a shorthand description, or umbrella term for describing types of drama and theatre activity ‘specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies’ (Nicholson 2014:3).

performance as a stimulus for developing knowledge, skills and understanding alongside the formal, informal or hidden curriculum.

To simply visualise the concept Theatre *with* Education:

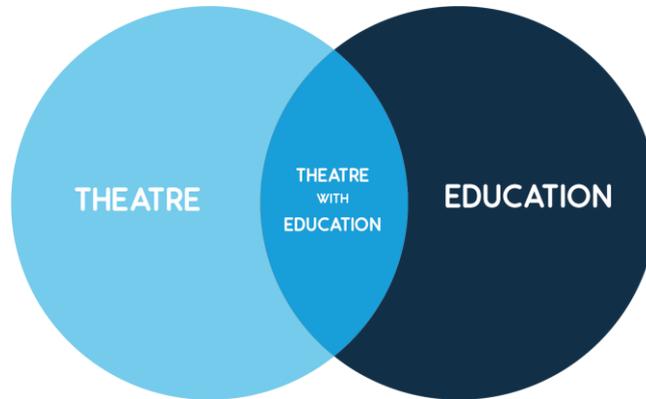


Fig. 9 Theatre *with* Education

In Theatre *with* Education both Education and Theatre may remain discrete. However, the intersection between the two rings is formed through teacher intervention, or the theatre company aiding the learning process. Theatre *with* Education is mutually beneficial and not at the cost of either element.

When considering the types of Educational Theatre and their existing relationship with education, I suggest that the relationship between Theatre and Education in TiE, where educational objectives are more likely to predominate, with theatre being at the service of education, could be visualised thus:

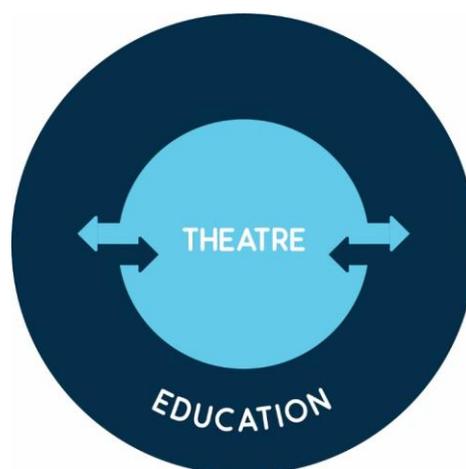


Fig. 10 Theatre *in* Education

Educational objectives and outcomes drive the theatrical aspects. Some TiE companies, such as Big Brum, have broad educational, issue-based

programmes with high design values where theatre may be less compromised but their driving intention is to encourage children to question. Other TiE companies may be driven by external funders' objectives, which may rely on specific instrumental educational outcomes. In the case of Immersive Theatre, such as Punchdrunk Enrichment, the configuration would be similar although the emphasis on theatre may be stronger due to the dependence on high production values.

Theatre *for* Children and Young Adults, which includes most performance in theatre venues, including Theatre Alibi's work, may be visualised thus:

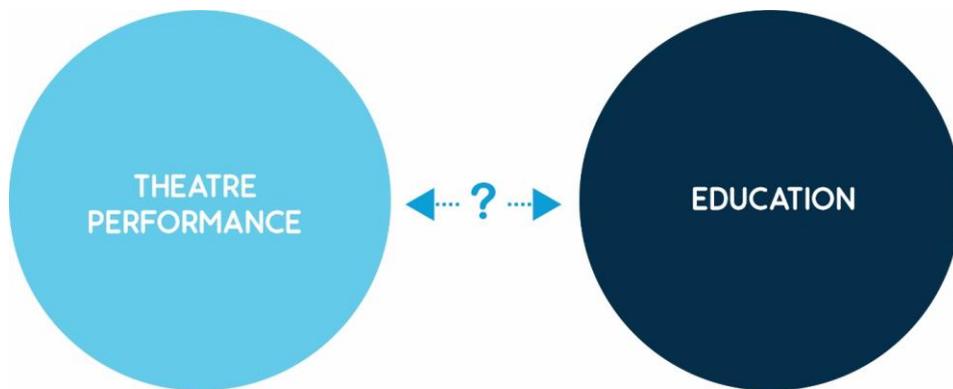


Fig. 11 Theatre *for* Children and Young Adults

In TfCYA there may be little or no relationship between Theatre and Education beyond a generic cultural experience; if the performance is a set text and being used as part of the curriculum there may be some connection but both education and the performance are discrete.

Theatre *with* Education is not Theatre *in* Education or Immersive Theatre, as it is not purposefully participatory or in the service of Education, being tied to educational objectives; it is not TfCYA, which is often discrete and separate from education; it is theatre that is performed in a school setting with equal, non-conflicting objectives, which are theatrical and educational but discrete in their design with neither partner in the service of the other.

4.2 Learning

As much of this thesis is focused on what children have learnt from a Theatre Alibi performance, it is necessary to define learning and its varying use in the field of education. Finding an agreed and accepted definition of 'learning' is challenging and contentious, with educationalists, cognitive scientists and psychologists all placing different emphases on the key elements. This section also reinforces many of the tensions and challenges encountered when working within the field of education as highlighted previously.

The established emphasis on learning as related to changes in long-term memory, judged by long-term change, is, I believe problematic. Instead for my research, I concur with educationalists, cognitive scientists and psychologists (McCrea 2018:4; Nuthall 2007:127; Willingham 2010:54,72) who adopt a broader view of learning, recognising it is both a verb, a process, and a noun, a product. Learning is on-going and by implication not easily measured.

For schools, OFSTED's definition is understandably influential. Their recent definition of learning offered in the *Education Inspection Framework (2019)*, clearly posits changes in long-term memory as being important:

182. Learning can be defined as an alteration in long-term memory. If nothing has altered in long-term memory, nothing had been learned. However, transfer to long-term memory depends on the rich processes described above. To develop understanding, pupils connect new knowledge with existing knowledge. Pupils also need to develop fluency and unconsciously apply their knowledge as skills. This must not be reduced to, or confused with, simply memorising facts. Inspectors will be alert to unnecessary or excessive attempts to simply prompt pupils to learn glossaries or long lists of disconnected facts (OFSTED 2019:45).

Whilst I support the view that children's understanding is developed by connecting existing knowledge to new knowledge and understanding, I align my research with a broader definition which goes beyond knowledge and skills to include understanding.

David Didau and Nick Rose, former teachers and current educationalists, suggest that 'Another helpful definition is to see learning as a change in the way

we see and understand the world. Learning has three related aspects: retention, transfer and change' (Didau and Rose 2016:14). This broader definition, whilst recognising the importance of memory, also suggests an iterative process with the child building upon or interacting with the new memory or thought to initiate transformation. However, Didau and Rose also identify the difficulty of recognising learning and becoming confused with performance, clarifying the distinction: 'Performance is what students can do. It is all that we can ever observe. Learning takes place inside a student's mind and as such cannot be observed directly' (2016:14). This then provides a dilemma for my research into the impact of teacher intervention: how much do I focus on the learning 'performance' of the child based on the tasks that the child has been given, and how much do I base my findings on observations, discussion and the child's emotional responses?

In attempting to assess the impact of a performance to stimulate learning it would be foolish and naive to make definitive claims about long-term change, after an hour's discussion or other short-term learning activity. Learning as a process is cyclical, needing revisiting and concentration.

To define learning further, it is important to go beyond knowledge and skills and to consider what eminent psychologist, Jerome Bruner posits, that 'knowing is a process not a product'; learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas and concepts based on their current and past knowledge. Therefore, it is a spiral rather than linear, intuitive and exploratory (Bruner in Kershaw and Nicholson 2011:13). This concept of learning is further supported by educationalist Graham Nuthall, citing Lee Vygotsky, who maintains that the process of thinking, or learning is shaped by the child's social experiences (Nuthall 2007:73). Nuthall, following Vygotsky, defines learning as a reiterative and layered process, relying on repetition of knowledge building on experience. Learning, therefore, is enhanced by consolidating what is already known, connecting and re-connecting this to new thoughts and experiences, and developing an environment of curiosity, where the child gives their attention to what is being presented. I suggest it is important for teachers to capitalise and build a sense of connection after a Theatre Alibi performance, where children will

have been faced with considerable amounts of new information, content and experience.

Throughout the show, they have been curious and attentive to the content of 'big ideas' the performance may have uncovered but may need further explanation for these new ideas and new learning to become consolidated. As cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham suggests, to deepen the learning experience, prior experience should be built upon: 'students come to understand new ideas by relating them to old ideas. If their knowledge is shallow, the process stops there' (2010:110).

However, Nuthall, from extensive observation of children's learning, also proposes that 'learning does not come directly from classroom activities; learning comes from the way students experience those activities' (2007:103). He acknowledges that learning does not always occur within the classroom and goes on without being taught. Children learn not only from their experience of the world around them but also from their peers and from their inner thoughts. My research supports Nuthall's observation that the opinions of peers can have a significant influence on learning, with children learning from each other (2007:15). As will be shown in Chapter Six, peer influence may not always lead to the intended learning outcomes if unchecked by the teacher.⁵³

Learning is multi-layered and complex, requiring attention. When children are watching a Theatre Alibi performance they are receiving information, often in an abstract form, which is multi-dimensional, visual, auditory and sensory, all at one time. As the ideas are wrapped up in a narrative it often makes it easier for the children to grasp but this may require further referencing and time to process. Academic Peps Mccrea in *Learning: What is it, and how might we catalyse it* suggests, 'Our capacity to attend to something is influenced by our knowledge of it, and how recently we've been thinking about it. We find it easier to perceive or see things we have a frame of reference for' (2018:10).

⁵³ See TMS *Apple John* evidence in Chapter Six:301 where the children thought eating an apple during pregnancy made children well-behaved.

Maintaining attention is obviously important in gaining new insights and new knowledge, however, with the child potentially being exposed to so much new information in a performance, they need to prioritise what they attend to. As I will show in Chapter Four, focussing on the non-verbal performance of *Apple John*, meant that some children became 'over-loaded' with new information and, without opportunity to comprehend or mediate this new information further gave up. Mccrea, drawing upon other educational research, confirms:

The more we *know* about something the more likely we are to value it, because knowledge increases the chances that it will find utility in our lives (Hattie and Yates 2014). This is why younger children tend to exhibit curiosity for instinctive information over cultural information (Geary 2007 in Mccrea 2018:12).

Learning takes time, it is a process and therefore does not happen in one instance. What has been encountered needs to be processed and revisited in the child's memory for it to enter the long-term memory. Learning is highly individual, contingent and therefore different for each child in the class, dependent on their own interests and prior experiences and knowledge.

Defining learning is contentious and multifaceted, with prominence traditionally placed on memory retention, developing the relationship between new and existing knowledge and providing the climate to bring about lasting change. Therefore, definitions of learning are dependent on the context within which they are situated and the specific objectives the teacher may have in relation to the application and purpose of the theatre performance.

4.3 The Curriculum

The Curriculum is the programme of concepts, knowledge, skills and understanding that makes up the total experience of their schooling; 'all learning and other experiences that each school plans for its pupils'.⁵⁴ The legal requirement for Headteachers and Governors is to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, which meets the needs of all children and is much broader than the

⁵⁴ The national curriculum in England: Framework Document. Department for Education. Dec 2014: 5.

national curriculum. It may be referred to using different terminology, such as 'Intent' (Policy), 'Implementation' (Taught) and 'Impact/ Achievement' (Learned) by OFSTED⁵⁵ or the 'Planned, Taught and Received' curriculum. This terminology recognises that the 'planned' curriculum agreed by the school governors may differ in the way it is taught, when teachers decide the strategies and methods they will use to interpret the planned curriculum, and may be different still in the way each child receives what is taught. As a Theatre Alibi performance may differ, so may the curriculum experience be affected by the teacher's intervention, and subsequently, how it is received by the child may vary depending on their prior knowledge and experience. I will employ the terminology 'Formal', 'Informal' and 'Hidden' or 'Cultural' Curriculum when discussing how the curriculum provides the totality of experience for the child. With the term 'Formal curriculum', I am referring to the taught, intended curriculum which occurs in the classroom; the 'Informal' curriculum refers to other planned activity organised by the school, inside or outside the classroom, which enriches the child's experience such as extra-curricular activities or events like a theatre visit by Theatre Alibi; finally, the 'Hidden' or 'Cultural' curriculum relates to the ethos and culture of the school. This is often value-based and aims to develop the child's societal, communal and ethical knowledge and experience.

Primary schools organise the delivery of the curriculum in a variety of ways, which may include an integrated, immersive and project-led curriculum where subjects are delivered thematically within a cross-curricular project, or discrete subject-led delivery. Adopting this more progressive approach to curriculum delivery may influence whether the class decided to follow up the performance, being dependent on whether it related to the topic being covered at the time of the performance.

4.4 Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)

When considering social, emotional and personal development I am taking a broad holistic view and including the development of well-being, resilience,

⁵⁵ A presentation by Sean Harford, Ofsted's Director of Education, given at the NASUWT BME conference on 27 January 2018. Retrieved 7 April 2019 from: <https://www.slideshare.net/Ofstednews/the-curriculum-87255767>

empathy, critical thinking and the ability to work and understand others within the world in which the children live. PSHE is a statutory part of the curriculum. To support schools in their programmes of study, the DfE suggest schools use resources created by the PSHE Association who produce materials for every KS 1-5. Schools may choose how they evaluate children's progress and how they deliver PSHE. In relation to my research this gives greater flexibility, but little guidance on how to evaluate aspects such as well-being, resilience and empathy. In many schools PSHE is not treated as a major part of the school curriculum and therefore curriculum time allocated to PSHE may be limited to cross-curricular delivery, a discrete lesson or as part of a project-led curriculum.

Part Five: Ethical issues when conducting research with children in a primary school setting

Conducting research in a primary school setting provides a range of unforeseen challenges, due to the transient nature of teachers and children in schools, the distinctiveness of schools and their governance, where each uses different approaches to parent consent and safeguarding.

The relationship I established with staff in schools was crucial to the success of my research. Firstly, communication; being able to progress beyond the school receptionist to speak to the Headteacher and being given permission to conduct my research was instrumental to the selection of schools. The choice of year groups or the teacher I would work with was decided by the Headteacher or the teacher responsible for booking the show. Internal communication within some schools was also pressurised due to external factors and therefore teachers were unaware or unprepared for the content of the performance their class were seeing. Many teachers saw the performance as a one-off cultural 'treat' and were therefore more reluctant to participate in further follow-up aspects of my research.

Secondly, shrinking budgets; schools operated within increasing resource constraints throughout the three years of this study which influenced whether they had the financial resources to book a Theatre Alibi performance from one year to the next.

One further constraint of working with children and teachers throughout this study was children or staff moving from one school to another or teachers changing from KS2 to a younger class in the existing school. Key staff were often transitory, moving to a new school, resulting in established and supportive teachers being no longer able to be part of my study.

Ethics tensions and consideration of other challenges

In accordance with the Exeter University Humanities Ethics Committee guidance my research complied with good practice on ethical research by ensuring all participants, including adults, children and their parents understood the process, gave their consent and were aware that their involvement was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time. Following a full explanation of the study, permission was sought from the Headteacher and teachers involved in the case-studies with signed consent forms.⁵⁶

Some Headteachers interpreted their relationship with parents and the children they are responsible for as acting in *loco parentis* during the school day and thought it was unnecessary for parents/carers to give permission. There was an inconsistency of approach with some schools thinking it was important to have parental permission and therefore, in those cases, I only met children whose parents/carers had signed my request letter; whilst other schools felt contacting parents/carers would be contrary to school policy, as I would be working with the teacher or other member of staff present. In Autumn 2018, due to General Data Protection Regulation legislation on data collection, there was an increase in schools using my permission letter which often meant I worked with a small group of children who had returned the forms rather than the whole class.

A week prior to my visit to schools, I provided information letters with permission slips for staff and for children working within my research, but it was left to the discretion of the Headteacher whether the permission letters for parent/carers were sent out. Where I had detailed interviews with children, I insisted that

⁵⁶ See Appendix D for copies of ethics permission forms agreed by the University of Exeter Humanities Ethics Committee for the *Apple John* case-study. These forms were then modified for different case-study productions.

parental permission was given. Throughout my research all respondents were given the opportunity to opt out of questions if they did not wish to answer. It was made clear that their comments, photographs of work or transcripts of interviews would remain confidential and be stored safely. Information on children's names has been anonymised and pseudonyms used. Photographs of children's work are unattributed with permission for their use given by parent/carers or teachers and identification of children's work or comments has been avoided.

All schools required me to have current DBS certification and for safeguarding reasons did not allow any form of recording or photographic devices to be used in the school. Therefore, all interviews with children were written verbatim by me or occasionally by the class teacher if I was conducting the interview rather than observing, and then transcribed as field-study visits. Pre-arranged extended interviews with either the Headteacher or a teacher were recorded, transcribed and returned for approval. Schools are very different from each other, interpreting government policies in different ways.

Conclusion

This thesis explores the relationship between the performances of Theatre Alibi and the learning, including emotional development, that takes place from watching the performance itself, or from intentional learning activities the teacher facilitates as a response to the theatre performance. My research aims to address and contribute to the current gaps in audience research with children, particularly performance in a school setting.

Meeting the varying constraints and preferences of inter-disciplinary research has necessitated reflecting on methodological frameworks from each field. From audience reception studies, I have drawn upon a quali-quantitative research design which allows for both statistical analysis as well as richer individual opinions. *The Young Audience* (Reason 2010) and *Critical Mass* (Reinelt et al 2014) provided a helpful starting point for considering a methodological framework which encompasses both audience research at the time of the performance and over time. As my research investigates emotions and well-being, consideration needed to be given to methods from the field of Arts and

Health and particularly a method which would be appropriate for children of all ages and abilities. Sellman and Cuncliffe's study (2012) inspired my development of a visual questionnaire which has been adapted and adopted as a central method. From the field of education existing research with children from Cremin et al (2016), Beswick (2016) and Miles (2016) encapsulated the dilemma of educational based research: the predicament of quantitative, scientific biased statistical data and more qualitative interpretative feedback. Research on each case-study production privileges both qualitative and quantitative data so meeting the needs of educationalists, other researchers and theatre practitioners.

Working across fields and particularly in schools has introduced a further layer of complexity regarding the choice and range of methods requiring objective quantitative research outcomes and richer individualised qualitative data and therefore a mixed method framework has been adopted. Using a range of methods which are most appropriate for each research question was also important. The range and scope of my field-study research has been broad, involving more than 900 primary aged children over a two-year period. This quantity of child participants provided opportunities for a broad-based study but also potential difficulties of analysing and interpreting a wealth of data.

As my research progressed I have evaluated not only the data gathered but also reflected on the methodology used, analysing successful aspects and any shortcomings which needed to be addressed. I considered the ontological depth of the ethnographical material and children's work to assess how deep the understanding and impact has been on the participants. I have therefore needed to be reflective, sensitive and responsive in my research methodological practice.

In summary, my methodological framework aims to explore the relationship between theatre, through Theatre Alibi's performance, and learning. My methods examine 'the after-life' of the performance – its effect and affect; from a one-off experience; from a planned learning experience where the performance becomes a partner with the learning: Theatre *with* Education; and how its impact develops over time.

Theatre Alibi has created imaginative and emotionally engaging performances for children and therefore provides rich case-study research opportunities to evaluate the impact of the company on children over time. Being able to investigate three contrasting case-study performances over three years enables new research on the longitudinal impact of theatre performance on primary-aged children particularly regarding their recall and emotional connection to the live performance they have encountered. In the next chapter I present my findings based on field-study research from the first case-study performance, *Apple John* and the impact of the performance alone.

Chapter Four –The value of the ‘one-off’ performance

Central to my inter-disciplinary research on the impact of theatre performance on children’s learning is the examination of the relationship between performance and learning in primary school settings. Having discussed the affective influence Theatre Alibi performance contributes to children’s emotional development in general terms in Chapter Two, this chapter explores the contribution in more specific terms. This involves examining the emotional and cognitive impact of the ‘one-off’ performance, lasting no longer than an hour without further teacher intervention, and how this contributes to children’s emotional well-being, social and emotional development. Using a review of academic literature, supported by extensive field-study research I address the following research questions:

- How do Theatre Alibi performances help children learn by enhancing personal, social and emotional well-being?
- How does the performance help children learn without additional teacher intervention?

A summary of findings follows.

Summary of findings from watching a one-off Theatre Alibi performance

1. Post-performance children employ an extended emotional vocabulary, and therefore the performance may contribute to their emotional literacy.
2. Children who are familiar with Theatre Alibi performances demonstrate a more positive pre-performance response than those children who see Theatre Alibi for the first time.
3. The emotional impact of the performance can be long-lasting.
4. Watching a performance has a positive impact on children’s emotional state.
5. Lower-ability children, those identified as having additional needs and those children from schools with the highest levels of socio-

- economic deprivation demonstrate the most positive change irrespective of the performance style.
6. Girls were more confident and willing to handle conflicting emotions.
 7. Higher ability children, particularly boys, reported less positively after watching an abstract, non-verbal performance suggesting a lack of confidence and resilience when being presented with a performance they found difficult to understand.
 8. Through performance, children are able to engage with and experience intense and conflicting emotions in a 'safe' space which can aid their emotional development.
 9. Children can see and learn from the actor's physical portrayal of a character's emotional journey, so providing a mediated and protected experience for understanding difficult emotions.
 10. Watching as a whole school community can lead to shared emotional experience for children and staff, and lead to longer term impact.

Based on field-study evidence of teacher and children's responses to the performance of *Apple John* (2017) and the retour of *The Boy Who Climbed Into the Moon* (2018), I argue that theatre performance can provide an important contribution to children's emotional development and literacy, encouraging their non-verbal learning and broadening their emotional understanding of different and difficult emotions.

Summary of *Apple John*

Apple John, a non-verbal production, tells the epic story of the life cycle of a boy, John, juxtaposed with the life cycle of an apple tree which grows from an apple core tossed out of a train window by Edna, John's mother, triggering her labour and John's birth. To add historical context and interest, projected images appear, apparently from nowhere, onto white cloths, blankets, parasols and posters. The performance is complex, requiring the audience to interpret non-verbal signs, including props protruding from the set, and musical accompaniment to understand abstract concepts of growth, change, family relationships and decay.

John deals with the eventualities of life, falling ill, a motor bike accident, leaving home, marriage to Joyce, the birth of his 'tear-away' daughter, Justine, the difficulties of parent and child relationships, and growing old. In contrast, the counter-plot concerns the life of an apple tree from seedling to sapling, through hard winters, spring, abundant crops and finally being felled due to disease.



Fig. 12 *Apple John* (2017)

The theatrical form and content of the production, with its universal theme, is appealing to adults watching the performance as well as children, and provides hard-hitting and challenging subject matter for audience members aged 5-11 years old. Although a simple narrative, episodes are set in multiple locations with the use of an image, a prop, a chair or musical theme moving us from an orchard, to a London street, to a lecture room or a hospital waiting room. There is a cyclical pattern to the performance, which spans one lifetime of 77 years in 55 minutes: three pregnancies, two babies growing up, teenage years, illness and danger, repeated returns to the apple tree, weather, seasons and trains. Two actors and two musicians create emotional moments of quiet and tenderness, which contrast with the visual, often slap-stick humour of birth, eating unknown food, learning to ride a bike, childish play and adolescence. The storytelling presents a glimpse into someone's life using high quality production elements. It maximises the non-verbal form to highlight the moments of emotional intensity and to place centre stage the things which cannot easily be expressed in words,

thereby providing an environment where children are required to 'read' and interpret meanings created non-verbally beyond what many children may have experienced previously.



Fig. 13 *Apple John* – Projections aiding the storytelling

The performance repeatedly uses changes of scale, illustrated at the start of the performance with the actors representing the large wheel and piston movement of a 1939 steam engine slowly picking up speed. Once the image is established and recognised, they then switch to a smaller scale, more abstract movement where the train moving through the countryside is symbolised by an actor's index finger. The storytelling shifts between the actors, with the other actor miming small hand gestures of billowing, puffing smoke following the train or the gesture of a cupped hand to create a tunnel which the finger train passes beneath. To re-inforce the setting and clarify the story, images of steam trains and railway bridges are projected on a white cloth.

This storyline setting is complemented by the music, where the violin or the cello carry the very strict beat of the motion of the moving train throughout the eight-minute sequence. At times the beat is held by the violin whilst the cello introduces a different theme such as the "John theme" and at other times the beat is taken by the cello so the violin can create a tremolo of wonderment as Edna thinks of her unborn baby. Changes of scale are repeatedly used to show John, and later Justine growing up, the tottering baby walking for the first time portrayed by a

fully grown adult, and the miming of a baby being placed on a small child's bicycle which is transformed quickly into a child learning to ride without stabilisers.

Catering for audiences with additional needs

The production of *Apple John* was distinctive from other Theatre Alibi performances as it relied on visual and musical forms of storytelling rather than the spoken word. As Musical Director, composer and performer Thomas Johnson comments, 'If you take away the words then everything on stage becomes more significant. You've lost one medium and so all of the other media grow in importance' (2017:1).

Using the language of the Visual Vernacular

When creating the production, it was intended it to be equally accessible for a Deaf, as well as a hearing audience. This creative objective was reinforced during the R&D process when a Deaf actor was employed and all the company underwent Deaf awareness and BSL training. Although in the final performance this actor was unavailable for the tour, his use of the visual vernacular had a significant effect on the visual storytelling process. The visual vernacular, often adopted by Deaf communities, provides an alternative form of language using symbolic short-cut images created through simple gestures and facial expression rather than employing British Sign Language (BSL). It differs from the theatrical form of mime by being more direct and succinct. It also allows for short repeated actions rather than using mime to convey a scene or character. Use of the visual vernacular can be seen clearly at the beginning of the performance through the representation of the train, one of the key re-occurring themes which signify time passing and journeys from one state to another e.g. the journey from pregnancy to motherhood; leaving home to independence and finally life passing.

The visual vernacular is further employed when the 'tree' is introduced by hand gestures depicting a seed growing into a tree, and later in the performance, the gesture for snowflakes falling, suggested by the Deaf actor in rehearsal, to increase its accessibility for the Deaf community. The use of hands rushing in front of the face is a repeated gesture which effectively creates the sense of

speed as the train rushes in and out of a station and the danger of speed during the near fatal motor-cycle race.

From its inception, *Apple John* used a more physically poetic form of expression, a visual language rather than verbal. It is clear, from the response to the performance that this impacted on both Deaf and hearing audience in differing ways which will be discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter Six on the memory of the performance.



Fig. 14 *Apple John* – The Motorbike race

As the children await the start of *Apple John*, there is a keen interest in the set and what the performance may unfold as they 'read' the set by interpreting non-verbal signs, identifying the musical instruments and the actors. Many discuss with a neighbour what the 'strange teeth' in one of the hoops of the set rings might mean or recognise the more familiar trains, clothes or motor-bike helmet. Some notice they are from a different historical era, not quite from the children's cultural experience, and therefore add interest and discussion with another audience member prior to the show. Reception theorist, Susan Bennett identifies this pre-performance activity, which involves 'the spectator's interaction with the performance in both social (audience member) and private (individual) capacities' (Bennett 1997:125) as significant. In this case, such activity with some children talking to their fellow audience members and other sitting quietly, synthesising what they see, hear and feel develops a learning and emotional environment, creating a sense of 'theatre as an event' discussed previously.



Fig.15 *Apple John* set

The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon – a brief summary

The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon explores the themes of unlikely friendship, depression and unusual ideas. It tells the story of Paul, a child who lacks confidence and does not enjoy school, who has a strange idea that the Moon is a hole in the sky. With the support from his family, neighbours and ‘outsider’ Benjamin, a depressed war-veteran who believes in Paul’s extraordinary idea, Paul is able to climb a tall ladder to the moon where he discovers Fortuna, an orphan girl abandoned in the Moon. The production, using a range of puppets, including the portrayal of Paul and Fortuna, takes the audience on a strange emotional journey.⁵⁷

Chapter Outline

The scope and range of my associated field-study research has been broad.⁵⁸ As *Apple John* was a non-verbal performance, the comparison with *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, a more typical Theatre Alibi performance, enabled further investigation into how verbal or non-verbal performances contributed to

⁵⁷ A more detailed summary of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* can be found in Chapter Six pp.258-260.

⁵⁸ Previously discussed p.104.

the emotional development of children.⁵⁹ Field-study observations suggest that most children experience all Theatre Alibi performances as a stand-alone event with little or no further teacher intervention. Therefore, understanding the impact of the 'one-off' theatrical encounter is important for schools who book the production and the company itself.

Within the context of audience engagement studies in Chapter Three, I argued that the method of using a traditional quantitative questionnaire, used for transactional purposes by many theatre companies or venues, is insufficient to capture the deeper social and emotional impact of a one-hour performance. Although my principal method of collecting children's views is a visual emotion questionnaire (VQ), I recognise that, although specifically designed for this research, it only tells part of the story if considered without context. Therefore, when completing the VQ, the children were asked to clarify and contextualise their feelings. This method was further supplemented by observations of children watching the performance and discussion with them to provide a richer evaluation of their experience and its emotional impact. To add further validity and provide greater context to the research, teachers were also asked to observe the children and comment on their level of engagement and concentration. Initially, I had intended to collect my research data from small mixed-ability groups of children; however, due to safeguarding concerns, available classroom space and expediency, schools requested I conducted my research with the whole class which led to a much broader research data-set. Having collected data from the whole class it would have been unethical to disregard the responses from those who were outside my selected small group. I therefore adapted my methodological design to explore a much larger data set and provide a broader empirical study drawn from different types of schools, including Special Schools, children from across the 5-11 age range and those familiar and unfamiliar with Theatre Alibi performances.

⁵⁹ Data supplied by Theatre Alibi as part of their NPO progress report 2018. *Apple John* – 76 school performances in 61 schools to a total audience of 11,120 children. In addition, there were 11 community school-based evening performances for children and their families. *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* - Spring 2018 tour was performed to 1,585 children over ten performances in nine different schools.

Children's experience of theatre is varied. For many younger children seeing *Apple John* was their first encounter with live theatre, whilst other children are accustomed to the annual or occasional visit of Theatre Alibi during the Autumn Term, but may not have experienced theatre outside the school environment. For a minority of children, the school-based performance may be complemented by more regular theatre visits either organised by the school or parents and other family members. Field-study evidence and Theatre Alibi surveys suggest exposure to the arts and culture has diminished over time with Headteachers and governors finding it difficult to justify a theatre visit. It is pertinent, therefore, to investigate the value of a 'one-off' theatre performance beyond the 'feeling' of its worthiness and that exposure to the arts is a good thing.

Throughout this chapter I evaluate my methodology and any subsequent adaptations to analyse its benefits and its limitations. The VQ was employed to capture emotional changes before and after the performance and observe improved or declined well-being resulting from the performance. The VQ method was useful in resolving the challenge within my research of capturing and describing emotional well-being with young children who may have a limited emotional vocabulary and not have the range of words to express their emotions. This may be further pronounced in children who have additional learning needs including Deafness. Children having the necessary language to describe emotions and conveying how they are feeling to an external researcher is a key aspect of my methodology and my investigation into how performance helps children learn by enhancing personal, social and emotional well-being.

Following discussion on the storytelling approaches employed to cater for a hearing and Deaf audience, Part One, The Audience, interleaves current literature from audience studies focusing on the 'innocent', 'captive', 'active' and 'passive' child audience with field-study observations and findings. In Part Two, Moods, Emotions and Happiness, I survey scholarly literature on emotions and well-being including the government's current emphasis on 'happiness' and life satisfaction surveys as a measure for well-being. I recognise the importance of research into children's emotional well-being in today's society and in schools particularly of the value of the term 'well-being' and its links to 'happiness'. Using children's responses, Part Three and Four presents the research gathered from

quantitative and qualitative methods which underpins my findings from *Apple John* and further evaluate the limitations and benefits of my field-study methods. Part Five discusses a second smaller field-study of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, and provides a comparative analysis to *Apple John*. Finally, I return to my research questions and subsequent findings to consider the educational value of a 'one-off' performance as a stand-alone event.

Part One: The Audience

Theatre for all, a place for cultural instigation

Despite the highly structured National Curriculum each primary school visited in the Theatre Alibi tour is different, in terms of buildings, management structures, demographics, funding, culture and ethos. Whilst there has been increased diversity in the school population since 1986 and the performances of *Shouting, Singing and Stamping Home*, mentioned in the previous chapter, the Devon school population is still predominantly 'White British'. An area where the demographic of the tour audience has changed over the last five years is in the increase of family economic deprivation as measured by the percentage of children in receipt of Free School Meals.⁶⁰ Based on this factor, the provision of theatre in a school setting with little or no cost to children may, for some, be their only access to a cultural experience. Who pays for Theatre Alibi's subsidised performance also varies between schools (TA Stats 2018).⁶¹

The school setting for the performance is important both in ensuring egalitarian access to a cultural event for the whole school and providing a 'safe' space for an unfamiliar experience. Being performed in schools suggests educational worth and provides instant opportunities for teachers to interpret the performance

⁶⁰ Tour data provided by Theatre Alibi (TA Tour FSM stats) and comparison of school data. Retrieved 20 May 2018, from <https://www.compareschoolperformance.service.gov.uk>.

⁶¹ Results from the Theatre Alibi Booking Process Analysis (TA School Stats 2018) which analysed 25 returns from schools reported the Theatre Alibi shows was funded in the following ways: 56% funded by school funds or PTA donations; 5% by parental contributions alone; and 39% by a combination of school funds, PTA donations and parental contributions.

back in the classroom if required. They are also able to intervene during the performance, or later in the classroom, if the children become upset.

The ‘innocent’ child

Jamieson, the writer and Sved, the director, are sensitive to the content of the performance to make it appropriate for all ages. The themes of the performances are not ‘dumbed down’ and have strong emotional content, such as facing mortality, illness and family breakdown in *Apple John*; depression, lack of confidence, loneliness and wanting a family in *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*. Although the productions frequently see the world through the children’s eyes, Theatre Alibi does not adhere to the myth of the ‘innocent child’. This term, quoted by Schuitema (2015:183) and Reason (2012:25), refers to the work of Jacqueline Rose *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (1993, originally published in 1984). Schuitema refers to Rose’s notion that childhood innocence is a myth created by adults (Schuitema 2015:183). She argues that the concept of children’s fiction is ‘a flawed concept, as even though books are written and published for the child, in reality it is the child who comes second, after the adult who as an author, maker and giver occupies the primary position’ (Rose:1-2 in Schuitema 2015:183). Reason addresses Rose’s argument further, highlighting ‘the uneven 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’ (Reason 2012:25). Reason also criticises Rose, believing she is reinforcing the powerlessness of children, ‘perpetuating a disempowering of children- as spoken for, not speaking’ (2012:25). Most Theatre Alibi performances for children have a child as their central protagonist, but Jamieson’s writing and Sved’s careful direction, do not make them powerless despite them being vulnerable at times. John, Justine, Paul and Fortuna, the children in the plays *Apple John* and *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, certainly demonstrate sadness and vulnerability but they are not two dimensional characters; they show boldness, courage and resilience. In contrast, in *Apple John*, Edna, John’s mother and John are over-protective parents, and in *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, adults are portrayed as either being over protective or not listening to children and confirming their powerlessness. From semi-structured interviews with

children, the way Paul is ignored, even ridiculed, is prominent in the children's minds when asked to recall the performance. They empathise with Paul and how he is treated by adults, sharing their similar experience of adults: 'Adults don't listen to children. They treat you like a baby...You would never be able to climb to the moon because adults would stop you'(FS-BM109-Wil:5). They see themselves as not having a very strong voice (BM-FS01-SMC3). Jamieson's writing is sensitively written to give the child characters a voice and the ability to speak out in a world where they can be silenced.

The notion of the 'innocent' child is also developed by Schuitema, in challenging the myth that children are either unaware or need protecting from the events of everyday life,

There is a conception that children, especially young children, are unaware of or uninterested in events beyond their direct local environment. However, research by Alexander and Hargreaves (2007) illustrates that children are indeed aware of and concerned about national and global issues (Schuitema 2015:180).

Although Alexander and Hargreave were writing more than ten years ago, I recognise children now are more aware of their environment and global issues with greater access to social media and web sources readily accessible on mobile devices.

As a former teacher, I have been surprised by the uncompromising issues Theatre Alibi's performances cover, particularly issues of rejection and death in *Apple John* and depression, war and abandonment in *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*. Returning to the challenge of a 5-11 aged audience, what might be appropriate for a ten-year-old might not be so for a five-year-old. The material is sensitively used and provides opportunities to explore further difficult issues children may be facing. One teacher wrote thanking Theatre Alibi after a performance when a child in her class had felt able to divulge the difficulties she was finding at home dealing with a relative with mental health issues (BM-TAFF-CH). Another Head, Jonathan Gower commented:

I was very struck by the character with the bag on his head [Benjamin] and the acting... the moment of quiet in the performance when she [Molly] took the bag away. The children were empathising with her doing that. I was reflecting that there

will be children who have people in their lives they can connect with and that's interesting they are able to see things like this. It's useful because we often come over as very jolly around the place and life isn't always like that. We might be able to engage with them by asking the children to think why he behaves like that and how we can understand his behaviour (2016:7).

The exploration of a range of emotions within a performance provides opportunity for children to encounter and experience those emotions, either first hand or by seeing and interpreting the actor's response. This may be a private, internalised experience for the child or shared with others as a communal response. School is a 'safe' space where teachers can interpret the performance for the children by opening discussion, exploring any concerns with the child and supporting them rather than disempowering them or ignoring the issues. How teachers use the performance will be explored further in the next chapter.

The 'captive child'

The 'captive child', an expression used frequently by academics working in children's theatre (Levy quoted in Schomann, 2006:20-21, Reason 2010:17, Schuitema 2015:175), recognises children are often powerless when watching theatre, having little or no freedom over the choice of what they watch or whether they attend. Within the context of my research, teachers will have decided for them. As the whole school sees the performance, the children are unable to 'opt out' unless they are absent on the day of the visit or have very particular special needs which may prevent them from attending (AJ-FS07-BBSS). When Theatre Alibi arrives in schools, the cast is keen to ascertain if any children with additional needs would benefit from meeting the cast, seeing the set or hearing any loud sounds before the performance to alleviate any fears or apprehensions the children may experience. The company is careful to reassure those students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or other additional needs and encourage them to participate. Often, these children may sit close to the exit so they can leave without disturbing the rest of the audience. Therefore, they are less 'captive' than most audience members, although the decision to leave is often taken by the teacher or support member of staff rather than the child.

Inevitably, there will be some children who may not enjoy watching theatre, preferring to stay in the classroom and study a topic they enjoy more. Most children do 'sign up' to the premise of watching a play without much choice, but not all, with some occasionally looking for an escape by walking out or choosing to disrupt so they are 'removed'. When observing *Apple John* performances involving over 3,500 children, I witnessed three children choosing to remove themselves and one child being removed from the performance due to their behaviour, throwing bits of 'blu-tac' at the performers (AJ-FS03-WB2:2-3). Others, usually up to ten children per performance, left to go to the toilet but all returned quickly to resume watching the performance. My research, based on VQs, observations and discussions methods, reflects the views of all children, including those who would have chosen not to see the performance had they been given a choice.

The 'collective' audience

The 'collective' audience within a school setting is similar to an audience in a theatre where much of the enjoyment comes from the reactions and laughter of those around you. As a communal activity, this shared experience adds to the enjoyment and re-enactment of the performance in 'play' activities and discussion with friends after the theatre company has left. Although it is easy to categorise the audience as a homogenous group, it is amoeba-like, shape-shifting, changing and responding as a unit.

I suggest the 'collective' audience is more significant in school-based performance as children can feel, hear and see others' responses due to it taking place in daylight, in the more confined space of a school hall and familiarity with each other. Whilst watching *Apple John*, a non-verbal and complex narrative, having your interpretations confirmed by the person next to you was important for many children. It was also an event where children were 'swept along' by the collective audience reaction, such as laughter when Justine became a punk teenager, or when John played 'air-guitar'. In more physical moments many younger children copied the actors' mime of the large wheels of the steam train. There was a difference in 'collective' response, where the children unconsciously joined in with what was happening around them. The individual, as a sole

audience member, became 'absorbed' into the performance and enveloped by it, unwittingly mirroring the actions they see.

Behavioural psychologist, Dylan Evans suggests that a collective audience can often appear to have a group mind, reacting together and influencing those individuals around them. The collective emotion can be a powerful force with the audience becoming swept along by the emotion (Evans 2001:91). Laughter and feelings of emotional well-being are certainly infectious in a positive collective audience. Conversely, Evans mentions a 'herd mentality' when groups are affected by sympathy:

Sympathy means feeling someone else's emotions as if they were your own. Some people would prefer to call this empathy, and reserve 'sympathy' for a more intense form of sharing someone else's feelings in which some critical distance is maintained...The capacity for groups to amplify emotion requires the individual to take on someone else's emotions and feelings and feel it in your heart (2001:91).

Children watching a Theatre Alibi performance often report experiencing strong emotional attachment to characters and the situations they face, empathising with their predicament. A heightened emotional moment in *Apple John* occurs when John rejects his daughter, Justine, turning away when she leaves home. Some children reported feeling empathy towards Justine but also feeling anger towards John. Similarly, *In The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, a heightened emotional moment occurred towards the end of the performance when the audience is concerned that Paul will leave his newly found friend alone in the moon. There was a will amongst the audience when the girl, Fortuna, said 'Take me with you' that Paul would do as she asked. Adults within the audience of *Apple John* also became 'swept along' emotionally, empathising with John at the end of the performance when Justine returned. Several adults were seen crying, with some having to leave the hall and colleagues having to escort their class back to the classroom at the end of the performance (AJ-FS01-SHJ, AJ-FS08-SVP, AJ-FS10-SVP, AJ-FS14-SiS, AJ-FS18-H2). Teachers in their feedback to Theatre Alibi also recognise the importance of the collective experience as a shared emotional activity for the whole school. As one teacher explained, 'children and the staff had the opportunity to laugh and understand together, share and enjoy' (AJ-TAFF-WB1), recognising the value for the adults as well as

the children seeing mutual enjoyment. Despite the performance being a more abstract experience for a collective, homogenous group, one teacher in an audience of four-five year old children praised the performance and reflected, 'Each one of our 90 children got something unique and personal from the performance' (AJ-TAFF-SHI).

The 'active' and 'passive' spectator

Having looked at the collectiveness of this 'captive' audience, it is also important to reflect on what children are 'doing' whilst watching the performance. Are they 'passive' or 'active'? In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière debates the 'paradox of the spectator' – how on the one hand, theatre cannot exist without an audience, and on the other hand there is a negative perception of spectatorship – that 'being a spectator is a bad thing, [being] immobile in her seat, passive [and therefore] separated both from the capacity to know and the power to act' (Rancière 2011:2). In contrast Reason suggests 'the idea of an "active" audience is extremely problematic, mired in the legacy of an overly comfortable binary between active and passive spectatorship' (2015:272). Alongside this binary there is an implicit judgement that being an active or participatory audience, such as during TiE or immersive theatre, gives agency and empowerment which is good and the passivity of children 'watching' a performance is bad.

My research suggests that although the audiences are not as 'participatory' as they would be in programmes like Punchdrunk's *Lost Lending Library* or *Prospero's Island* discussed in Chapter Three; or during a pantomime where children are engaged in frenetic or hysterical calling out, there is, however, often more active engagement than might be presumed. There is an unpredictable freedom in a school hall which allows for a more individualised response with children getting up, consciously or unconsciously joining in the actions, or responding to rhetorical questions. This occurs most frequently with younger and Special School audiences where some children want to get around the back of the set and follow the characters 'off-stage' or join them in the action (AJ-FS20-A2, AJ-FS07-BBSS, AJ-FS13-ER).

However, within the performance this type of 'active participation' is often not encouraged with staff restraining 'walkers'. The freedom to be more actively engaged in a school-based performance can be restricted by the school 'as an institution'. Different schools and individual teachers within schools will set different parameters for what they judge to be reasonable or unreasonable behaviours. The concept of reasonableness and unreasonableness is convergent with Kershaw's concept of 'theatre-as institution' and 'theatre-as-event' discussed previously, p.17. The actors may place a different value on what may be reasonable, often wanting the children to respond, and becoming frustrated with the teacher who 'shushes' any noise. The issue here is who gets to decide what is 'reasonable' or 'unreasonable' in the audience's response, and how this is bound up in the value placed upon the performance, its intrinsic or instrumental worth, and why the performance is booked in the first place. It was 'reasonable' for M, a student at the Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education (ERADE), to shout and scream with sheer pleasure during the performance (AJ-FS13-ER), but considered 'unreasonable' for a Year 1 child in a different school to stand up and clap with happiness during an engaging moment (AJ-FS20-A2).

During observations at the start of the *Apple John* tour, in two schools the performance coincided with the start of the Reception children's school experience and their first venture into the school hall (AJ-FS02-WB, AJ-FS04-BPS). They were surprised on entering and had not learnt the accepted conventions when being in the hall, often facing away from where they should be looking, standing up and moving around before being cajoled by their teachers to sit and watch quietly. The younger audience members had not been 'taught' or 'learnt' the theatre etiquette of how to behave when watching a performance. What is clear from my observations is that the decision of 'reasonableness' or 'unreasonableness' is always beyond the agency of the children themselves.

One constraint on 'activity' or 'noisiness' was placed on the children by the cast. In the first week of the *Apple John* tour, when the cast were 'bedding in' with children's responses, an issue arose with the level of 'chatter' the children were generating during the performance. This was not due to poor behaviour but a desire to interpret and make meaning of what they were seeing with the

assistance and confirmation of their neighbour. This low-level noise, which was not a distraction to the audience, was problematic for many of the teachers and particularly for the musicians and actors, who were unable to hear essential musical cues. This was overcome after the first week by the company reworking unclear scenes and the actors asking children to save their discussion until they returned to the classroom or playground after the performance. Whilst this was a practical necessity, and did lessen the chatter by making the audience more 'passive', it meant some children were less able to fully understand the performance.

Observations of 18 performances of *Apple John*, confirm Rancière's assertion that 'being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity' (2011:2). On the contrary, it is instead an active and empowering process where the children are continually and repeatedly interpreting what they are seeing and hearing; actively decoding the sign systems they are experiencing. This was apparent during field-study observations of child R, as he keenly watched the beginning of the performance:

In the first five minutes R is interested in the set – watching the musicians. He appears to be very intently watching, unaware of others around him and silently mouthing words such as *train* and *apple* to himself (AJ-FS15-SaPS: 2).

For R, actively mouthing the words as he watched the actor's gestures and non-verbal communication was a conversation with himself to aid and confirm his understanding. R's teacher, who also observed him, identified him as a lower-ability member of the class who showed considerably higher concentration and engagement than she would have expected. Unlike R some children may lack the resilience or the desire to keep reading the more abstract, physical gestures they see, but for others this is the joy of the performance, accepting they can use their imagination to make new meaning for what they are experiencing.

Observations of performances of *Apple John* demonstrate the audiences were neither 'passive' or 'active', at times sedentary and at other times bubbling with liveliness. Reactions obviously varied between individual members and children from different age groups. Often younger children were observed being drawn

into the performance in a state of flow,⁶² laughing or being ‘swept along’ or transferring the emotions of those around them, being enriched and engrossed, demonstrating an ‘enraptured’ but not necessarily ‘active’ gaze. Most children observed were not only ‘captive’ but also ‘captivated’ by the performance. Therefore, it may be considered a good ‘fit’ between the creation of the theatre performance and its audience. This is particularly surprising bearing in mind the diversity of experience of the audience and its broad age range.

Creating theatre for an audience with a broad age range

Performing to an audience with a broad age range of 5-11 year olds requires high levels of tolerance on the part of actors, teachers and children. There needs to be an acceptance that not everything will be understood by the younger children, a level of emotional challenge and suitable narrative which engages the upper age group, and a trust that, despite this challenge, no harm will be caused to the younger members of the audience. As has been suggested in the previous chapter, Children’s Theatre companies usually create performances for a more discrete age range, such as Early Years (0-4), KS1 (5-7) or KS2 (8-11). For Theatre Alibi, providing theatre intended for the whole school community is important, requiring care and consideration regarding organisational and narrative constraints.

Theatre Alibi productions, such as *Apple John*, are generally 55 minutes’ duration placing high demands of concentration on the youngest in the audience.⁶³ The performance is skilfully directed to enable maximum concentration, with moments of humour, visually engaging objects, heightened emotional elements and magical, unexpected moments, such as objects or images appearing from nowhere, to support engagement. However, observations showed that many of the children, especially the youngest, found

⁶² Mihaly Csikzentmihaly’s concept of flow is a state of optimal experience which arises when there is a balance between challenge and skills. It is typified by an immersive experience combining intense concentration and focus, a lack of self-consciousness where there is no apparent existence of time (2004).

⁶³ The expected attention span for a KS1 child would be 10 – 20 minutes before moving onto a new activity (Pitt 2019: 1); the expected attention span for a Year 6 child would be 20-50 minutes; children with additional needs including Attention Deficit Hyper-Activity Disorder (ADHD) would be significantly less.

the last ten minutes of the performance more difficult. The children appeared very tired at the end of *Apple John* as they had had to concentrate throughout to interpret the non-verbal performance. Many teachers expressed surprise and delight at how the children sustained concentration and reported it had been far greater than in classroom activities.

Field-study observations suggested that children were most engaged in childhood moments, for example, when John was a baby, growing up, or playing in the snow, or when Justine was repeatedly crying as a baby or toddling, and particularly when Justine was playing with toys. These were moments of heightened action but also moments which were closer to the children's experience. Towards the end of the performance, in scenes which dramatised John and Joyce as an elderly couple carrying out everyday chores, there was a greater tendency for children to lose their focus, watching without engagement, and with some becoming restless. Some children did not regain interest until ten minutes later and the final section of the felling of the tree. The children seemed to find it more difficult to relate to old age but were re-invigorated by the change of pace and narration towards the end.

Part Two: Moods, Emotions and Happiness

Emotions and Moods

An emotion or feeling can be difficult to name or capture, being amorphous and hard to pin down. Within the context of *Apple John*, the children are presented with several emotional moments which may be experienced differently. For some it may be blurry, lasting for a fleeting moment, which is hard to describe, whilst for others it may have a more profound affect, lasting from minutes to hours. In the theory of emotion, psychologists, anthropologists and emotionologists often classify emotions which are fleeting, such as joy, distress, anger, fear, surprise and disgust, as 'basic emotions' as they are universal and evolutionary, being innate and involuntary (Evans 2001:6-13; Ekman 1992:169-200; Watts-Smith 2016:8-9). Similarly, there is a recognised nuance between similar emotions:

Happiness it's not the same as joy, but it is closely linked. Joy is a basic emotion, and, like the other basic emotions, a single episode lasted only a few seconds, rarely more than a minute.

Happiness is a mood, and moods last much longer—from several minutes to several hours (Evans 2001:48).

The emotional state, or mood, with which we approach situations in life impacts on our reactions and responses to situations and is longer lasting:

Moods are background states that raise or lower our susceptibility to emotional stimuli. In a happy mood, for example, we will be more likely to react joyfully to good news, while, in a sad mood, we might not react so intensely. Conversely, someone in a sad mood is more likely to cry at bad news, whilst a person in a happy mood might laugh it off (Evans 2001:48).

Academics suggest it was not until the 19th century that the term emotion was recognised. Prior to this, greater consideration had been given to ‘passions’ or ‘humours’ or ‘moral sentiments’ which controlled our emotional well-being (Watt-Smith 2016:3,96; Evans 2001:44,52,93).⁶⁴ For cultural historian Tiffany Watt-Smith the ‘Victorians are responsible for two of the most influential ideas about our feelings today: that our emotions are evolved physical responses, and that they are affected by the play of our unconscious minds’ (2016:6). Based on Darwin’s research, it was believed that emotions were part of the evolutionary process, intuitively bound to our survival and therefore, childhood is considered an important time for emotional development. Evans argues that childhood allows children not only to discover their likes and dislikes but to witness and learn from the external expressions of other people’s emotions, such as parental anxiety or pride (2001:28). For Evans ‘Emotional learning is the combination of environmental inputs, and an innate disposition to learn something rather than others’ (2001:28). Therefore, exposing children to a wide range of emotions within a performance which they can witness and assimilate can potentially contribute to children’s emotional development.

⁶⁴ Descartes identifies six ‘primitive passions’ (wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness). Conversely, Ekman in *Basic Emotions* (1999) does not include sadness within his concept of basic emotion theory. The theory of Humoral Medicine from Greek physician, Hippocrates was based on maintaining a balance between the four humours of blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) suggests humans have a capacity for feelings of sympathy or empathy towards others and concern for others’ well-being based on moral goodness.

Well-being and its link to happiness

Happiness has become a more prominent or promoted emotion due to its association to Government Life Satisfaction Surveys (GLSS) and the link to well-being. An Office of National Statistics (ONS) publication *People, Prosperity and Planet* states that since 2010 the ONS has set up 'the Measuring National Well-being Programme to monitor and report UK progress by producing accepted and trusted measures of well-being of the nation' (ONS 2019:1). As part of the personal well-being questionnaire they ask respondents to assess themselves on a 0-10 scale on four personal well-being questions, one of which is 'Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?' (ONS 2018a:2). Other questions focus on life satisfaction, feeling worthwhile and feeling anxious. Although most national and global Life Satisfaction Surveys are for adults aged 16 and over, such as Office for National Statistics, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations and the World Health Organisation, the same happiness question is asked of children aged 10-15 in the UK as part of The Children's Society Panel. Therefore, happiness and well-being can be seen to be clearly linked with the ONS recognising the four personal well-being measurements being 'strongly related to other important aspects of the quality of life such as our health, relationships and employment' (ONS 2018:3). The ONS (2013:2) and other governmental reports (APPG 2017:19) recognise the correlation between how people feel about themselves, including how happy they feel, with levels of good health. It is noteworthy, that in the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Report in 2017, they suggest from analysing current ONS data that, 'The dimension documenting personal well-being, which takes account of happiness and life satisfaction, shows only a third of the population feel very happy or satisfied' (2017:35). The APPG also recognises the efficacy of participation in arts and culture in improving and aiding well-being, health and social care (2017:4).⁶⁵ Although these reports refer to adults, I suggest the same could be true for children.

Well-being can further be coupled with happiness as a global concern with academics John F. Helliwell, Richard Layard and Jeffery D. Sachs producing an

⁶⁵ See also previous discussion p.102.

annual 'World Happiness Report' for the UN since 2012. With self-help manuals and continual reminders from advertisers and social media implying material wealth, reconstructive surgery and a consumer lifestyle will make us happy, the pursuit of happiness has become a multibillion pound industry.

Watt-Smith suggests the pairing of happiness with well-being is a product of the EU International Life Satisfaction Survey introduced in 2003, which 'measured and compared the happiness of people in its member states, a barometer watched eagerly by politicians, as happiness has become a shorthand for that other ubiquitous goal: "well-being"' (2016:128). She assesses how happiness has been changed from an emotion based on contentment, or good fortune, to a commodity; something which can be measured or controlled. She warns:

If something seems important, we want to control it; if we want to control it, we measure it first. But in our hurry to weigh and measure that most subjective, fleeting experience of happiness, we might be forgetting to check first what we're putting at risk (Watt-Smith 2016:129).

According to Watt-Smith there is an inherent pressure to be always happy, and pressure is placed on individuals that if we are not happy then we have failed.

Particular emotions have been given different value over time. Watt-Smith in her research into the history of emotions, suggests that 'Sadness was a very popular topic in the Renaissance. As popular as happiness is today' (2016:224-225). Much of the importance that is currently attached to happiness today, would have been given to sadness, with English lawyer, Thomas Elyot, suggesting 'that readers should familiarise themselves with other people's sorrow to better tolerate their own' (Watt-Smith 2016: 225). Elyot suggested people should be encouraged to practise feeling sad so that when they came across a sad experience in later life, as they inevitably would, they would be prepared and be able to overcome difficulties. Therefore, practising being sad and undergoing emotional training was seen as being vital to equip people for a prosperous life. Watt-Smith suggests that ... 'the idea that we might have to *learn* the art of sadness—how to experience its many flavours and how to endure it too—does have a resonance today' (2016: 226).

For many educators, children being happy in their learning would be amongst one of their key objectives, and, as has been shown in Rose's view of 'the innocent child', may want to protect children from the difficulties and conflicts of real life. Happiness is often seen through the lens of well-being, particularly mental well-being, as shown by the enhancement emphasis on well-being to achieve a judgement of good or better within the latest OFSTED framework.⁶⁶

In many ways, the use of my VQ and using happiness as a guide for increased emotional well-being follows the same framework, of linking happiness directly to overall well-being. I have measured and assessed children's levels of happiness on an emotional 'barometer'. However, I recognise that placing happiness as a single measure may not be helpful as it places that emotion in a hierarchy above all others. There is a danger that in looking for improved positivity in emotions I will dismiss other emotional considerations. Therefore, in my analysis of the findings from the VQ this is tempered with caution and discussed within the context of all feelings and emotions and alongside findings from other ethnographical methods. I also discuss the temporality of happiness and recognise the subjectivity of one child's expression of happiness being different from another's.

The use of a theatre performance, and particularly *Apple John*, where children can encounter emotions like sadness, is important in not only providing children with the experience as part of preparation for life, but also offering a rich opportunity for teachers to discuss emotions with their classes. As will be shown later, when responding to the VQ many children responded with conflicting emotions, feeling extreme happiness as well as extreme sadness. Children had the ability to recognise contrasting emotions simultaneously, including the ability to tolerate sadness, often seeing it as temporary and able to sit alongside positive emotions and experiences.

⁶⁶ Schools Inspection Handbook Section 5 2019. pp. 57,60,62,65 and 75.

Part Three: Findings and Method evaluation – How does watching a performance enhance children’s personal, social and emotional well-being?

Watt-Smith, notes when discussing emotions, ‘Without context, you only get a “thin description” of what’s going on, not the whole story – and it’s this whole story which is what an emotion is’ (2016:10). I argue deeper context is required to present a rich, contextualised account of the child’s experience and subsequent impact of a performance. Central to this section is a discussion of my research findings offered at the beginning of this chapter, the use of a VQ and its effectiveness in capturing the impact on children’s emotional well-being and enabling what is often considered to be immeasurable to emerge. I endeavour to explore what Ben Walmsley describes in his study of adult audiences thus: as ‘the art of evaluation [which] lies in ensuring that the measurable does not drive out the immeasurable’ (Walmsley 2013:15). I also examine whether the VQ is sufficiently robust in determining the emotional impact of a ‘one-off’ performance and explore the field of emotions both through field-study responses.

Deployment of the Visual Questionnaire

The visual questionnaire was designed with the *Apple John* performance in mind with 19 cartoon style apples representing different emotions and incrementally graded so that the top of the tree contained more positive emotions.⁶⁷ Prior to the performance the children were asked to locate how they were feeling and identify the ‘apple’ which best represented how they felt. To avoid misinterpretation, they were asked to describe an emotion in writing to accompany the apple. On returning to the class, the children were again asked to consider how they felt now, and to give a further emotional explanation.

The VQ provided quantitative data, which, observations of the children’s reactions and discussion when they were given the questionnaire suggested, they found to be engaging. Following consultation with a teacher in one Special

⁶⁷ The Visual Questionnaire can be found on p.106.

School, the VQ was adapted and simplified (AJ-FS07-BBSS). Using the questionnaire provided data on the self-reported emotional change in the spectator before and after the performance. As explained earlier, it was not possible to provide comparative 'control group' data as Theatre Alibi performed to the whole school.⁶⁸

As a researcher, I was mindful that some children may want 'to please the visitor' and say what they thought I might want to hear. The children were very positive in wanting to participate in my research and were keen to give their views and I was unaware of any child changing their response because they wanted to please me. However, I also used a small sample of schools where data was collected from some classes before and after, and other classes only after the performance. The results from the sample data showed little variation in the emotional responses from classes where I had met the children before and after the performance and those who I had only met after, and therefore, I conclude that there is little or no evidence of children changing their emotional response to please the researcher.

Unlike Sedgman's previously discussed research on the National Theatre of Wales, where audience members were concerned about being critical, and did not see themselves as 'theatre experts' or 'the right kind of person to judge' (Sedgman 2016:123), the children from my field-study research had fewer inhibitions when asked for their opinion. Children were less culturally aware or bound by expectation or protocols and therefore appeared open and honest in their opinion. They would be equally at ease describing the performance as 'boring' or 'awesome' without fear of what the teacher or company might think.

Dilemma of choice, pragmatism and children's voice

The VQ, whilst effective in capturing the children's emotions pre-and post-performance, was limited by its reliance on interpretation and therefore open to misinterpretation. To reduce misunderstanding, it became important not only to circle the apple but, for the children, also to add a written response for

⁶⁸ For further explanation see pp.99-100.

clarification. Lunchtime incidents were also a contextual consideration before the afternoon performances where children would identify as feeling 'angry', 'sad' or 'wanting to be alone'. Prior to one afternoon performance, a Year 4 child who had circled an 'angry' apple explained this was due to another child being 'mean to his younger brother' during lunchtime. Throughout the performance, he found it hard to engage with the performance and leave his bad mood behind and self-reported feeling 'not happy' and 'didn't enjoy' at the end (AJ-FS03-WB2). As Evans suggest, p.148, the pre-performance mood often correlated with how children felt at the end of the performance, although this was not universal with many children reporting a positive transformation of emotion.

The graphic design of the VQ using apple 'characters' which represent different emotions, was also open to misinterpretation. One apple which I interpreted as 'angry', the children, due to cultural and demographic difference, read as 'cool'; a contrasting more positive expression encompassing 'chilled' or 'relaxed', expressing extreme enjoyment.

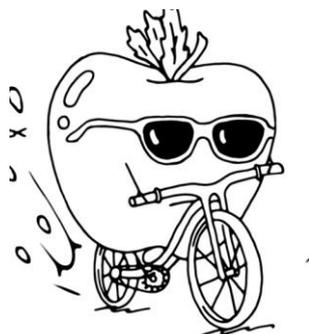


Fig. 16 Individual apple 'Angry'/'Cool'

The VQ, as a sole method of response, was insufficient and needed further contextualisation and explanation for accuracy. It would have been useful to have had some form of emotional cartography, a map to negotiate and interpret the children's responses or help children with the language of emotions. As Watt-Smith suggested previously, I recognise that the children did not need to know the word for the emotion, for it to exist or be experienced. Learning a word for an emotion can lead to children, or adults, recognising that they now have meaning for something which has been previously undefined. Children were keen to use the word 'magnificent' after watching *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* as a direct response to the child character, Paul, regularly using the word to express heightened joy. I also acknowledge there are issues of language development

when working with audiences of a young age. As Schuitema suggests, ‘difficulties of empirical audience research with children are partly due to their understanding of interview questions’ (2015:181); what is being asked and how it is interpreted by the adult, ‘because they are still developing their language skills’ (2015:181). The children may not have the emotional vocabulary or sophistication to express the detail or intricacy of how they were feeling and may have found it difficult to put a word to an emotion.

Naming emotions and extended emotional vocabulary (Finding 1)

In describing and defining their emotions, the children were being asked to self-reflect on a cognitive phenomenon, recognising a feeling and a thought. As my research focused on young children between the ages of five to ten years old, one potential problem was whether the children would have developed sufficiently sophisticated language skills to be able to name the nuance of the emotion and encapsulate how they were feeling. Through observations, many children took longer to locate how they were feeling prior to the performance than they did after the performance.

What became an unforeseen issue before and particularly after the performance, was many children found they were unable to confine themselves to one emotion, feeling two, often quite conflicting emotions, at once. After *Apple John* children reported feeling ‘very happy’ and ‘sad’, or ‘laughter’ and ‘bored’. Again, I decided to modify my research design by allowing two responses if needed.

	Words and emotions expressed before the performance	Words and emotions expressed after the performance
Responses from children completing the VQ before and after n=371	493 words	616 words
Responses from children completing the VQ after only n=61	X	116 words
Different emotions expressed	32 emotions	49 emotions
Total number of children = 432	Total number of emotional words expressed = 1225	

Table 4. Emotional expressions

Overall 58 different emotions were expressed, although due to the children’s understanding of feelings some expressions may not be classified as emotions within a scholarly context. There were also words which the children expressed as emotions which may be considered as conditions such as ‘illness’, ‘hot’, ‘hungry’ or ‘tired’.

One methodological dilemma was the range of multiple emotions being expressed and the difficulties of having too many factors to analyse. I considered giving the children a more limited choice of eight pre-designated emotions which would have been a simpler method to analyse but would not have fulfilled my research objective of giving children a voice. When analysing the 58 different emotions, I also considered grouping or linking similar emotions together. However, saying an emotion is very similar is not saying it is identical. To link emotions would mean ignoring the passion or enthusiasm of the children’s response and rejecting the many nuances contained within the broader emotion, particularly the emotionally charged post-performance responses. ‘Happiness’ appeared to have its own emotional thermometer with some related emotions being described as cooler and hotter than others. Pairing emotions for expediency of analysis would have been pragmatic but unethical as I would not be using the words offered to me. However, I did link ‘tired’ with ‘sleepy’, ‘funny’ with ‘laughter’, ‘ill’ with ‘unwell’ and ‘OK’ with ‘normal’ as these seemed to describe conditional states rather than emotions. Accepting the words the children offered, I have classified them as follows:

Positive Emotions (30)	Negative Emotions (17)	Neutral – neither positive or negative (11)
Very happy	Sad	Tired/Sleepy
Happy	Bored	Unwell/ill
Cool	Worried	OK
Relaxed	Nervous	Normal
Really enjoyed	Angry	Hot
Fabulous	Grumpy	Weird
Breath-taking	Uncomfortable	Busy
Amazing	Confused	Hungry
Awesome	Puzzled	Listening
Brilliant	Unsure	Concentrating
Delighted	Awkward	Emotional
Great	Lonely	
Funny	Not happy	
Laughter	Upset	

Thankful	Didn't enjoy	
Proud	Disappointed	
Friendly	Stressed	
Magnificent		
Interested		
Energetic		
Playful		
Refreshed		
Relieved		
Even better		
Joyful		
Enjoyable		
Surprised		
Quite happy		
Musical		
Silly (depending upon the apple identified)		

Table 5. Classification of expressed emotions

Interestingly, the children were more limited in their choice of emotions pre-performance and more expansive after (see Table 4 and 5 above). One conclusion was the performance engaged them in such an imaginative and embodied way that an emotion such as 'happy' was insufficient and therefore a more expressive emotion, such as 'breath-taking' or 'awesome'⁶⁹ was necessary. An emotionally expressive variety of emotions was employed to describe their heightened awareness so contributing to their emotional language development and suggesting that being asked to describe the emotions they were feeling extended their emotional literacy. The children's extended vocabulary following the performance would also support McNaughton's findings (1997) of children using a richer vocabulary in written work following engagement in drama activities, cited previously.⁷⁰ In general, of the research sample of 32 classes visited during *Apple John* (2017) and *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* (2018) tours, the younger age of the participants corresponded with the smaller range of emotions being expressed in the questionnaire. However, this was not always the case with one Year 2 class (AJ-FS10-SVPS) expressing a wider range of emotions than many older classes. In all schools the number of emotions expressed and the range of positive emotions increased after the performance. Therefore, I propose, a positive outcome can be seen in the

⁶⁹ 18 additional positive emotions were expressed after the performance and ten neutral or negative emotions. Eight further emotions were only expressed before the performance.

⁷⁰ See p.87.

emotional language development of children with a wider use of emotions expressed after the performance than before.⁷¹

All (total=1238)	%	Before (total = 493)	%	After (total = 745)	%
Happy	27%	Happy	38%	Happy	20%
Tired/ Sleepy	16%	Tired/ Sleepy	14%	Tired/ Sleepy	17%
Funny/ Laughter	9%	Funny/Laughter	0.6%	Funny/ Laughter	13%
Excited	8%	Excited	15%	Excited	3%
Very happy	6%	Very happy	1%	Very happy	9%
Cool/ Relaxed	5%	Cool/relaxed	5%	Cool/ relaxed	5%
OK/Normal	4%	OK/Normal	7%	OK/Normal	3%
Sad	3%	Sad	2%	Sad	6%
Bored	3%	Bored	1%	Bored	4%
Unwell/ill	3%	Unwell/ill	4%	Unwell/ill	1%
Worried/ Nervous	3%	Worried/nervous	3%	Worried/nervous	2%
		Angry/ Grumpy	3%	Amazed	3%
				Really enjoyed	3%
				Confused/puzzled	2%
				Even better	2%
Other ⁷²	14%	Other	6.5%	Other	8.5%

Table 6. Most Frequently Expressed Emotions

The children will experience a wide range of emotions during the performance that, due to their transient nature, may or may not be recalled post-performance. There is a curious relationship between thinking about an emotion and feeling

⁷¹ The total range of different emotions expressed during the 32 research studies ranged from 6 to 22. AJ-FS15-SaS expressed 22 different emotions, 13 before and 17 after. In AJ-FS04-BPS and AJ-FS16-H1 respectively, the children's range increased by over 100% with 7 different emotions pre-performance and 16 post-performance (BPS), and 8 emotions rising to 16 expressed after (H1).

⁷² **Notes on Other All** – 179 data responses classified as Other, 13 may be classified as negative emotions (5.2%) with each emotion having 22 to 1 mentions. 23 positive emotions were also included as Other (9.1 %) ranging from 21 to 1 mentions.

Before – 32 data responses identified in Other, respondents expressed 5 additional negative emotions (2.8 %) and 6 additional positive emotions (2.6%). In addition, there were 5 responses which would be classified as neutral emotions (1%).

After – 63 responses identified in Other, respondents expressed 8 additional negative emotions otherwise not listed (2.4%); 13 positive emotions (5%) and 5 neutral emotions (1%).

that emotion, due to its malleability and openness to change. As Watt-Smith explains ‘Some emotions ...are harder to grasp... [and] others which are so quiet that they slip past before we’ve even had a chance to spot them ...or there are those which brood on the horizon ... or hurry past’ (2016:2). As the performance becomes an organic, holistic experience, it may also be difficult to distinguish one emotion from another. For some children, certain emotions may also be harder to recall due to a time lapse for break-time following the performance and completion of the questionnaire.

Familiarity with Theatre Alibi performances (Finding 2)

It became important to contextualise the emotional response prior to the performance as more than half of the children expressed feeling ‘excited’ or ‘happy’ pre-performance. Further discussion with the children confirmed this positive mood was as a direct result of the Theatre Alibi visit and having positive memories of previous performances. Prior knowledge of the company can add to the excitement, as illustrated by one Year 6 child speaking after *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* (2016), and another Year 2 child after a later production tour, *Table Mates* (2018), both drawing upon memories of Theatre Alibi performances seen previously:

I am always excited when it’s Theatre Alibi because it’s so good. There are brilliant props, more passion, more expression, they seem to really enjoy it. The body language is brilliant. When my mum said this morning “It’s Theatre Alibi today”, I knew it was going to be a good day (FS-BM109-Wil: 6).

and

On Wednesdays, I usually don’t like coming to school and want to go back home ...because of the lessons I have. But when its Theatre Alibi – yeah – It’s going to be a good day (TM-FS12-Wi1:3).

The children attributed their happiness to the ‘specialness’ of a performance or the difference of curriculum activity which took them away from ‘normal classroom work, which was boring’ (Year 1-AJ-FS18-H3).

Turning fleeting emotions into longer-last moods (Finding 3)

As there was a high percentage of children who reported feeling 'excited' pre-performance and then reported as 'happy' or 'very happy' post-performance this suggests that the fleeting, momentary emotion had been transformed into a longer lasting 'mood'.⁷³ Conversely, not everyone reported feeling positive emotions pre-performance, particularly those children who had not seen a theatre performance before. A small minority, (3%), also expressed feeling 'nervous', 'worried' or 'scared' beforehand due to unfamiliarity and not knowing what to expect. Other children who expressed feeling worried or nervous explained this was not due to the performance. The performance also improved many children's mood if they were feeling angry, grumpy, worried, nervous or lonely prior to the performance. Although my research involves a small data-set, this finding is contradictory to Evans, cited earlier on p.148, suggesting a negative mood is longer lasting and less likely to be changed. This may suggest either the impact of the performance being 55 minutes is long enough to override the previous low mood over time, or the positive impact is stronger leading to the child forgetting the initial negative mood.

Quantitative findings on emotional well-being from the VQ analysis (Finding 4)

My first research question partially sets out to investigate whether it is possible to measure the impact of a one-off performance on children's emotional well-being. Well-being, as previously identified by the ONS, can be seen to have four elements: feeling worthwhile, life satisfaction, levels of anxiety and happiness.⁷⁴ Happiness is only one aspect of well-being and therefore it would be problematic to suggest that improved happiness from a 55-minute performance, as measured by a simple quantitative tool, would bring about long-term improvement in well-being. Whilst associated changes in mood are nevertheless related to well-being this research has focussed on changes in emotional states rather than well-being. Using the VQ to analyse changes in children's emotional states from case-

⁷³ See previous discussion on fleeting emotions and longer-lasting moods pp. 147-148.

⁷⁴ Discussed further on p.149.

study research has proved to be possible, but measuring well-being is beyond the scope of this analysis as it is currently designed. The concept of well-being is far broader than can be captured by a simple quantitative method which provides a momentarily reported emotion following the performance. Whilst qualitative and anecdotal evidence discussed later,⁷⁵ may suggest longer-lasting shifts in mood and other positive impacts, any claims for changes in well-being would be speculative.

Central to my research and the application of the visual questionnaire is the impact of the performance of *Apple John*, and how this affects children. From analysing the same children's emotional responses before and after it was possible to note changes in the children's emotional state, noting whether they reported more positive, negative or neutral emotions (Table 5 pp.156-7). Analysis of the 371 child participants showed, 173 children (47%) reported a more positive response after the performance and 84 children (23%) reported a similar emotional response pre-and post-performance. Many children feeling 'happy' because of Theatre Alibi's visit, discussed previously, accounted for a high proportion of emotions remaining the same. Of the remaining children, 51 (41%) reported a more negative emotional response and 63 children (17%) reported conflicting emotions or an unclear response post-performance, identifying feeling, for example, 'very happy' but also 'very sad'.⁷⁶ Using this method of analysis to identify children's emotional change does provide quantitative data which may be of some statistical use for some school's or arts policy makers wishing to assess before and after impact. However, it is problematic when considering the context of a multi-layered piece of theatre, aimed at engaging children emotionally and therefore, as will be discussed later (p.184), judging a single emotion of 'sadness' as a negative emotion is reductive.

The identification of emotional responses by apple character could be seen as subjective, with one child's expression of 'happy' being a different intensity from another child's. However, I would suggest, particularly with the large number of

⁷⁵ See also p.185, pp.227-8 and p.312.

⁷⁶ See Appendix E.

responses, it is no more subjective than other more traditional quantitative evaluation methods requiring children to identify if they felt Excellent, Good etc.

Drawing from 'captive' participants, this research includes the children who would choose to watch the performance as well as those who, given the choice, would not. Therefore, the overall data provides representative inclusive evidence which would go beyond the sample of most audience surveys focusing on those who choose to attend theatre. It further supports research finding 4 on the performance of *Apple John* having a positive impact of children's emotional well-being.

Of note, when considering individual responses 21 children reported feeling 'ill' or 'unwell' prior to the performance and only seven children still felt ill at the end of the performance, representing a 67% improvement. Conversely, 38% of children reported feeling more 'tired' or 'sleepy' following the performance, which was understandable due to the length of the performance, and the necessity for the children to concentrate intently, having to process and interpret the non-verbal performance. There was a 67% increase in feeling 'sad' at the end of the performance, but this was often accompanied by other more positive emotions. As one child, T reported, 'I liked the play but felt upset' (AJ-FS05-IPS:2), so recognising the negative emotion did not detract from his overall enjoyment of the play.⁷⁹

Responses from different schools and socio-economic groups (Finding 5)

The overall summary of changes in well-being also forms a useful basis to analyse the data comparatively from individual schools which indicate that children from Special Schools and from schools with the highest levels of socio-economic deprivation showed the most positive change in mood. Five schools, of which two were Special Schools (AJ-FS07-BBSS, AJ-FS13-ER),⁸⁰ had a

⁷⁹ See also further discussion on sadness not being necessarily negative on p.183.

⁸⁰ AJ-FS07-BBSS – 100% more positive; AJ-FS13-ER – 88% more positive and 12% same; AJ-FS20-W1 – 67% more positive, 33% same.

significantly higher percentage of children whose mood improved. As *Apple John* was a non-verbal production, it may be expected there would be more positive emotional impact for Special School audiences as they may not be disadvantaged by literacy or hearing difficulties. Two of the three other primary schools with the highest levels of positive mood change (AJ-FS02-WB1, AJ-FS06-HPS), were also schools with the highest levels of socio-economic deprivation, as judged by the percentage of children in receipt of Free School Meals (FSM) and being above the national average for FSM.⁸¹ As my evidence base was from a relatively small sample of 15 schools, it would be inappropriate to draw firm conclusions; however, it may suggest this additional positive impact could be due to children not having as regular access to live theatre or the arts. Moreover, the data from an Independent school with children from more affluent backgrounds who have greater access to the theatre and cultural events, was less positive.⁸² This raises issues for further investigation in subsequent studies. The remaining school that showed most positive change in mood (AJ-FS20-W1), demonstrated a 67% improvement and 33% remaining the same with already high levels of positive mood pre-performance. When drawing conclusions from performances where schools had a significantly lower percentage of children who showed improvement in mood post-performance there is often a correspondingly high percentage of children who are reported high levels of positive mood pre-performance.⁸³

Using the quantitative data gathered from the Visual Questionnaire enabled two forms of analysis:

1. Changes in emotional states from individual children, highlighted above, and

⁸¹AJ-FS02-WB1 (FSM=36%) – 65.4% more positive, 12% decline, 7.7% same and 15.4% unclear; AJ-FS06-HPS (FSM= 36.9%) – 58% more positive, 3.9% decline, 15% same and 23% unclear. Devon primary school average for FSM = 19.1%, National Average for FSM = 24.9%. Retrieved 4 July 2018 from: <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk/schools-by-type?step=default&table=schools®ion=878&laname=devon&geographic=la&for=abspop&basedon=Pupil%20population>.

⁸² AJ-FS11-TMS1- 44% more positive, 28% declined, 11% the same and 17% unclear; AJ-FS11-TMS2- 31% more positive, 23% declined, 23% the same and 23% unclear.

⁸³ AJ-FS17- H2 20% more positive, 0% decline, 60% the same, and 20% unclear; AJ-FS15-SaS 28% more positive, 17% decline, 31% the same and 24% unclear.

2. A comparison of the total emotions expressed, including those children who had only reported after the performance.

Despite there being a significant rise in the number of emotions expressed, when analysing these emotions there was little difference before and after the performance in the use of positive, neutral and negative emotions.

Before n = 492			After n = 745		
Positive Emotion	Neutral Emotion	Negative Emotion	Positive Emotion	Neutral Emotion	Negative Emotion
310	115	67	466	164	115
62.7%	23.5%	13.7%	62.1%	23.3%	14.5%

Table 7. Distribution of Expressed Emotions Before and After *Apple John*

Initially this was unexpected. However, given that *Apple John* dealt with some of life's sad moments it is not surprising that children expressed negative emotions. There is a paradox when considering the value of 'feeling sad' discussed later and recognising 'sadness' would be often be viewed as a negative emotion. *Apple John* is more challenging to understand as a story which may also explain why the percentage of positive emotions is not higher. Conversely, it is also surprising that neutral emotions, such as tired or sleepy, are not higher post-performance due to the intellectual labour required of the children.

The challenge of the unfamiliar

Apple John created additional enjoyment for some audience members, both adults and children, and additional challenge and conflict for others. Due to its universal theme of a life cycle, many staff related to the high-quality storytelling and enjoyed the performance as much as the children. Some adult audience members became emotional at the end of the performance either due to its nostalgic quality of looking back fondly to a different era, or because they were experiencing many of the situations faced by the characters, such as having a new baby, or a child leaving home for the first time.

Conversely, some staff and children, who were familiar with Theatre Alibi's work, were unsettled or disappointed by *Apple John's* different non-verbal form. They felt uncomfortable at not being able to interpret and understand everything and

were challenged by what to expect from the performance. The performance disturbed their basic expectations of the Theatre Alibi style, of spoken text alongside visual and musical storytelling, preferring what they had seen before because it was familiar and safe. As one teacher said, 'Personally, I really found this quite unlikeable. However, I have enjoyed TA in the past in school and at the theatre'(AJ-TAFF-SiS). Interestingly this was not the opinion of some of her class who recognised the change from the usual style, commenting 'The show was very clever with all of the digital and normal props...I thought it was interesting-all of it' and 'I liked the fact they didn't talk but you knew what was going on' (AJ-FS14-SiS, child A and F respectively).

Part Four: Other methods - Quantitative data is 'just the tip of the iceberg'. Exploring what lies below the surface.

The VQ's quantitative style is based on measurable outcomes, which is more conducive to an educational or arts funding organisation data-driven culture, but only communicates part of the experience. It does not provide contextualised information and is limited, requiring one or two-word responses rather than capturing the holistic experience of the child. Whilst capturing emotional responses was important for my research, I also needed to understand the meaning behind the emotions; not only the emotional words the children used but the unspoken thoughts that occurred and the emotional context associated with the selection. Therefore, the VQ, as a single method, although useful and interesting, did not provide comprehensive data to evaluate the learning that had taken place. To increase reliability, to understand how a 'one-off' performance helped children learn, and evaluate the richness of that learning it was important to employ a multi-method approach, including observations, semi-structured interviews and inviting children to draw their response.

As has been discussed in Chapter Three, to triangulate the data, I asked teachers to choose a small sample group of children from a cross-section of abilities, including children with Additional Educational Needs (AEN). This selective research was conducted with 76 field-study children during the *Apple John* tour, who were observed by me and the teacher and participated in further post-performance discussion on their thoughts and feelings. This additional

research enabled provisional conclusions to be drawn between different groups by ability and gender.

Researcher observations of designated children

Observation of the selected children was often problematic. From the side of the school hall, I was often able to see the whole audience, but not always able to have a good view of each of the targeted children without making it obvious I was observing them. As the children entered the room I would record their varying reactions during the performance, moments of heightened engagement, absorption, curiosity and conversely, moments of fidgeting or disengagement. Sections of the performance which the children found amusing, mimicked actions, consciously or unconsciously, and how they appeared to interpret the more abstract parts of the performance were also noted. Emotional engagement was documented providing a comparison with the children's VQ response.

Of 76 children, most reactions were consistent with their VQ response, although the observation provided much richer data for the whole performance rather than synthesising it into one or two emotions. The children who were highly engaged throughout the performance generally recorded positive emotions on their questionnaire; or those who were observed as tired, distracted or disengaged correspondingly recorded feeling 'tired' or 'bored' in their post-performance response. However, observation notes of nine children (12%) conflicted with the child's recorded questionnaire. One lower-ability Year 2 boy who appeared quite distracted, scoring higher than average on the 'fidget chart', reported more positively than expected, recording 'very happy' and 'funny' (AJ-FS10-SVPS-child H). Two further middle-ability children who recorded positively on the questionnaire, seemed to 'give-up' at times, appearing quietly disengaged waiting for the performance to end (AJ-FS10-SVPS-child E, AJ-FS04-BPS-child I). Conversely, with more able children, observation notes would be very positive, recording 'very attentive, watching thoroughly, laughing at spaghetti, appears concerned at John's accident' or 'very engaged/ absorbed' and the child self-reported 'didn't understand' or 'bit bored' (AJ-FS01-SHJ-child M, AJ-FS15-Sa-child L). Observations of the first performances noted a distinct 'gasp' when John

rejected Justine, with four of the five observed children showing a reaction, but only one child mentioned feeling 'sad' in their final response (AJ-FS01-SHJ).

One reason for the above discrepancies may be that because the children experienced so many fleeting emotions it was only those which were significant, or towards the end of the performance that became 'stuck' and were recorded. A further reason may be due to the complexity of observations with very little difference to the onlooker between an 'absorbed' gaze, a 'transfixed' gaze or a 'day-dreaming' gaze. Changes in facial expressions can be subtle, so without insight into what is happening in the child's thought processes it is difficult to be accurate.

A pattern began to emerge amongst some upper-ability children, mainly, but not solely boys, who reported less positively in their questionnaire than their observed response. My conclusion, from further discussion with these children, was that they found their lack of total comprehension of the performance frustrating and a non-typical experience, being used to comprehend more than their peers in usual classroom activities. This response was confirmed from field-study notes after one performance:

Child 1 (Upper-ability): Did you enjoy it?

Child 2 (Lower-ability): (smiling) Yes, it was funny.... Did you?

Child 1: Hmm... not sure... I didn't understand everything.

Child 2: Nor did I, but I don't care. It doesn't bother me. (AJ-FS14-SiS)

Further discussion with the class teacher, confirmed that Child 1 liked to get everything right in the class and was often the first to offer an answer, whilst child 2 'was a lovely lad but often struggles with understanding' (AJ-FS14-SiS).

My conclusion is that many lower ability children 'don't care' or are more accepting if they do not understand everything as this is their regular experience in school, and therefore, they enjoy those aspects they are able to comprehend. In contrast, and suggested in Finding 7, is some of the higher-ability children found understanding *Apple John* a more challenging experience than they were used to and felt uncomfortable and unsettled by this. Researcher observations were useful as a comparison with other methods, predominantly confirming the

children’s self-reporting, but not always. It therefore suggests that reliance on one method can be insufficient in obtaining the whole picture.

Teacher’s Observational Response (Finding 5)

Findings from teacher observations confirmed the experience of watching *Apple John* demonstrated greater concentration, increased engagement and enjoyment and resulted in less fidgeting than would normally be expected of the children. They provided a good correlation with the children’s self-reported response, although, where there was variation the teacher was more positive than the child.

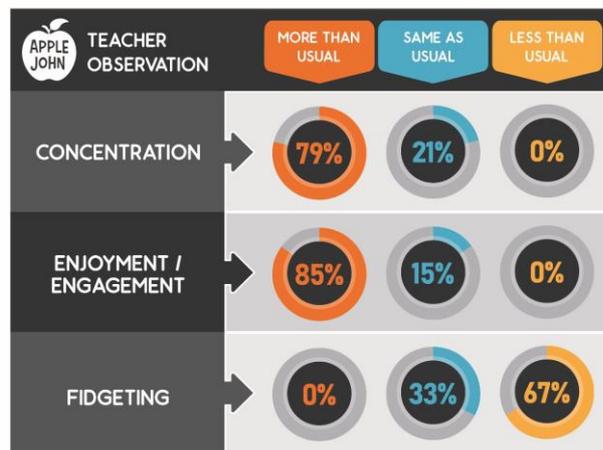


Table 8. Teacher Observation *Apple John* (n=33)

When analysing different ability groups of children, teacher and researcher observations confirm the significant improvement in emotional well-being in children classified as lower-ability or AEN. This may have been due to *Apple John’s* non-verbal style, although paradoxically, the level of demand on children to be able to interpret the semiotics of the performance due to its abstract content, was far greater than a traditional theatre performance. It may also reflect the high value schools place on literacy and textual ability as opposed to social skills and ability to read and understand non-verbal or embodied experiences as demonstrated by children classified as lower ability, a classification reflecting their literary skills.

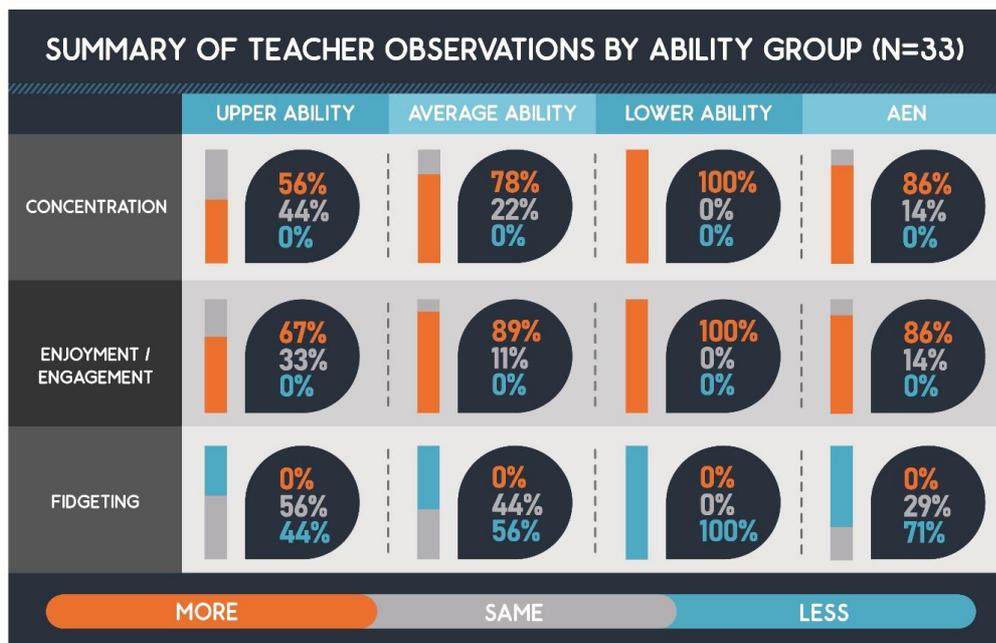


Table 9. Teacher Observations by ability group (n=33)

Many support staff assigned to specific AEN children who were surprised at the higher level of comprehension and enjoyment expressed, commented on their pleasure in seeing the children engaged with and learning from the performance: 'B finds it hard to understand anything with emotions ...he lacks...so much confidence... I was amazed when he put his hand up to ask a question. I almost cried' (AJ-FS13-ER); 'L has never stayed in for the whole performance before. She normally gets upset and must leave. She was fascinated by the actions and loved the music. It was lovely for me to see the whole performance too'(AJ-FS05-IPS) or 'It was great to see M in the performance... She was so involved... and enjoyed it so much with the other children'(AJ-FS16-H1).

How different groups responded (Finding 5, 6 and 7)

I became interested in the patterns within the data which would provide new knowledge on how different sex and ability groups were affected by the performance. In many audience research studies, cited previously (Reinelt et al 2014, Sedgman 2016, Wilkinson 2014), the participants are often adult, female and from highly educated backgrounds. As my research is fully inclusive, drawing from a wider social group, I was interested to investigate whether theatre being enjoyed by females and the most able in the *Critical Mass* study, was

replicated in young audiences, particularly when they had no choice over attendance.

Analysis of the representative 76 observed children showed considerable similarity to the data-set from 371 children. I, therefore, considered this to be fair data group, although I recognised it was significantly smaller and perhaps less reliable.⁸⁴

Bearing in mind the smaller sample group by gender, (40 boys,36 girls), it was notable that more boys reported more positive mood (50% boys,44%girls). Paradoxically, boys also showed the most decline in mood after the performance (15% boys,8% girls). The girls' lower rate of improved mood (44%) can be explained by girls declaring more conflicting emotions such as 'happy' and 'sad' following the performance (unclear 22%) and expressing positive emotions pre-performance. Conversely, many boys reported negative emotions, such as 'angry', pre-performance, due to lunchtime incidents. For many boys, these intense negative emotions were forgotten during the performance resulting in higher improvement in well-being. Therefore, from this limited research, I would conclude the impact on well-being is similar for boys and girls but recognise previous comments on girls' emotional literacy. I would also suggest this may demonstrate that many girls come to the performance with heightened emotional literacy, having the ability and willingness to hold intensely conflicting emotions at the same time, as suggested in Finding 6.

When comparing the responses by ability groups, the cohort consisted of 19 higher-ability, 19 middle-ability, 20 lower-ability children and 10 children with AEN.⁸⁵ Further analysis of groups by gender and ability showed similar findings, with upper-ability boys reporting higher levels of positive mood than girls. Upper-ability girls appeared to have gained no improvement in mood post-performance, however, when interrogating the data further, their positive pre-performance

⁸⁴ For the observed group of 76 children, 47.4% of children's mood was more positive; 11.8% less positive; 23.7% remained the same; and 17.1% was unclear; compared with 47%,14%,23% and 17% from the overall group of 371 children. See Appendix F.

⁸⁵ There was no ability data on 8 children reducing the data-set to 68.

emotions were retained (58.3%). Again, upper-ability boys showed most decline in mood, although this was in line with the overall data. Evidence from the upper-ability students may confirm my previously held opinion from observations, that many higher-ability children found the struggle of interpreting a more abstract performance a challenge, and this may have led to feeling frustrated, less enjoyment and a challenge to their resilience.

For middle-ability children, girls showed more significantly improved mood than boys (69.2%girls,33.3%boys) and a similar variation in declined mood (15.4%girls, 33.3%boys). Based on this data, middle-ability boys did not gain as much from the performance as other groups. Researcher observations of the detachment some boys showed whilst watching the performance would also support the theory that some boys struggled to understand everything which happened and gave up, becoming more distracted (Finding 7). This was not the case with all boys and certainly not true for lower-ability children who seemed to become absorbed by the performance, soaking up the emotion and the action, letting moments of confusion pass over them.

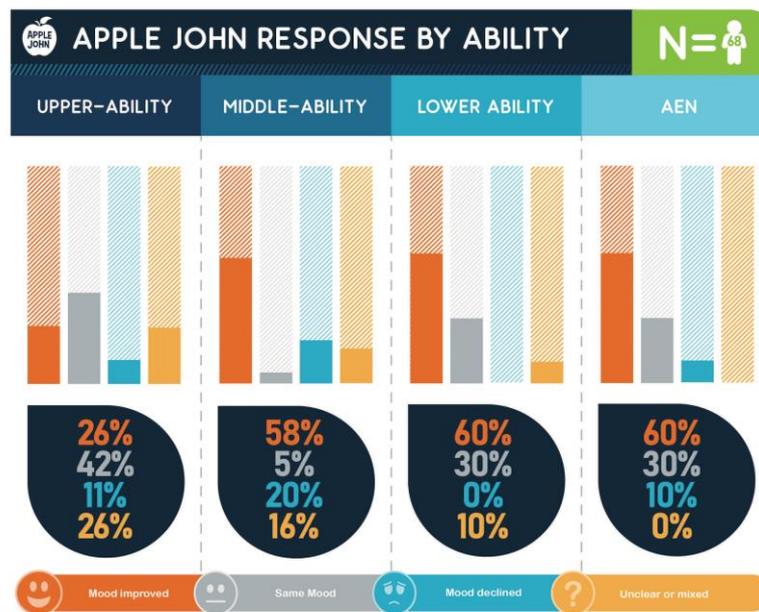


Table 10. *Apple John* comparison by ability groups

The performance clearly had the most positive impact on well-being for lower-ability and AEN children, and less decline than other groups. Triangulation between the children’s self-reporting, teacher and researcher observations all record a similarly positive response (Finding 5). My research findings would also

support Child 2 above, that failure to understand the performance was not a barrier for some children.

I was curious to see if the positive impact of performance with lower-ability children was due to *Apple John's* being more visual and non-verbal in style and so not being disadvantaged by their level of literacy. To evaluate whether the raised impact of this production with lower-ability children is a standardised finding or due to the productions particular performance style, a comparative study with a more language-based production, *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, will be explored later. From field-study evidence of revisiting many classes eight to ten weeks after the performance, I also observed that it was often the lower-ability children who surprised teachers by remembering the performance in considerable detail, beyond expectations. Exploring the longitudinal memory of the performance and what is retained will be explored in Chapter Six.

Responses from the Theatre Alibi Feedback Form (Finding 8 and 9)

The Theatre Alibi Feedback Form for *Apple John* showed:

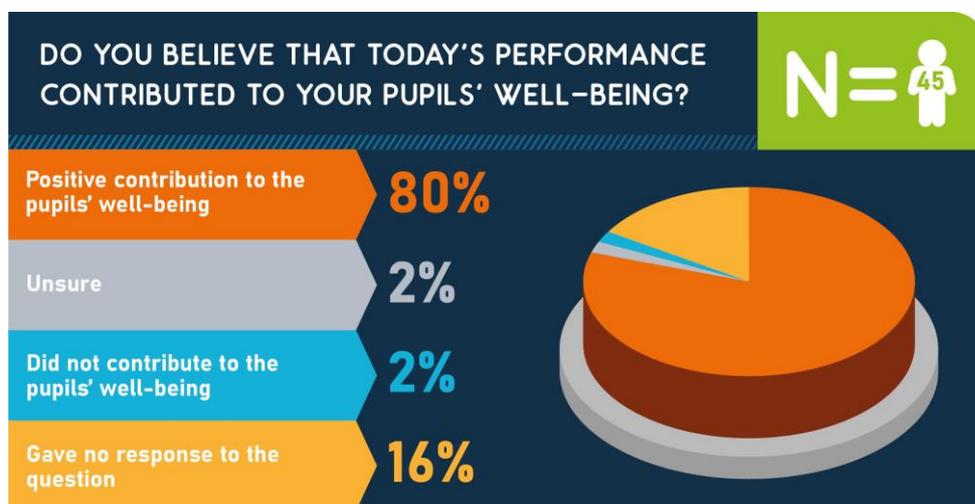


Table 11. Opinion of teachers on the impact of *Apple John* on children's well-being

The teachers' positive response (80%) was significantly above my research findings from the children's self-reported response. However, when including children who pre-reported positive well-being because of the performance, and

those who reported positive and negative emotions after the performance it is in line.

Teachers felt the performance contributed positively to well-being because of: the subject matter, access to a cultural activity, a 'feel good' factor from seeing a live whole school performance, and the contribution to the children's emotional and social development. Several teachers referred to the community response of sharing a positive emotional activity, 'It allowed them [the children] to laugh together and talk together, helping them share and enjoy'(AJ-TAFF-WB), or as one Headteacher commented, the performance 'felt like a step back to a simpler and less frenetic time. It was also very amusing and it's healthy to laugh, especially as we all laughed our socks off!(AJ-TAFF-DoPS). Other teachers mentioned their observations of children's total engagement and facial reactions as evidence of improved well-being and the school having enjoyed a high-quality arts experience. (AJ-TAFF-DuPS/SHI/RSS/KPS).

Teachers also acknowledged the performance offered holistic benefits as it developed the emotional and social development of children by providing 'an opportunity for peaceful reflection to consider life's journey' (AJ-TAFF-WhiPS), or an opportunity to develop empathy by raising awareness of generational understanding and 'everyone being young once' (AJ-TAFF-MoPS/BPS/NoPS/ShbPS/MorPS).

The qualitative aspects of the feedback form provide supplementary evidence from teachers who were not part of my field-study research on the contribution a performance can make in improving children's well-being.

In some schools the emotional content within Theatre Alibi performances is recognised and used to promote emotional development in children. As part of the teacher feedback form, teachers were asked to comment on whether the performance had contributed to developing children's well-being. One teacher highlighted the emotional importance of the whole production and not only the acting: 'The music and the performance gave the children the opportunity to safely explore a range of emotions, and there was a great deal of joy and humour gained through music and visual aspects alike' (AJ-TAFF-NMPS). Experiencing

a range of contrasting emotions during the performance could also help children develop empathy. Whilst watching the performance of *Apple John*, the children are both emotionally engaged, drawn into the world of the play, but also able to remain detached and emotionally 'safe'; employing both their affective and cognitive capacities. This is illustrated by an observation of a seven-year-old child during a moment of tension in the performance when the audience is unsure if John will survive; an anxious child asks a friend 'Is he going to die?', her friend replies, 'No, don't worry, he won't die 'cos you have to have a happy ending' (AJ-FS08-SVPS1). The friend is drawing upon her knowledge and experience of other stories as well as emotionally reassuring her friend.

In the context of theatre performance, I argue, many children learn from the actors' emotional expressions and experiences conveyed within the *Apple John* performance. They may feel the anxiety of Edna, the mother, as she waits for John to recover from illness, or Joyce, the wife, unsure whether John will survive a heart attack, or the despair of Justine, the daughter, when John rejects her before she leaves home. Supporting Finding 9, one teacher wrote that the performance was 'very good for emotions. Reading emotions, as a few of our children struggle with this' (AJ-TAFF-MuPS). During the performance, the children experience the emotion, but at a safe distance and mediated by the actors without having to go through it first-hand.

One conclusion from observing children's emotional response to *Apple John*, is the disconnect between the children and the character of John, following his argument and rejection of Justine as she tries to hug him before she leaves home. At the beginning of the schools' tour there was little compassion portrayed by the actor playing John as he turned his back on Justine. Discussion with the children and analysis of their feelings, whilst they completed the VQ after the performance, showed this event made them feel 'sad' or 'angry' with John. This may suggest that they lost some compassion or sympathy with the character after this point. Therefore, when he had a heart attack many children did not care what happened to him. One child explained 'He got what he deserved' (AJ-FS03-WB2). After reworking in the first two weeks of the tour, the actor playing John refined his reaction, turning to the audience to show he was upset and looking after Justine when she had left. Consequently, the response from the children's

VQ became less negative. Although the children still struggled to hold their concentration due to the length of the performance, the children's responses showed that they were less uninterested. There was correspondingly, less reporting of 'angry' or 'sad' in the children's questionnaire after the first month of the performance due to the actors refining their responses in response to audience reactions and directorial reworking. Analysis of the emotional responses indicating sadness collected in the first three weeks of the tour, showed significant variation from those collected in the remaining nine weeks (from 9.2% to 6.7%). As the actors became more familiar with the production the clarity of the performance also increased. This is evidenced by the 4% of children who reported being 'confused' or 'puzzled' in the initial performances but only 0.5%, in the performances after October. Another marked effect after refining the production, was the reduction in children who reported feeling 'sleepy' or 'tired' which reduced from 35% to 20%. This is surprising as, based on my experience of teaching, children's tiredness increases as the term progresses with them often feeling tired and exhausted by end of term. Therefore, children reporting 15% less tiredness at the middle or end of the term from the beginning is significant and possibly further demonstrates the marked effect of refining the production.

Qualitative findings from talking to children

Talking is a process of meaning-making; for the children, it is a way of exploring why they feel as they do, and for the researcher, together with observations of facial expression, pausing, and vocal tone, it is possible to judge the 'weight' of the emotion and understand its relevance. Talking to children about the performance not only provided richer and greater validity to my research, it also served to help the children further engage and comprehend the performance; providing contextual clarification for both the child and the researcher. On many occasions, what the children said was accompanied by gestures, actions from the performance, as well as facial expressions which encapsulated the emotions expressed. The importance of allowing the children to talk became clear, when conducting a semi-structured interview with a small group of Year 3 children:

Researcher: What did you feel about talking about the show with the teacher after the performance?

Cl(smiling): Talking about the show was good.

Cs (animated): I liked talking about the show. It gave me new ideas and meant I could share my ideas.

T: I liked it. It helped me understand what was going on.

F(smiling): I like the funniest bits of standing on the chair.... [Justine playing with toys – alien and giraffe] (laughing) When we talked about it, it made you laugh again. You relive it again.

D(smiling): I liked it... It reminded you of the performance.

I: I liked the alien and the giraffe... Talking about it... very funny ...I was laughing inside... Made me laugh on the inside again (giggles and others join in) (AJ-FSO2-WB1).

What was apparent from this discussion was how the emotions from the performance were recaptured and re-experienced both individually and collectively when the performance was discussed. The teacher giving time and space in the classroom for discussion allowed for more of a collective experience which was given greater value. Many children in the class discussion had spoken about their enjoyment of the music imitating John's 'air-guitar' or Justine's 'head-banging' whilst they spoke about these sections. One child astutely noticed, much to the surprise of his teacher, the repeated musical motif indicating passing of time, making the pizzicato musical sounds of the violin producing a rising scale, accompanied by mimicking hand gestures, and saying 'That is when the apple tree and John were growing' (AJ-FS25-RSS). An emerging observation throughout field-study discussions was the impact of music on the emotions and the enjoyment immediately following the performance; as one child commented, 'The music made the play sad but also told the story' (AJ-FS25-RSS). However, music then became quickly absorbed into the overall emotion and was not mentioned in subsequent visits.

For some children, the act of reliving the performance physically was as important as talking about it, for example: 'a boy and a tree growing up and getting bigger and bigger' [accompanied by hand gestures used in the performance of rising to show growing] (AJ-FS05-IPS). Talking about what they have seen allowed the children to show feelings collectively,

It was about different feelings, like being kind, loving someone (Giggles... followed by others in the class giggling. Girl's face changes to look neutral) ...showing you were cross with someone (Girl looks sad. The class go silent) (AJ-FS05-IPS).

Being able to share their feelings with others, particularly intense or unfamiliar emotions, seemed important for many children. Talking and reflecting allowed the children to connect the performance with their own lives and experience through association: 'I find it difficult to eat spaghetti too' or more emotionally, 'I was sad when the man was ill, because my mum has been ill' – or 'My grandad had a heart attack' or 'I thought about my sister who left home after a row with my step-dad... I miss her' (AJ-FS08-SVP). Discussion with the children enabled clarification of the level of engagement beyond a one word emotion. L, a boy who had not seen a piece of theatre before, was enthralled and asked me where he could get the book, so he could read it again (AJ-FS06-HPS); M, who expressed 'tired' on his questionnaire, explained that he was tired because it had been so good and 'you have to work hard at understanding things...but that's what made it good...it's happy-tired...not bored-tired' (AJ-FS05-IPS). Many children described the projections and the way they appeared on the 'magic cloth' as enhancing their enjoyment, particularly the briefly displayed image of a seed growing within the apple core. One girl, H, drew the apple after the performance, and told me 'the apple seed growing inside the apple is like the baby growing inside the mother'(AJ-FS05-IPS).

Some children felt the need to be able to process the performance. Discussing what he had seen and sharing the meaning-making process, often to himself, was important for M, a post 16 AEN student with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, from a Special School. He repeatedly kept pausing and revising his understanding and opinion of *Apple John* both during and after the performance, as illustrated in extracts from my field-notes of the visit:

During the performance, M, spoke quietly both to me and to himself. It was clear that he was processing the gestures and movements, needing to process what was happening in the play, repeating comments, such as 'that's a tree', 'the baby is growing', 'there's going to be an accident', 'the man is having a heart attack', 'the tree is dying and needs to be cut down'...M was keen to talk to me about what he had enjoyed. He felt there were no mistakes and that helped his enjoyment. He very much enjoyed the attention to detail... (AJ-FS07-BBSS).

Whether conducted by the researcher or the class teacher, through class and individual discussion, it became apparent that the children enjoyed participating

with greater value becoming attached to performance. I concur with Sedgman, reflecting on Reason's research on the importance of talking to children after a performance, that the importance is not that the children come to the 'right' meaning but that they undergo the process:

The object of the study here is not meaning but the pathways that bring people to those meanings; not 'values' itself, but the manoeuvres by which we navigate our ways to a particular value judgement. Therefore, Reason has argued persuasively that the act of remembering should be understood as an experience in its own right, "connected but different" to our in-the-moment response: because audience research is less about understanding experience per se than it is about understanding how people understand their own experiences (Sedgman 2017:315, referring to Matthew Reason 2010:26 in *Asking the Audience: Audience Research and the Experience of Theatre*).

For some children, the collective responses and navigational manoeuvres within discussion created a new version of the story and a later recreated memory. During discussion with a small group of girls aged seven, one girl offered a theory that eating apples in pregnancy results in well-behaved children. She explained how Edna, John's mother had eaten an apple in the train, and her baby, John, was very well behaved, but Justine had been a 'naughty' baby, who cried loudly because her mother, Joyce, had not eaten an apple. The other girls accepted the theory agreeing it was highly plausible (AJ-FS12-TMS). It was also interesting that the children associated Justine's hyper-activity and exuberance as a 'bad' characteristic in children.

The children who most appreciated the non-verbal style were often children from Special Schools who felt less disadvantaged and privileged. As one child commented, 'It made me feel very special because the performance had been made for us' (AJ-FS13-ER:1). Teachers from Special Schools also commented on how the performance held the children's attention:

The performance kept our children engrossed all the way through. Some of our children find it very difficult to sit still for long periods, so the fact they didn't move is a credit to the performers ... The whole visual nature of the performance showed the children how you don't necessarily need words to tell a story (AJ-TAFF-RSS),

or

Really liked the music and no language. It was much easier for our pupils to enjoy, without having to worry about understanding the verbal language. They all enjoyed the acting and music, even if they didn't understand the story. This was great as it was able to be enjoyed by a far wider audience (AJ-TAFF-MW).

In discussions with children from Special Schools they often gave a more detailed response to questions and showed a higher level of comprehension. This was evident in children from a Deaf Academy where they commented on the nuances of the use of scale and physical interpretation of the train sequences, the growing apple tree and the boy (AJ-FS13-ER:3). They also recalled and enjoyed a momentary sequence of John falling in love and imitated John and Joyce pedaling and eating an ice-cream. The children appreciated the acting, commenting on the excellent facial expressions and movement from both actors to convey the humour and the emotional aspects. One child commented through signing, 'I felt very emotional when the man had a heart-attack and I thought he was going to die... and when the tree was cut down'. Many of the group appreciated the final resolution of the play with 'one cut down and died [the apple tree] and one damaged but lived [John] (AJ-FS13-ER:3). The more detailed understanding may have been due to the older age of the group, being a group of 13-15 year olds; however, a similar finding of greater detail was witnessed in a primary-aged class from another Special School for children with Autism. This group of four children were keen to give their opinions on a range of aspects which included referring to many features which were not usually mentioned including B, offering an alternative interpretation of the ending: 'The apple tree was sprouting at the end showing it didn't die and life goes on ...when he died [John], the tree was chopped down and it broke the emotional attention [tension]' (AJ-FS25-RSS:1). For a different child, S, discussing the multi-roles played by the other actor, she observes the emotional relationship between the father and daughter,

She played lots of parts. She cut the tree, ate the apple, was John's mum and his wife and daughter. She wore a wig and she was a baby. I enjoyed the rock music when she was crazy. The man was sad, disappointed and ashamed of her. She was on the motorbike and he was ashamed (AJ-FS25-RSS:2).

These comments from S demonstrates an ability to read and interpret the non-verbal signs the actors were conveying and verbalise quite nuanced

sophisticated emotions of sadness, disappointment and shame. This is particularly surprising when considering the teacher's comments that the children in the group found it difficult to empathise and recognise emotions. I would propose that the performance, and particularly its non-verbal in style, helped to contribute to this particular group's emotional development. This is further demonstrated when the class were asked directly how the performance made them feel. Their responses were wide ranging and varied from one child saying, 'dead inside' but recognising he also enjoyed the performance. Another child felt, 'so many different things, happy, sad, angry and emotional' (AJ-FS25-RSS:2). The teacher listened with surprise, to the children sharing their feelings and commented positively on their level of emotional vocabulary and high level of engagement during the discussion.

Experiencing a range of often conflicting emotions, was also a common feature of discussion with many children, predominantly but not solely girls, from mainstream schools as well as Special Schools. As two Year 3 girls wrote immediately after the performance:

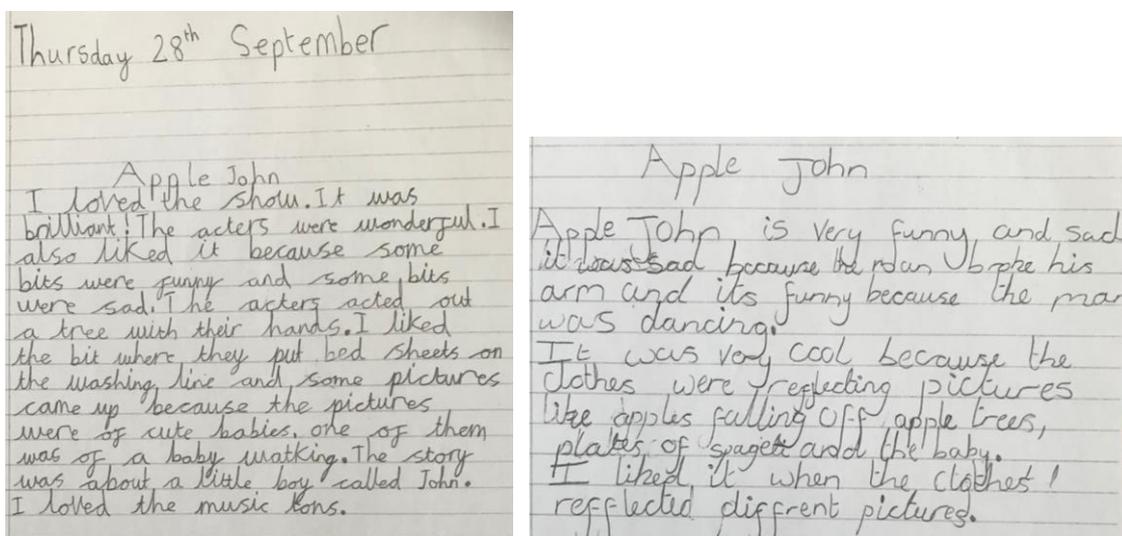


Fig. 17 Response from D and E following *Apple John* (AJ-FS08-SVPS) ⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Transcription of Fig.17: D 'I loved the show. It was brilliant! The actors were wonderful. I also liked it because some bits were funny and some bits were sad. The actors acted out a tree with their hands. I liked the bit where they put bed sheets on the washing line and some picture came up because the pictures were of cute babies, one of them was of a baby walking. The story was about a little

Children often used the emotion they have experienced within the performance to share their own situation. In one school, when a group of girls were talking about John having a heart-attack and feeling sad but then feeling happy when they realised he hadn't died, one child shared with the class how she had felt very worried and sad when her mother had been ill (AJ-FS12-TMS). The performance provided an opportunity for this child to verbalise her feelings in a safe environment of the classroom and share a difficult situation.

Talking to children about the performance to gain further ethnographical depth has been an important aspect of my quali-quantitative research. Whilst the VQ, and observations provided interesting outcomes which can be used as a comparison with other field-study case-studies, it was the individual discussions with children which explored the emotional quality and incidental learning from the performance and support Findings 8 and 9.

Part Five: Comparison between *Apple John* and *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*

In March 2018, Theatre Alibi re-toured the production of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* providing an additional case-study for my research and enabling me to re-examine some of the questions raised by the *Apple John* tour. It provided a useful comparative study on the impact of the 'one-off' performance as a more typical production including speech, multi-characters and puppetry, all of which usually feature within a Theatre Alibi performance.⁸⁷ As this was a much smaller tour, field-study data was drawn from seven different classes from five schools involving 134 children, 24 of which were closely observed, I recognise the data-set is less extensive. Nevertheless, using the same methods as the *Apple John* field-study, it confirmed many of my findings and raised further questions for subsequent case-studies.

boy called John. I loved the music tons.' and E: 'Apple John is very funny and sad. It was sad because the man broke his arm and its funny because the man was dancing. It was very cool because the clothes were reflecting pictures like apples falling off trees, plates of spaghetti (sic) and the baby. I liked it when the clothes reflected different pictures.'

⁸⁷ A brief outline of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* can be found earlier on p.134 and a fuller synopsis on pp.258-260.

The emerging research questions were:

- Would a more typical language-based performance improve or reduce the child’s emotional state?
- Would the positive impact of the performance on different groups including lower-ability and AEN children be confirmed?
- Would the contribution the performance makes to the emotional development of the child continue to be a significant factor?

Emotional Mood comparison

As can be seen below, when analysing data from pre-and post-performances questionnaires the emotional impact of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* was more positive than *Apple John*.

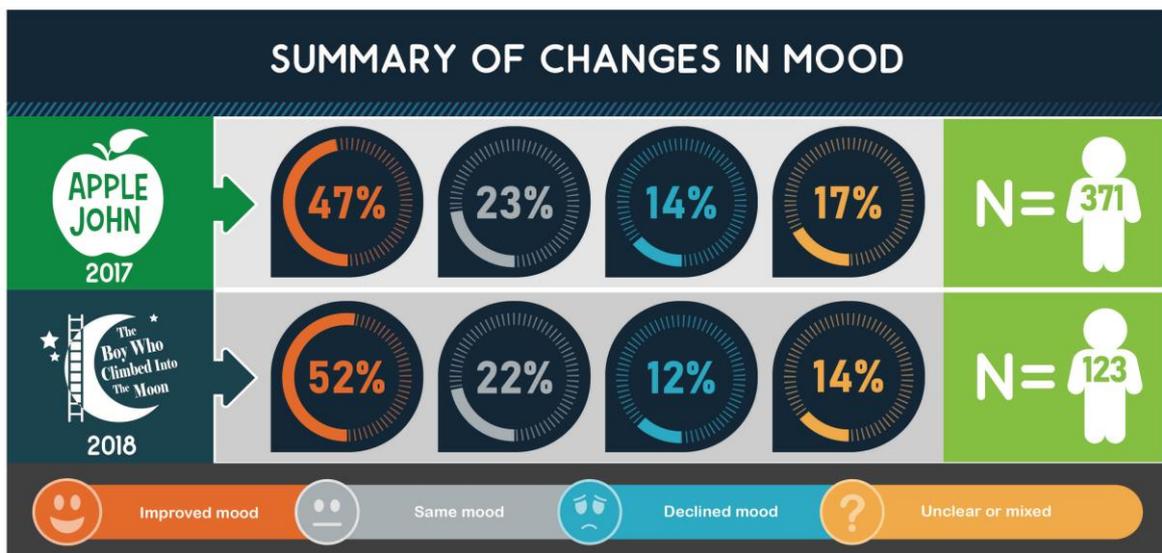


Table 12. Comparison between *Apple John* and *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*

In terms of individuals’ change in mood before and after the performance, I recognise there is little difference, no more than 5%, between the two data sets. However, when analysing the emotions expressed, audience observations of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* confirmed the children experienced high levels of joy and sadness. Encounters with negative emotions, such as ‘sadness’ were not borne out in the post-performance questionnaire responses which were overwhelmingly positive. When considering the emotions expressed by children on their questionnaire, there was a similar pattern to *Apple John* with an

increased emotional vocabulary used to describe their feelings. Unlike *Apple John*, where there was little difference between individual's changes in well-being and overall emotional response based on emotions expressed, discussed earlier pp.160-164, when considering *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* the post-performance emotions expressed were significantly more positive.

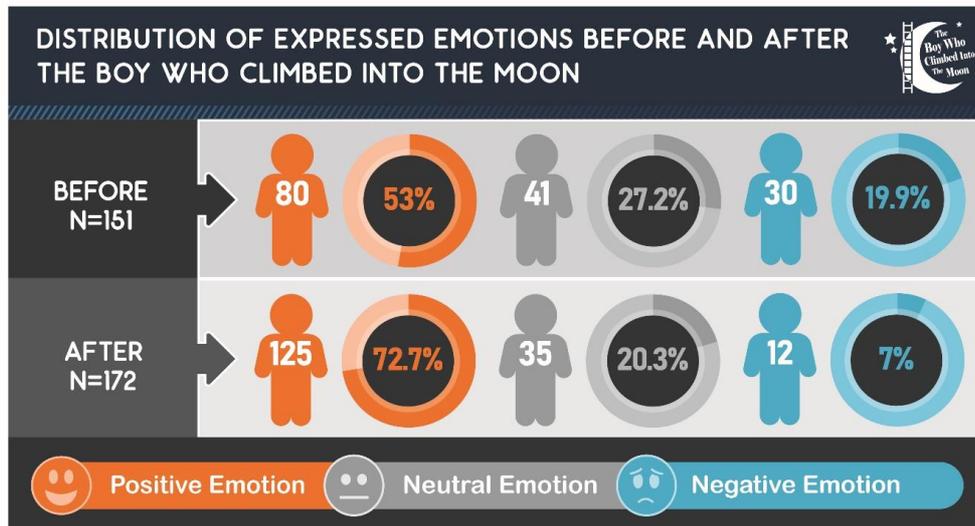


Table 13. Distribution of Expressed Emotions Before and After *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*

When considering reasons why *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* induced more positive emotion, it may be due to it having more of a 'feel good' and humorous ending; the children related to the child characters Paul and Fortuna and their resolved, positive conclusion, whilst in *Apple John*, the plot focused on a life cycle, both the tree and the central character's life ends.

However, judging improvement in well-being based on increased positive emotion such as 'happiness' is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, despite the children expressing longer lasting moods rather than fleeting emotions, discussed earlier, many psychologists may consider the increase in well-being to be momentary. I would agree with this argument in some part. However, as will be shown in Chapter Six, positive emotion generated by the performance can be longer-lasting. Secondly, measuring by positive emotions alone is also problematic, as this may not be the intended objective of the production: good storytelling theatre enables children to encounter many contrasting emotions and experiences, not only positive.

Comparison by groups

Using a similar mixed-ability data-set of observed children it was possible to differentiate the responses by gender and ability. However, the size of the sample group in *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* study was significantly smaller and does not make it as fair a comparison as it could be between the two productions.

I was keen to investigate whether lower-ability and AEN children, who responded more positively than other groups, continued to gain the most from a performance. Within the *Apple John* sample, upper-ability children, particularly girls, showed less improvement than any other group. Unfortunately, as the sample group of girls observed for *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* was small and sub-sets by ability even smaller, it is unreliable to make comparison with responses to *Apple John*. When considering the boys, all ability groups showed considerably more positive emotional response after watching *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* which seems to confirm my understanding that some of the boys negative attitude towards *Apple John* may have been due to it being a non-verbal performance (Finding 7). However, with both *Apple John* and *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* boys recorded more positive mood than girls. This was surprising and unaccountable, requiring further investigation.

When analysing different ability groups irrespective of gender, in the *Apple John* field-study, each ability group was of a similar size. With *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* there was more of an imbalance, with significantly more middle-ability children. It is also worth re-stating that the sample group for *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* was more positive and a smaller sample. However, the data confirms findings from *Apple John* that lower-ability and AEN children also gained more improvement in well-being than any other group. It may also suggest that AEN children were not specifically affected by *Apple John* being non-verbal, and therefore enhanced positivity may be more general to all performances. It is also significant that upper-ability children in the performance of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* also gained significant improvement. More extensive evaluation, and graphical representation by ability group can be seen in Appendix F for both *Apple John* and *The Boy Who Climbed Into The*

Moon although with such a small data set there is considerable margin for error. Research from further case-studies would be necessary to provide more reliable conclusions.

Teacher Observations (Finding 8 and 9)

Ethnographic evidence from individual teachers provided a rich source for further discussion on the value of the performance both to their class and individual members. Research evidence contributing to Finding 8 was provided by one teacher who saw the production as an invaluable means of dealing with difficult emotional issues,

The plot was very thought-provoking and covered some difficult issues that both staff and children face...We have children that find it difficult to come to school and also parent/family members that suffer with depression and it was good to talk about it and acknowledge it through the play (BM-TAFF-CH2).

Not enjoying school and difficulties of attending is typified by the character Paul at the start of the performance and had a strong impact on one child, R who had poor attendance at school due to attachment difficulties and not wanting to leave his mother. On his pre-performance questionnaire, he identified as feeling 'worried'. From observations of R during the performance, he showed a good level of interest when he entered the hall, talking to his friend about the set. However, he became more involved when he saw the puppet and highly engaged when Paul pulled the blanket over his head because of not wanting to go to school. R continued to talk to his friend as he returned to the classroom and recorded 'Happy, I feel good' on his questionnaire. Whilst he was completing his questionnaire, R spoke about how he empathised and identified with Paul, and, as Paul had felt brave at overcoming his fears he would try to overcome his of coming into school. In the semi-structured interview which followed, R said he particularly liked the way one character, Benjamin, felt he could change his mood from 1-10 and he wanted to try that. R then left to attend an Emotional Support session and did not return to the class. However, the Special Educational Needs teacher who ran the session R attended was keen to report to R's teacher that R had talked more openly about his emotions during the session than he had previously (BM-FS03-SMB:2). Unfortunately, I was unable to find out from the

class teacher whether R's attendance had improved over time as he had intended. Nevertheless, this example shows a clear impact on one child's emotional development.

During the *Apple John* field-study, when visiting a Specialist Deaf Academy, one member of staff spoke to me at the end of the performance saying how delighted and moved she was by the reaction of a quiet, shy child she had supported for the last four years, who had felt confident to ask a question in front of the whole school during the post-performance Q&A (AJ-FS13-ER).⁸⁸

Conclusion - More than a good laugh! The value of the one-off performance

When I commenced my research, I expected the 'one-off', 55-minute performance which had little or no follow-up by the teacher, to have minimal worth beyond an aesthetic or cultural event. I thought it would be relatively insignificant in the children's lives and have diminishing impact if the teacher did not develop or use the performance. During the course of my studies of *Apple John* and *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, I have come to realise the importance of performance as a stand-alone activity, which is the predominant experience for most children.

A whole school experience (Finding 10)

One advantage of school-based performances is that the whole community can share the performance from Reception to Year 6, teachers and support staff. For economic and practical reasons, many Headteachers comment that it would not be possible to take everyone to the theatre and therefore the annual Theatre Alibi performance becomes a special event for the whole school community. The emotional impact on a class being able to share in an enjoyable, pleasurable experience with their teacher should also not be under-estimated. Children can experience a range of emotions, whilst also knowing that they are protected

⁸⁸ The case-study evidence on the impact of the performance on this school will be explored in Chapter Six.

because it is 'theatre' rather than 'real life', or as one child explained, 'If it wasn't theatre, it would be sad' (BM-FS02-SIS).

The experience of watching a performance as a school community, including staff, can also have an enhanced impact on introducing whole school developments into the school. During field-studies into *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, two members of staff reported the significant impact in their school following a Theatre Alibi performance in 2013 of *I Believe in Unicorns*. This production, set in a war-torn European country, places emphasis on the importance of books and storytelling to stimulate childrens' imagination and support them when they were experiencing difficulties. Following the performance, the staff took the decision to implement a new school library policy which involved creating a new space and investing in fiction books for the children to read. The librarian, Pam Wood, confirmed how the change became a whole school initiative involving governors, staff, parents and children:

Previously a few non-fiction books were stored in the library but all KS2 fiction books were kept in the individual classrooms. The PTFA [Parent Teacher and Friends Association] raised funds. The children were very supportive of this change and a new system of child librarians was re-established.... A KS2 class had made a large unicorn in class following the performance and this was transferred to the library for several years (Wood 2017:1).

She also confirmed the changes continued to have a long-term effect on the children with the library now expanded and regularly used, with increasing enthusiasm, 'The children are now avid readers, particularly the boys, who had previously been reluctant readers, especially of fiction' (Wood 2017:1). A former Deputy Head at the school also confirmed the impact of the performance leading to, 'revamping the library and putting books back in the library and getting children librarians and all sorts of things... so there was actual change in the school as a result of the performance' (Gower 2016:5). This example demonstrates a clear whole-school benefit and impact on learning from a 'one-off' performance in one school.

My field-study evidence offers distinctive research to other scholars, being school-based and with a diverse range of child participants who would not traditionally participate in audience engagement research. Due to the inclusive

context of a school setting, in my field-study survey and observations, I have incorporated equal data from male and female participants. Other previously cited theatre surveys with adults have predominately female respondents and recognise that theatre audiences are in general female (Reinelt et al 2014:19, Wilkinson 2015:142). Theatre surveys conducted within a traditional theatre venue can represent a narrow socio-economic and demographic group, 'reflecting the values and assumptions of a narrow elite' (Ehrenreich 1990, 1178 in Sedgman 2015:124). Children watching Theatre Alibi performances could be considered as a non-mainstream audience, encompassing everyone in the school, whatever their socio-economic demographic background. Sedgman suggests 'on the whole young people's voices are denied an outlet' (2015:124). This chapter creates a rich inclusive and varied set of data which redresses the imbalance of children's voices not being heard.

In summary, my field-study evidence from two contrasting productions suggests watching a theatre performance has a positive impact on children's emotional development. Most children enjoy seeing live performance which provides broad educational value resulting in children not only using a wider emotional vocabulary post-performance but also a more expansive use of emotions; one emotion is insufficient to capture the performance. The emotional aspects of the performance, performed in a school setting, provide an opportunity for children to experience and understand intense and conflicting emotions in a 'safe' space where teachers or friends are available to help process and further interpret the performance so supporting their emotional development and in some cases resilience. Additionally, children can see and learn from the actor's physical portrayal of a character's emotional journey, so providing a mediated emotional experience which is second hand, protected, but no less intense. The children are willing to 'suspend their disbelief' by empathising with the characters in the situations they are facing believing and feeling it to be real, whilst simultaneously, objectively knowing they are watching a play in their school hall. When considering the responses of different groups of children, field-study evidence suggests lower-ability children, those identified to have additional needs and those children from schools with the highest levels of socio-economic deprivation demonstrated the most positive change in emotional well-being from the performance irrespective of its style and whether it is non-verbal or language

based. Conversely, with an abstract and non-verbal production upper-ability children, particularly boys, reported less positively than with a more verbal performance, which may be due to their frustration and lack of comprehension suggesting their confidence and resilience were challenged. Where the performance was more easily understood and more familiar children from higher-ability groups register much higher levels of well-being.

There is also the sheer enjoyment of seeing a piece of highly quality theatre as a whole school community. One teacher highlighted how the well-being value of the performance was due to it being special and non-instrumental, 'To be given time to enjoy something without having to go back and write about it, is always great in schools' (AJ-TAFF-NMPS). Another Headteacher referred to the importance of creativity in the current education system, 'Increasingly education/ the curriculum is being reduced to reading, writing and maths by the DfE. The performance reminded our pupil's (and staff) about the power to dream and imagine' (BM-TAFF-Br).

Chapter Five – Theatre *with* Education: The Learning Partnership between the child, the teacher and the theatre company

Introduction

Having considered the impact of the ‘one-off’ performance, this chapter explores how teacher intervention, in its various forms, alters, confirms or enriches the learning of children. It addresses the research questions:

- What do children learn from the performance?
- How do teachers intervene and how does this alter the impact on children’s learning?
- How does teacher engagement impact on the performance? Does this enhance or is it to the detriment of the emotional and aesthetic after-life in children? Is it possible for theatre and education to be equal partners when working in the field of Educational Drama?

A summary of findings follows.

Summary of findings on teacher intervention

1. The company offering a Q&A session was engaging for the children, providing opportunity for them to expand their knowledge of performance skills. The performance also provided opportunities to reinforce the school ethos.
2. The use of the resource pack provided by Theatre Alibi offers a high-quality resource which can be an expedient way of reducing teacher workload.
3. Discussion helps the children’s understanding, improves enjoyment and enhanced memory of the performance, resulting in recall of not only plot and characterisation but all production elements and emotional understanding. If teacher-time is limited, this is an efficient and effective intervention to follow-up the performance.

4. Discussion, with additional intervention, also helped children remember with greater depth and recall more details with ease and enjoyment.
5. What children recalled is often shaped by the focus of the work completed. Written work improves depth of recall but narrows what is remembered generally.
6. Teacher intervention helps the children locate and retrieve the memory of the performance more easily. The children also remembered in detail the learning activity they had completed over time.
7. Choice is important to children and improves positivity about the work. The use of a short post-performance response where children were given choice over how they responded to the performance was an effective intervention which brought about strong recall and high enjoyment for a small cost to curriculum time.
8. Children were positive about following up the performance with classwork. This was particularly the case when it was more creative activities, and different from everyday class work. Children enjoyed completing work for up to half a day but as the time taken to complete the work increased (after 2-3 days or weeks) the enjoyment diminished, although children remained generally positive.
9. When teachers chose to follow-up the performance they found the motivation and progress of children was at least maintained and in many cases improved.

One concern, expressed by company members of Theatre Alibi was that a magical experience created by the performance would be turned into an instrumental educational one (MacDonald 2017:10). Many teachers also share this concern, believing the performance should be a 'stand-alone' activity, as an enriching cultural event without specific educational objective. As one Headteacher explained, whilst some teachers 'made some utility out of the performance', the majority chose to 'keep it as a magical cultural experience' (Gower 2016:4-5).

Adult audience members either in discussion like Gower above, or in the comments given in the Theatre Alibi Feedback Form (TAFF) regularly describe Alibi's performance and the affect on the child audience as being 'magical'. For adults, the term is used as short-hand for describing an extra-ordinary event where the children are immersed in the performance. Evelyn O'Malley in her research on outdoor theatre also notes the regular use of the term 'magic' by adult audiences to describe their experience. She argues the term is used to express 'the affective vibrant' impact of a performance (O'Malley 2016:110) rather than the 'traditional, unreflective assumptions that fail to get much further in their attempts to explicate the value of 'liveness' that involve clichés and mystifications like "the magic of live theatre"' which Phillip Auslander criticises (Auslander 1992:2 quoted in O'Malley 2016:110). Although the expression can be used regularly by adults following a Theatre Alibi performance, it is more akin to O'Malley's affective understanding context than a shorthand for 'liveness'. However, the terms 'magic' or 'magical' have not entered the children's emotional lexicon in this usage and are exclusively used by adults. Apart from one Year 6 child using the similar word 'entranced' to describe how she remembered feeling during *Apple John* a year earlier (TM-FS11-K), children only place 'magic/magical' in the context of physical action, using it to describe trickery brought about by sleight of hand or other theatrical devices. For example, in *Apple John* it was the sudden appearance of projected images: in *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* it was a prop pear appearing from nowhere and in *Table Mates* it was the trickery of an actor interacting with the audience prior to the performance, pretending his finger had been chopped off. Although children and adults use the word 'magical' differently, both remember the different magical elements over time whether this is the emotional, nostalgic connection for adults or the curiosity of the magician for children.

When discussing the relationship between Theatre and Education, the theatre performance is likely to create a more emotional connection with the child due to it being 'a magical' and more memorable event than much of the work carried out in the classroom. This opinion is confirmed by Headteachers and theatre practitioners who recognise the value of a theatre company's work as providing a memorable experience which has lasting impact. Headteacher, Jim Wallace, who has been a regular booker of Theatre Alibi performances confirms, 'The

children will remember trips and performances way above an apostrophe' (TM-FS15 CRP:17).

Many headteachers who book Theatre Alibi performances see them as an opportunity to foster creativity and a means to promote a broader curriculum which encourages children to use their imagination. Others book a performance for its cultural value, recognising the children will learn from the experience whether the teachers decide to follow up the performance or not, and acknowledging the difficulty of being able to quantify its value: 'It's hard to try to measure its impact, as it is different to other aspects of the curriculum... Everyone gets something from the performance but it may be different from one person to another' (Budden 2016:1). The performance is recognised as being important particularly for children who would not normally have access to theatre. Headteacher Jonathan Gower encapsulates the contribution Theatre Alibi performances make to the cultural development of the child:

You hope it's a profound enough experience, even if the experience is tricky to track... I think there is something important about gathering a community of teachers and children around a piece of art work of that quality and getting them to consider it for that amount of time for a performance, and in the conversations before and after, that feels like an important thing to be doing, although it is quite hard to say, "It led to this and it led to this" ... Introducing the school community to the best bits of culture. It's the high culture type argument which says it is good for schools, children and teachers to be looking at the best that has been written and the best that is spoken and the best performances and I think we saw that. That doesn't translate into an OFSTED type experience (2016:3,5).

As has been identified previously in Chapter Three, learning is concerned with drawing upon prior knowledge, which may be an issue for younger children watching a Theatre Alibi performance as they may not have acquired sufficient prior knowledge or experience to recognise and understand what is being said. As 'connection and consolidation are the two fundamental levers of learning' (Mccrea 2018:11), the role of the teacher to act as the arbitrator for some of this new experience is crucial. Opportunity for post-performance discussion, whether this is the teacher, or other children will help develop and build connections and consolidate the narrative and children's understanding of the performance. If

children, particularly younger children, are left confused, this may have a lasting positive or negative impact when they encounter theatre performance again:

What we know also influences what we think we can do and so what we end up learning. If we think we can do something, then we are more likely to invest the mental resources required to do it. Our expectancy of success is partly influenced by our past success rate in similar situations (McCrea 2018:11).

Although a Theatre Alibi performance is a shared experience for the class, or the school, it does not mean that all the children will have learnt the same things, but it does provide a collective starting point for the teacher to use as a resource or experience. The teacher's role, irrespective of whether they wish to incorporate the performance into their longer-term lesson plans, may be important to help children mediate the performance.

This research poses the question whether it is possible to create a balanced and equal partnership between 'theatre' and 'education' or whether one partner dominates to the detriment of the other? Or, as Sved identifies, 'that very educational work, might suck the joy out of the show' (2019:1). One research intention of this thesis is to explore whether it is possible to create Theatre *with* Education where there is an equal partnership. Although teachers and members of Theatre Alibi are concerned about further teacher intervention being instrumental and to the detriment of the 'magical' experience, making it appear dull, this chapter will show that this is not the case.

This chapter explores what happens when Theatre Alibi's production of *Table Mates* (2018) is used by teachers for educational purposes. To help navigate the chapter, it is divided into three parts. Part One will investigate the learning partnership between Theatre Alibi and the teacher: exploring the relationship between the company and the school, examining how the company supports learning through a Q&A session following the performance, and analysing the company's Teacher's Resource Pack. Part Two explores the learning partnership between the company and the child drawing upon observations of children and using the Visual Questionnaire (VQ), discussed previously, to assess the emotional impact on the child audience. Part Three focuses on the learning partnership between teacher and child, specifically how teacher intervention impacts on the child's learning. Drawing upon case-study research

from seven different classes from Year 1 to Year 6 during and after the *Table Mates* tour, this chapter explores how teachers use the performance as a tool for learning. It then assesses how teacher intervention impacts on the children, asking 'How does teacher intervention alter, enhance or enrich the learning for children?' Finally, the conclusion returns to the findings offered at the beginning of the chapter and will summarise the learning partnership between child, teacher and theatre company.

***Table Mates* performance outline**

Table Mates focusses on four flatmates coming together to cook and eat their evening meal. The characters, appropriately named Nibbles, Starter, Mains and Pudding each contribute to the evening's menu but also use the taste of food as a stimulus for food memories from their childhood. For Starter, it is the taste of fish which transports him back to his unhappy childhood memories of a boarding school where 'boiled grey fish' dominated the boy's diet, and his sterile family situation where his parents were too busy to collect him for the Christmas holiday, leaving him to consume ever more platefuls of fish. He is 'saved' by the wonderful 'Nanny Sheila' who molly-coddles him and provides him with his favourite 'little biscuits' for his journey home. Main's story which is told through song, dance and physical storytelling, starts with the taste of apple and cheese. She is transported back to the happiness of her French farm and her love of food and dancing before being given the 'privilege' of being accepted into a world class ballet school in London. Main's character adds an element of difference and 'otherness' to the performance. Lapsing into her first language of French, kissing each character as a cultural greeting, she provides an interesting, 'non-British' character for children and teachers to discuss after the performance. Pudding's story, told through song and still and moving images, tells of his life in a large family from the East Midlands, dealing with his father's redundancy and family poverty. Each story is well delivered with a blend of humour and pathos—funny, both thought-provoking and emotional. Although we do not hear Nibbles' back-story, as the musician, she is well integrated into the plot, being offered each course of the meal.

Stylistically, *Table Mates* is an inter-mingling of music, song, images, physical storytelling, slapstick and text, whether it is the surrealism of one actor becoming the representation of a fish head on a plate, or the slapstick sequence of each character tying someone else's apron. Like other Theatre Alibi productions, the storytelling approach requires each actor to present multiple characters, but unlike other children's performances there is a greater sense of 'playfulness', with the actors Joe and Michael interacting with the audience throughout. This adds an improvised quality, making the performance seem very personal to each audience. As the performance focusses on the preparation of food there is a mixture of the theatrical, the imaginary and the real when dealing with the concept of different foods.



Fig. 18 *Table Mates* - Starter, Pudding, Mains and Nibbles

The set is visually striking with pillars of metallic kitchen utensils, precariously positioned one on top of another. On entering the school hall, the audience is intrigued by how the towers of bowls, pans and racks stay upright. Music is principally created by Nibbles, with her double bass, electric viola, violin and a variety of unconventional percussion instruments, which not only create atmosphere but also add tension and emotion. A strong feature of the performance is the sensory nature of food, from the crunchy sounds of breadsticks, the sourness of other tastes, and the exceptional chewiness of some food. Unusual percussion instruments offer visual and musical creativity with large

knives and kitchen tongs being played, or cooling racks scuffled with a palette knife.

The central themes of the plot rotate around the importance of friendship and a diverse group of people coming together to share a meal, as the 'best part of their day'. Emotionally the children explore darker themes of loneliness, loss, leaving home, acceptance of others and a sense of 'home'.

Tension and humour are also built at the end of the performance, where the children feel sad for Pudding's childhood memories and the poverty his family faced. The use of images to support Pudding's story, particularly the addition of an image of the local Co-Op, where Pudding buys ingredients to make his comfort food for the whole family, add connection and recognition for the children.

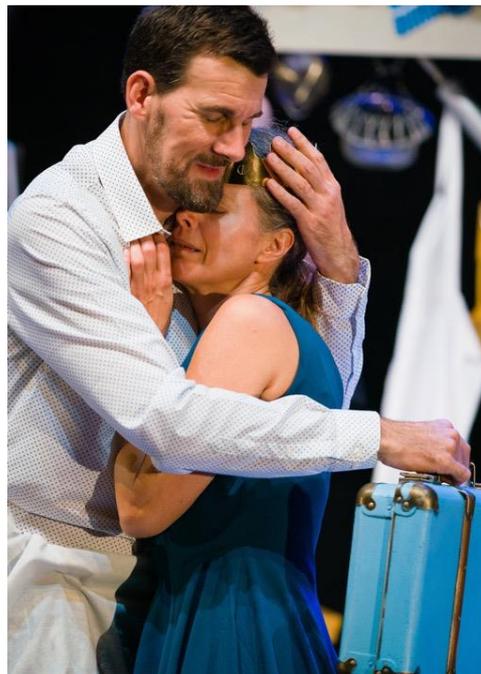


Fig. 19 *Table Mates* – Starter and Mains

There is sadness in each story: Starter having to stay at the school he hates for Christmas as his parents are too busy; Main's home-sickness, emotionally culminating in sleep walking and a loss of appetite, represents a lack of identity and belonging; and Pudding's poverty. However, sadness is not the pre-eminent emotion the children feel at the end of the performance; humour is provided by the farcical sequence of Pudding eating small spoon portions of his pudding

whilst being fed blindfolded, contrasted with Starter, who normally eats miniscule portions, greedily gorging himself on the pudding. As the plot reaches its resolution in the characters' enjoyment of eating, sharing and clearing up together, the performance concludes with further interaction with the audience, in a clowning finale, allowing all tension to be broken, providing a light-hearted but satisfying and enjoyable conclusion.

Part One: The learning partnership between Theatre Alibi and the teacher

The relationship between Theatre Alibi and schools

As the introduction to this thesis suggests, the relationship between a theatre company and the schools in which they perform is complex, requiring professionalism and trust between both partners. Besides negotiating the school timetable, breaks and the use of the school hall, Sved also identifies the clear distinctiveness of the role of the theatre company when working in schools:

There is quite a delicate line to be trod between respecting and understanding the skills and experience of the teaching staff and the ethos and culture of that specific school on one hand, and on the other being really secure in the knowledge that we are bringing in a level of expertise of our own craft (2019:6).

She recognises the actors' confidence and expertise which grows during the tour, and the years of experience the company draws upon which help her feel secure in the knowledge of what works with children in a school context: 'There is a lot that we know, not to mention all of the shows that we will have done prior to that...At its best, you hope it is a marrying of those two areas of expertise' (Sved 2019:6).

From observations of tours of *Table Mates*, *Apple John* and *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, the company is very clear at the start of the performance about 'taking charge' of the children from the moment they enter the school hall, which may conflict with the school's everyday procedures. Theatre Alibi's expectations of the seating arrangements of the children is rigorously followed and based on experience of touring in schools. The company greets the children

at the door and arranges where and how they sit. The youngest children, Reception age, who may have never seen a performance before and are often the most unpredictable audience members, who may run onto the acting area or be more easily unsettled, are always sat behind older children (Year1) who act as role models, showing how an audience should behave. This approach generally works well, but occasionally some teachers are concerned that it is a change to the usual school routine and become reluctant onlookers as the actors take charge in their space.

Schools organise the delivery of the curriculum in a variety of ways, which may include an integrated, immersive and project-led curriculum where subjects are delivered thematically within a cross-curricular project, or discrete subject-led delivery. From my field-study of *Table Mates* three of the 18 schools I visited organised their curriculum thematically, often leaving the choice of projects to pupil consultation. Adopting this more progressive approach to curriculum delivery may influence whether the class decided to follow up the performance depending on whether it relates to the topic being covered at the time of the performance (TM-FS14-GPS:1).

The company is ambivalent as to whether schools follow up the performance in the classroom, as Sved explains, 'There has been a strong sense that the opportunity is there for teachers to follow up on the work, if they so wish, but that the work needs to be able to stand up in its own terms. And that it is a piece of theatre first and foremost' (2019:1).

How does the performance provide educational value and support the wider curriculum?

Many headteachers and senior leaders book a Theatre Alibi performance to support the informal or hidden curriculum,⁸⁹ without explicitly wanting staff to incorporate the performance into the formal curriculum. In the Theatre Alibi Feedback Form (TAFF),⁹⁰ Theatre Alibi asked teachers to identify the curriculum

⁸⁹ See p.122.

⁹⁰ See Appendix C for an example of the Theatre Alibi Feedback Form.

areas to which the performance contributes and how the performance impacts on children's well-being. From analysis of the feedback forms for *Table Mates*, whether the teachers used the educational pack or not, the performance was judged to have strong educational value, particularly social, emotional, cultural and aesthetic significance. The thought-provoking content of the performance prompted further discussion, providing opportunities for children to develop critical thinking skills and creativity by using their imagination. As one teacher commented, 'It provided the children with opportunities to interpret and draw their own conclusions' (TM-TAFF-HNT).

Overwhelmingly, teachers felt children's well-being was enhanced by the themes within the performance, dealing with issues which complemented the school's wider curriculum. Teachers reported seeing the topics of food traditions, eating together with friends and families, healthy eating and exploration of 'family' relationships as being an important aspect of well-being. As one teacher explained, it provided opportunity 'to discuss what is 'family' and how food evokes strong feelings and memories' (TM-TAFF-HNT). Overall 98%, 46 of 47 respondents who provided feedback, thought the performance had contributed positively to the children's well-being.

Teachers also identified many children enjoying a new or rare experience of watching a live theatre performance (TM-TAFF-Str), and recognised the value of children having access to high quality theatre in their school. They saw Theatre Alibi's commitment to creative storytelling, skilful acting, high production values and live music as an opportunity to provide the children with a cultural experience which went beyond 'mere' entertainment. Another teacher summarised *Table Mates* as conveying universal values as it 'really embraced "everyone is different - everyone is special"' (TM-TAFF-Cu). Respondents also commented on how the performance developed the 'whole child' by exploring emotions and helping foster 'life-skills', such as empathy, resilience and nurturing positive relationships. The emotional content also provided an opportunity for teachers to raise difficult discussion topics such as family relationships and loneliness. One teacher commented, 'food is so essential to our existence but can also be a damaging and a difficult topic for some children. The theme was subtly broached, providing a safe space to start healthy discussion' (TM-TAFF-Bo). Teachers also

saw the performance as allowing space, outside of lessons, for children ‘to reflect on things that influence their lives’ (TM-TAFF-Wh).

Supporting and Enriching the Formal Curriculum

Whilst the performance was not designed to meet the needs of the formal curriculum, teachers are asked to identify areas of the primary curriculum, which the performance supported or enriched.

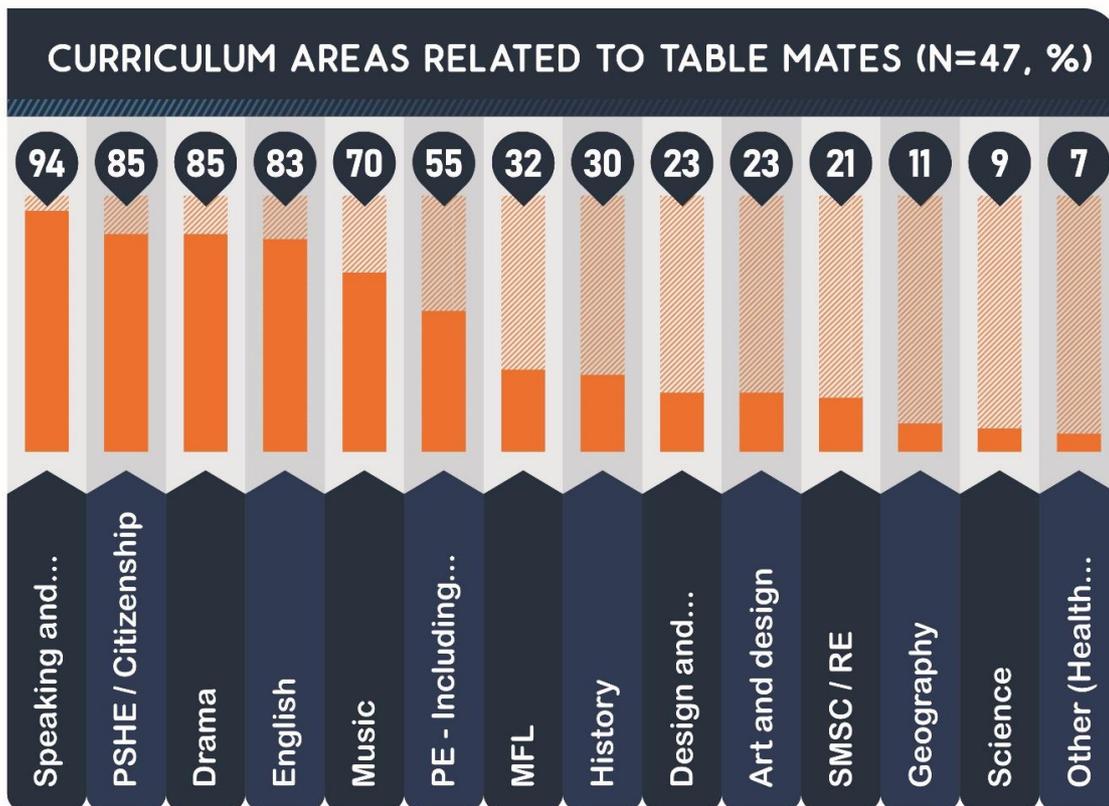


Table 14. Curriculum Areas supported by *Table Mates*⁹¹

As shown above, English including Speaking and Listening, were the most identified curriculum areas. When comparing TAFFs from the previous three years, there has been an increase in the reported importance of literacy elements. This may be due to schools placing more importance on the formal curriculum, particularly literacy, or equally due to the change in style of the Teacher Resource Pack, discussed later in this chapter. Some respondents

⁹¹ Curriculum areas acronyms include Speaking and Listening, PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education), MFL (Modern Foreign Languages), PE (Physical Education including Dance), Design and Technology, SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural), RE (Religious Education).

mentioned the appropriateness of the topic to the children and the work they were studying, commenting on its link to the National Curriculum – ‘lots of resources and inspiration to act-out and write about afterwards’ (TM-TAFF-BI).

Drama also featured highly, with many schools commenting on how the performance related to the development of the children’s performance skills. Dance and MFL were stylistic elements of the *Table Mates* production and therefore it was unsurprising that the performance was identified as contributing to and supporting these areas of the curriculum. Many teachers responded positively to the inclusion of the character Main and her intermittent use of French within the performance. The comments from one teacher encapsulated the show’s impact on both the formal and informal curriculum,

It was lovely to hear a little French in the show. An interesting topic, and a great stimulus for manners, healthy eating, creative writing, drama. Interesting to see how the music was used in the show especially the kitchen equipment being used to create sound(TM-TAFF-H).

Responses to curriculum contribution over the last three years show a considerable change, with respondents increasingly identifying the appropriateness of the performance to educational studies in the classroom. Consequently, there has been greater emphasis on the ‘use’ of the performance for the development of English, Speaking and Listening and PSHE.⁹² The variation in curriculum application in the last three years may also be due to the different storytelling themes lending themselves to differing curriculum opportunities. For *Apple John*, where the plot related to a child and an apple tree’s life cycle, Science and History were identified as being more significant than for *Table Mates*.

⁹² Appendix G provides a fuller comparative analysis of teachers’ comments regarding performances between 2016-2018.

The company educating the audience through the Q&A session (Finding 1)

Following *Table Mates* the actors offered a Q&A session which, based on observations of 20 performances, most schools utilised. When the Q&A was refused, this was due to insufficient time because of lunchtime, the start of the next performance, or the end of the day. The Q&A feature, which provided an informal opportunity for additional learning and partnership appeared more commonly in *Table Mates* than in other school tours over the last three years. The actors were not contracted to conduct a Q&A, 'but this group of people really embraced it and were very good at it' (Sved 2019:5). In many performances, the time for questions was limited to three or four questions before the teacher hurried the children off to break or back to their class. However, in seven of the observed performances, the teachers and company members allowed the questions to flow, allowing 10-15 minutes with nine questions being asked. In most cases the older children (KS2), were selected to ask the questions, which may have been due to the teachers feeling they could 'trust' them to ask 'sensible' questions, or ask questions which were deeper in content.

The Q&A sessions were enthusiastically received by children with far more children wanting to ask questions than time allowed. Questions fell into four broad areas: the connection between the character and the actor's back-story; performance and production skills, particularly the actor's training; how theatrical tricks were performed, including the sudden appearance of apples and images; and the unusual instruments which were played and the musician's expertise. Younger audience members frequently asked whether the stories of the characters were real: 'Did the actor playing Starter hate fish?', 'Was the actor playing Main, French?', 'Were the projected images of Pudding's family really the actor's family?'. The actors were open and responsive to the audience, who were surprised when Joe, the actor playing Pudding, revealed he had five sisters and three brothers.

As the tour progressed, so did the actors' confidence in dealing with the Q&A with Jane and Emma often taking on the role of facilitator or educator when responding to the audience's questions. In several schools, Emma, the musician,

was the centre of questions, with children wanting to know what the instruments were, her training, when she started playing an instrument and how she knew when to come in with the music (TM-FS10-O, TM-FS14-GPS).

Frequently, questions focused on the creative process, and children connecting the performance with their own lives and experience before asking a question, such as 'My dad is French...', 'My sister is an actress...' (TM-FS07-SHJ), or 'I play the violin...' (TM-FS10-O). The children also highlighted a specific aspect, like enjoying the way the actors played multiple roles. This was then followed up and developed by a company member (TM-FS08-HPS). The actors often gave advice in response to questions, aimed at improving the audience's performing skills including mime, learning lines, overcoming nerves, and the process of moving from initial ideas to the first performance. Emma also gave advice on what instruments were better to learn as a child, how the sound of the electric violin was changed by amplification, as well as giving information on the types of percussion instruments used, including the unusual use of kitchen equipment.

The company needed to be skilled and adaptable to the children's requests. The Q&A was unrehearsed, different from school to school and most risky for the actors. In one Special School the children were highly engaged in the Q&A, at times more so than in the performance, asking more personal questions of the actors including their ages and whether Jane, the dancer, had the expertise to perform a 'floss' dance move (TM-FS16-OMSS). Rather than asking questions, suggestions or advice on the set and the visual effects were offered. The company responded sensitively to their audience, demonstrating care and understanding. As no training was provided for these situations, an actor recruited for the schools' tour needs to be highly adaptable. Sved recognises the Q&A is a valuable asset offered to schools but only works if the actors feel comfortable with this role, 'I tend to follow the team when it comes to the Q&A... I'm wary of doing it badly, because you really are letting actors go then. It's quite hard to give guidance on the Q&A, because a bad Q&A is worse than nothing' (2019:5).

The Q&A was a special 'gift' for those children chosen to ask a question. This was apparent when I revisited a school to follow-up the performance where the

first recall of the performance by some children was the question they had asked and its response (TM-FSTI-Wil2:2-3). The performance itself contributed to the school's Informal curriculum but added value was created when the theatre company led the Q&A sessions. In most cases, it was an unexpected treat for the child being asked to address the 'visitor', particularly a visitor who as an actor was viewed by the children as being 'special'. Whilst the children appeared to suspend their disbelief during the performance, they distinguished the actor from the character they had been playing quickly after the performance had finished. This may, in part, be due to the way the actors interacted with the audience before the show, facilitating the actors to mediate between the 'real' and the 'imagined' world for the younger members of the audience and avoid a blending of what was story and what was reality. Meeting and greeting the audience enabled greater objectivity and emotional distance after the performance, helping the children to ask questions developing their skills and understanding rather than commenting on the narrative.

As well as responding to the numerous questions, the company ended the Q&A by inviting the children to write to them sending their comments or asking further questions about the show. By the end of the tour, eleven schools had responded to this suggestion and sent drawings, letters or questions to the company, compared with no more than five schools in previous tours. The actors followed up the responses, often drafting their letters of response in the tour van as they moved between schools. From visiting classes who had sent work, it was clear that this had a positive effect on the children, providing greater relevance to the children's work and generating increased enthusiasm. Field-study evidence from two of the schools will be discussed later in this chapter.

The Q&A sessions were a valuable, but often unrecognised, learning opportunity provided by the company. Led by the actors, they provide a conduit between Theatre and Education and an example of a trans-disciplinary approach. The Q&A also maximised the 'specialness' of the actors as visitors with many of the questions enquiring about their career as actors. It provided an opportunity for further reflection and engagement with the production, particularly if this was the only opportunity the children had, if the teacher decided not to follow up the performance with any further intervention.

Teacher Resource Pack

Another contribution Theatre Alibi makes to children's learning is by providing a digitally accessible Resource Pack for each tour, giving teachers an additional resource to follow up the performance.⁹³ Theatre Alibi introduced a Resource Pack to accompany their primary school tour in 2000. Initially, this was not for fully educational reasons but was developed to respond to a request from the actors who were concerned that their status was diminished by performing in a school and felt an education pack would provide greater legitimacy (MacDonald 2017:10). MacDonald was keen that if the company were to introduce an education pack it should be as creative as the rest of their work:

We don't need a teacher to go through that and bore children to death with word searches and the like ...So, we started creating packs and also very significantly it made it easier for teachers, who weren't headteachers, to justify it (2017:10).

Educational and creative consultant, Dorinda Hulton, was the first compiler of the primary school education resource pack and continued producing it for ten years. Reflecting on its original inception, Sved highlights the creative aims and the pride the company takes in creating the pack then and now:

Dorinda particularly started suggesting things which were a real joy in terms of things that children would and could think about after the show...There is a lot of care put into the pack. I suppose we hope that we provide high production values in every aspect of our work – it's our ethos coming into play on that. We just couldn't bear doing something that wasn't as high quality as we could manage (2019:2).

Since the pack's introduction, the company has employed an educational consultant to work alongside the Artistic Director and the writer to produce a pack of educational resources, crossing all subjects which relate to the production. When discussing the process of creating the education pack, Hulton highlights

⁹³ Appendix R - Teacher Resource Pack for *Table Mates*. Previous education packs can be found on the Theatre Alibi's website-<https://www.theatrealibi.co.uk/productions/past/>

the broad educational themes and emotional content drawn from within the performance's story as a starting point:

I focus on the main themes, and at least a third of those things are to do with emotions, and another third are to do with a related subject, such as Science, Ecology or Art...and then another third might be related to ideas. The things which spring out first and foremost are the emotions' (2017:6-7).

She was keen to ensure that the pack included differentiated learning activities appropriate for KS1 and KS2, recognising the various needs of the wide age range the performance was aimed at.

In Autumn 2018, for the *Table Mates* tour, the resource pack changed in format, with Theatre Alibi commissioning Isabella Mead from The Story Museum to design and create teaching and learning resources for the company. The pack focused less on emotional content, specifying learning outcomes more closely related to schools' formal curriculum and had a strong emphasis on literacy. The pack included activities which could be completed pre-and post-performance for both Key Stages, referring to the national curriculum with specific lesson plans structured to consolidate literacy skills in Spoken Language, Drama, Reading and Writing. Lessons were also supplied to enhance a wide range of curriculum areas - Art, Dance, Design and Technology (Food Technology), Geography, History, Languages, Maths, Music, PSHE and Science, which illustrated the broad content of the play itself. Where appropriate, each lesson plan was accompanied by a vibrant resource sheet which could be 'taken off the peg', re-printed and used with the class.

The resource pack is held in high regard by those teachers who use it, recognising its relevance to the curriculum and appreciating its appropriateness for KS1 and KS2 classes. A more detailed analysis of teachers' use of the material and the impact on the children from case-study visits will be discussed later. However, useful information on the pack may be gained from the company's feedback form.

Analysis of the Teacher Resource Pack's usage (Finding 2)

The newly designed *Table Mates* pack was visually more attractive, extensive and closely aligned to the National Curriculum learning activities than the packs

created prior to 2018. In discussion with teachers who have used the pack, it was praised for its accessibility and style. One Year 5 teacher, who thought the resource pack was very good, felt the Gingerbread House⁹⁴ activity ‘encouraged the children to think more deeply. Many of the children created better work. It was very lucky that it fitted with the work they were doing whereas it might not have done. The lessons seem to have been designed with the National Curriculum in mind’ (TM-FS02-H5). Analysis of the data from those teachers who responded to the question on the usage of the Teacher Resource Pack shows:

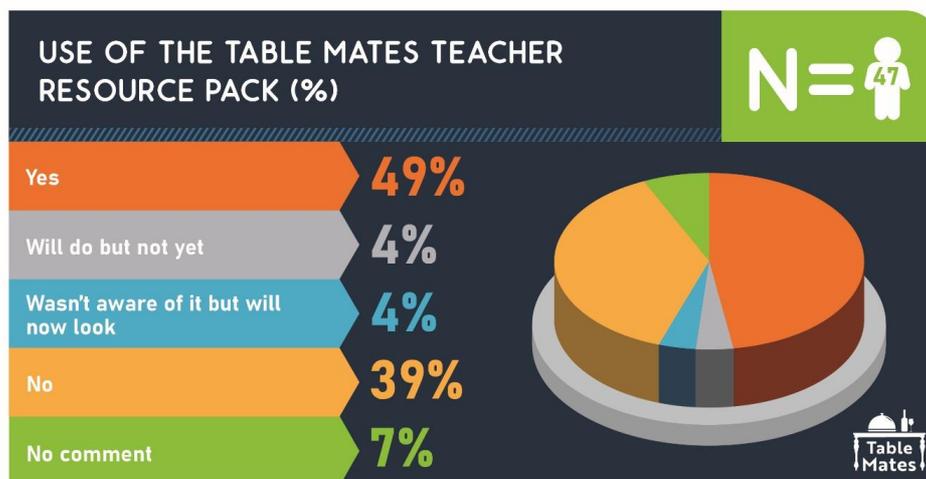


Table 15. Use of the *Table Mates* Education Resource Pack

When comparing the use of the resource pack over the last three years, there was greater use of the *Table Mates* pack than other tours and was the first tour where more respondents used the pack than did not.⁹⁵ The rise in usage may be due to the topics covered in the performance and its emphasis on food, being a universal and everyday theme, due to the change in style of the resource pack or due to schools wanting to use the performance more as an educational resource. This was not clear from analysis of the feedback form, although not having enough curriculum time, emphasis on SATs in Year 6 and positioning of the performance at the end of term were given as the main reasons why teachers did not use the resource pack.

⁹⁴ Appendix R p.29.

⁹⁵ *Apple John* tour (2017) – 36%, *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* (2016)–43%.

Analysing the usage of the resource pack from the feedback form may be limited, giving the views of the person completing the form rather than all teachers from the school. Therefore, this data may not be representative, as inevitably there would be other teachers who may offer different views from those expressed by the member of staff who completed the form. The use of the TAFF can, therefore, only provide a 'snap-shot' of comments and views. Nevertheless, it provides useful information of teachers' opinions and the further educational value of the performance.

Theatre Alibi aims to develop a learning partnership between the children, the teachers and the company. The strength and impact of this partnership depends on how teachers wish to develop the performance, either in providing opportunity for a Q&A or by using the education resource pack. An emerging conclusion from return visits to classes where teachers had chosen to exploit the Q&A session suggested children remembered the performance more readily. However, due to the small sample of schools which were re-visited, this requires further exploration in future studies to be confirmed.

What was clear from this study of *Table Mates* was how some schools exploit the learning provided by the performance extensively throughout their school, as illustrated by the feedback comments from one headteacher, where there was whole school benefit:

Theatre Alibi ensured that, some weeks prior to their performance at our school, our class teachers had a wide range of differentiated activities for the children to take part in. These were focused on 'Table Mates' and were fun, linked to the National Curriculum and provided the children with an insight into the backgrounds and motivations of the characters involved. The show itself was an outstanding opportunity for children in Years 5 and 6 to attend a live theatrical performance, and they were very positive about the experience. Following a class discussion after the show about why it was so successful, the Year 5 and 6 children have each written a letter to Theatre Alibi, sharing their thoughts and personal opinions on Table Mates. In Year 3/4 the children thoroughly enjoyed the performance. It was interesting to see how the children were engaged not only through individual stories but they were exposed to performance through contemporary dance, music and song. This performance also supported children with specific learning and language needs. The performance was accessible for all. The children enjoyed discussing healthy eating and how food is

important within their own traditions and celebrations. Year 1 and 2 children performed acting, singing and dancing for the whole school. All ages engaged. Some parts were interactive. It allowed children to reflect on healthy eating and the rituals and habits that arise from eating certain foods at certain mealtimes. The narrative that ran through the performance gave children the ability to articulate their own memories of food and eating in general. Children enjoyed the live performance and the range of emotions that came from the play (Brinicombe 2018: StD).

In some schools the use of the performance may be limited to its 55-minute duration, whilst in other schools the performance may permeate the whole school, not only in the formal but also the informal and hidden curriculum, as shown by it stimulating further creative and shared activity by Year 1 and 2 children.

Part Two: The learning partnership between the company and the child

Observations of how the performance was received by the children

Observations of 20 performances showed high levels of engagement in every performance. Younger children enjoyed the more visual–slapstick humour and the quirky food noises, made by a bicycle horn and other percussion instruments. There were gasps of awe when Nibbles first played the double bass and gasps of horror from some children when she played the ‘sushi’ knives, accompanying Starter’s mimed delicate slicing of an apple. Many KS1 children would react with a ‘yuk’ of disgust at Main’s entrance when she greeted other characters with a typically French greeting of kisses. The younger children quickly became absorbed in the performance and were keen to engage with the characters by calling out responses such as ‘here we go again’ at the repeat of the apron tying (TM-FS01-Wb, TM-FS02-H, TM-FS04-IPS). They were either unfamiliar with the etiquette of being in an audience or did not care, becoming engrossed in the action or trickery. Many children were surprised when Main started to eat a real cake from within a ‘fake food’ prop, exclaiming ‘She’s actually eating it’ or ‘Is it real?’ (TM-FS08-HPS, TM-FS15-CRP). There was a similar audience reaction towards the end of the performance in Pudding’s story, when they saw the

familiar sign for the Co-Op, children easily related this to their own lives and exclaimed, 'That's the Co-Op, I've one of those' or more personally, 'That's my Co-Op'(TM-FS10-O). The engagement of one Reception child was particularly pronounced, illustrating how she had become completely entangled in the performance, initially offering commentary on the appearance of the double bass, "Wow, that's a big guitar"; 'I love fish' to Starter's reaction at not liking fish and being given an additional spoonful by Mrs Trowler, and was clearly oblivious to the rest of the audience. During Pudding's story, she commented 'Look, that's his milk float'...and reacting to the Co-Op sign, 'I shop there'...and finally to Pudding as a reaction to the image of the boy at the end, 'That's you'(TM-FS14-GPS). What was particularly interesting was not only the way she thought the story was being told just for her but also the sensitivity of the staff who did not try to intervene to stop her causing more disruption to the actors and the rest of the audience.



Fig. 20 *Table Mates* –Tying the aprons

Older children also engaged with other performances, mimicking the sounds or the faces, responding to Starter's exaggerated reaction to eating fish. They appreciated the jeopardy of the bowl throwing sequence at the end of the performance and became sensitively engaged with more emotional aspects of the performance, such as Main's homesickness, Starter being left at school and Pudding's family having to cancel the milk delivery due to lack of money.

The performance catered for all ages, including teachers who enjoyed the nostalgia of Pudding's story, the everyday cooking routines, as well as the word play of hygiene and 'Hi Jean' from Pudding to a member of staff. Children with additional needs, who brought ear protectors into the performance rarely wore them. Observing one performance towards the end of the tour, I became aware of a Year 3/ 4 child who was a 'reluctant watcher' with additional needs. She sat, often rocking herself, to the side of the audience close to a large Christmas tree and her teacher. For the first third of the performance, including the slapstick routines and Main's story, she was turned away from the action, but did not appear to be distressed, only occasionally turning to glimpse the actors. As the performance progressed and Starter's story commenced, she increasingly turned to see what was happening almost in spite of herself. For the final part of the performance and the Q&A she had turned to focus on the action, particularly watching the music, but turned aside when the audience reacted loudly to the interaction with the actors (TM-FS15-CRP).

The actors adapted to the audience, particularly in Special Schools where there was often greater interaction, with the audience joining in vocally and becoming very excitable. In one Special School performance (TM-FS09-BBSS), a child who was fully engaged with the performance firmly told Starter to 'eat it' when he tried to eat an anchovy. In the same performance, a young child, who had been seated in the front row, decided she would like to taste some of Pudding's imaginary pudding herself and quickly ran onto the stage, hastily followed by her carer. There then ensued a Chaplinesque chase around the stage, whilst the actors briefly paused to acknowledge her and then carried on. The teacher who had arranged the performance acknowledged its appropriateness and value:

Table Mates was great for our pupils and students; very visual, lots of movement and 'big' sight gags. As we have a very broad range of cognitive awareness some can follow the words and story while some can enjoy the dance, music and other theatrical elements (TM-TAFF-BBSS).

Throughout the field-study, at the end of every observed performance, the children left delighted, with many children who were regular watchers of Theatre Alibi performances expressing the opinion that it was the most enjoyable performance they had seen.

Emotional response of the children

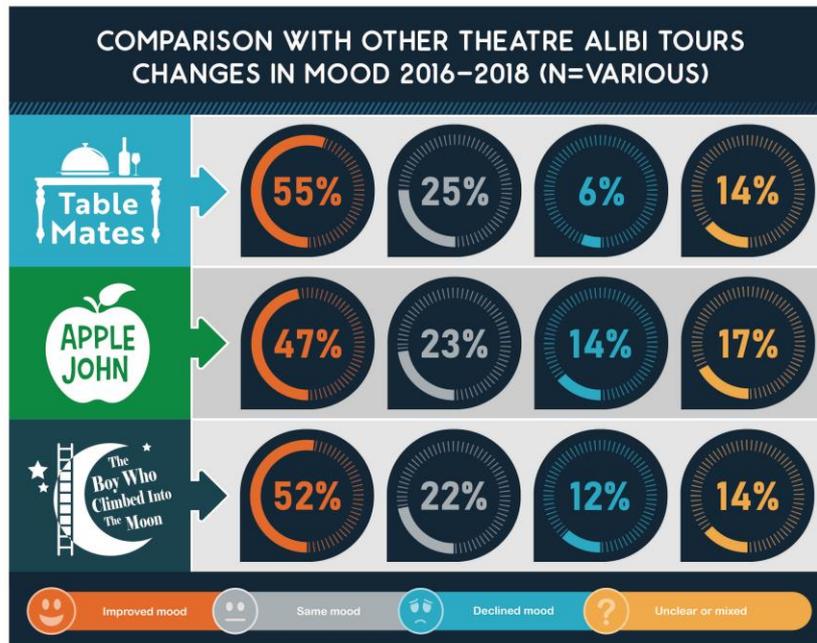


Table 16. Comparison of changes in mood before, after the performances of *Table Mates* (n=231), *Apple John* (n=371) and *The Boy who climbed into the Moon* (n=131).

Using the Visual Questionnaire method, it was possible to assess the positive impact of *Table Mates* on children’s mood and well-being. As the table above shows, when compared to other primary tours, children reported a more positive emotional change following the performance of *Table Mates*. This may be in part due to its ‘feel good’, high energy and more emotionally ‘straightforward’ style in comparison with the emotionally more complex content of other productions.

Further analysis confirmed previous findings from other tours, discussed in the previous chapter, that the children’s emotional vocabulary increased and became more positive post-performance.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ 258 emotions were expressed before and 302 after the performance.



Table 17. Emotions expressed before and after the performance

When analysing the emotions expressed, it was clear there had been a significant rise in positive emotions post-performance, with neutral emotions such as 'tired', 'ill' or 'OK' being converted into more positive emotions. The expression of negative emotions stayed the same, although the choice of negative emotions differed.

Why was *Table Mates* received so well by children?

From post-performance discussion, there was a range of reasons why *Table Mates* was so successful. The children enjoyed the different back-stories of the characters and feeling both 'sad' and 'happy' during the performance. When asked by their Year 5/6 teacher to identify what they enjoyed, one class identified moments which were not humorous but when they felt most engaged:

'At the Boarding school, I didn't think it was right that he had to eat everything'...

'Some of it was really sad, like when the French lady kept leaving her family to go to England'....

'In the play, there was a lot of mixed emotions – one moment you are happy and one moment you are sad'... (TM-FS14-GPS:4).

Another child identified the creativity of the music, 'I liked how they used different instruments at the start when they were eating. You could tell what the food was like. You could tell it was chewy and things like that' (TM-FS14-GPS:4). What was clear from this short discussion was how different audience members liked

different aspects and how Theatre Alibi met those wide-ranging preferences. Entertainment and humour were important, but for older children, it was not enough; they wanted to feel emotionally engaged. This was exemplified by a comment from another Year 6 child from a different school who showed a clear understanding of the difficulty of catering for an audience with a wide-age range:

S: At first I didn't enjoy it. I thought it was a bit slow... *Table Mates*. I felt disappointed... There were so many funny bits... silly, over-exaggerated bits. I do understand that the performance is for a large range of children, and so I thought it was a bit babyish. I realise that the company have to try and include the younger children as well as our age group. But after a while the performance changed and I became really involved... I loved going back over the character's story and I stopped being disappointed. I love it... I am so disappointed that we won't be able to see [Theatre Alibi] next year when we have moved to secondary school (TM-FS11-K:11).

As S perceptively highlighted, Year 3 and 4 children tended to enjoy the more physical aspects of the performance, or as one Year 4 child (I) said, 'I liked today more because it was much more energetic. Last year, it was just actions and I didn't get it. I liked the speaking in French and I liked how the two men were the mother and father and wore aprons' (TM-FS01-WB1). From her viewpoint understanding the narrative was important, but in the case of *Table Mates*, not so important if there were words to help; Main speaking French, for example, was enjoyed even though she did not fully understand what she was saying, as she knew this would be either explained or the French language would not affect her comprehension of the rest of the play as it was in short phrases.

In contrast, a conversation between two Year 1 children who had watched *Table Mates* the day before showed the importance of emotion but this was more personal to them. There was a sporadic approach to the conversation, with the children jumping from one unrelated memory to another:

E: Starter – he didn't like fish. He didn't eat his dinner. He had to stay at school because he didn't eat his dinner....

A: I thought he didn't want to go to school. I thought he was lonely...

E:(laughing): He wanted to have a big spoon and take big mouthfuls... They put the aprons on and it all got tied up –

A: They all pretended to eat. There was some funny instrument noises. ... When I saw the cake, I wanted to eat it... she danced and ate the cake.

E: My favourite bit was when the lady didn't want to go to school because that lady was really crying... but then I knew it was pretend.

E: It made you feel nervous.

A: Made me feel like popping.

E: How did the lady speak Exeter talking...England talking and French talking? (TM-FS13-R2:1-2).

Towards the end of the interview, E, commented on what it was like to be an audience member when others were not as engaged as she was, drawing upon her experience of *Apple John* the previous year, 'I didn't like it when the children weren't listening because they didn't want to listen... in Reception. They thought it was boring because they didn't listen... I didn't think it was boring' (TM-FS13-R2:2).

In the examples above the enjoyment of *Table Mates* was clear; however, the reasons behind the enjoyment were different. This may be due to the age and maturity of the children and would support child development theories which suggest younger children are more concrete and self-focused, relating the performance more to themselves and their developing experience. The older child (S) showed evidence of greater thought, considering more abstract reasons why certain creative decisions were made. *Table Mates* successfully catered for an audience with a wide age range, developing a close relationship between the company's performance and the child. Part Three will explore how this relationship was altered when the teacher intervened with additional intended learning outcomes with different educational aims and provide evidence to support the findings outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

Part Three: Teacher Intervention – The learning partnership between the teacher, the company and the child

Many teachers feel any form of intervention is undesirable, either because they consider conventional curriculum time to be more important, or intervention would be to the detriment of the children's enjoyment of the performance, making the performance too instrumental. One teacher outlined this dilemma, believing it was acceptable to conduct a brief discussion post-performance, but was

uneasy if the performance was to become 'just another lesson' and too utilitarian, 'Not everything needs to be used. It is important that the children have the opportunity of enjoying the performance in itself' (TM-FS02-H5:1).

This section investigates what happens when teachers choose to 'use' the performance, attaching a clear learning purpose; whether this is the intervention of a member of the Senior Leadership Team at the end of the performance associating it with the school's ethos; or the teacher integrating it into the formal curriculum in their classroom. It draws upon seven case-study schools where teachers integrated the performance into their lesson programme, some taking 20 minutes and others doing this over several weeks. A summary table of the case-study classes, including the age of the children, interventions used and research methods is provided on Table 18:219. A fully contextualised exposition of each case-study will be briefly discussed to provide background and identify its distinctiveness and learning purpose, with fuller details being provided for each case-study in Appendix H - N.

Supporting the hidden curriculum by relating the performance to the school's ethos (Finding 1)

Firstly, returning to the interconnectedness between Theatre and Education, what the Headteacher or Senior Leaders say, or do not say, can have an impact on the children who will either see the performance as being separate from learning, or may form a connection with the school's ethos. The message or meaning of the performance can be identified explicitly and carefully selected to re-inforce the values of the school to a collective audience. At College Road Primary School, where the ethos of the school is based on Value-based Education,⁹⁷ the Headteacher carefully linked the school's broader values with the performance:

I think everyone deserves a crown for being such a good audience. This was excellent, the 'stuff of life'- food and friendship. Now, take a crown [he mimes holding a crown] and

⁹⁷ Value-based Education(VbE) is based on the work of Neil and Jane Hawkes, concerned with nurturing well-being in schools to develop 'the whole child'. For further information see <https://www.valuesbasededucation.com>

put it on your heads. [He mimes putting it on his own head and the whole audience, including the staff do the same] (TM-FS15-CRP:3).

Although brief, this intervention was a way of confirming a sense of community, as cognitive scientists suggest, 'Students will be more motivated and successful in academic environments when they believe that they belong and are accepted' (Deans of Impact 2015:7).

The Headteacher at Willand School used the performance to set the tone of how the children should behave during a performance, positioning herself close to the younger children and acting as a positive role model. At the end of the performance she stepped forward to thank the company saying the performance was 'absolutely brilliant with so many little details for you to learn from...how to act with others... and the music. Let's give that a special clap (the audience applaud) ... I always love that over 400 children get to see such a brilliant show each year' (TM-FS12-Wil2:1). She was about to dismiss the audience back to class, when an actor stepped forward and asked if the children would like to ask any questions. Instantly, hands shot up, and the headteacher, rather than adhering to her original intention of dismissing the audience quickly so the canteen staff could get ready for lunch, allowed significant time for the actors to respond to questions. The questions focused on the production, the 'magical' moments, the music, and the life of a touring actor and their career rather than on the plots and characters (TM-FS12-Wil: 2).

Table 18. Summary of Case-studies, methods, teacher intervention and follow-up (overleaf)

SUMMARY OF CASE-STUDIES, METHODS, TEACHER INTERVENTION AND FOLLOW-UP

CASE STUDY	SCHOOL	METHOD				TEACHER INTERVENTION					DURATION OF TEACHER INTERVENTION					RESEARCH FOLLOW-UP				
		VQ BEFORE	VQ AFTER	DISCUSSION	Q METHOD	POST-PERF DISCUSSION	RESOURCE PACK	LITERACY ACTIVITY	FORMAL WRITING	STUDENT-LED MIXED ACTIVITY	LESS THAN 30 MINUTES	1/2 DAY	1 DAY	2-3 DAYS	3-4 WEEKS	2 WEEKS	1 MONTH	2 MONTHS	3 MONTHS	4-6 MONTHS
1	HEATHCOAT YEAR 1 TM-FSTI-HI	■	■	■			LITERACY								■					
2	THE MAYNARDS SCHOOL YEAR 3 TM-FSTI-TMS	■	■	■		PSHE FOCUS					ON DAY								■	
3	ORCHARD MANOR SPECIAL SCHOOL KS2 TM-FSTI-OMSS	■	■	■			DRAMA, SCIENCE, PSHE, LITERACY							■					■	
4	COLLEGE ROAD PRIMARY SCHOOL YEAR 6 TM-FSTI-CRP	■	■	■	■		DRAMA, PSHE							■					■	
5	ST. DAVID'S SCHOOL YEAR 5/6 TM-FSTI-STD			■	■		LITERACY							■					6 MONTHS	
6	KILMINGTON SCHOOL YEAR 3/4 TM-FSTI-K	■	■	■									■						■	
7	WILLAND SCHOOL YEAR 4 TM-FSTI-WII		■	■	■								■						RETURN AFTER 4 MONTHS	

Case-study schools – brief overview

Case-study schools were drawn from across the primary age-range, from different types of schools and locations, including children who would have seen Theatre Alibi performances annually and others for whom *Table Mates* was their first performance. Further information on the background, activities and ethnographic and statistical data from each school is contained within an accompanying appendix for each case-study.

Case-Study One – Year 1 Heathcoat Primary School (Appendix H)

This case-study represents some of the youngest children who make up a Theatre Alibi audience and therefore do not yet have a tradition of watching theatre, although the school is a regular booker. The children come from a large town school with an above average percentage of Pupil Premium (PP) children.⁹⁸ This case-study not only represents a younger audience but also the commitment of the teacher to use discussion as a way of enabling the children to understand and enjoy the performance further. He also utilised the Resource Pack to support literacy and understanding of characterisation.

Case-study Two – Year 3 The Maynard School (Appendix I)

This case-study also focuses on the importance of post-performance discussion in supporting a class of girls from an Independent School to negotiate their conflicting emotional responses following the performance. The children, who may have been more used to seeing theatre in a traditional venue, will have encountered Theatre Alibi performances for the second time with *Apple John* being their first experience.

Case-study Three – KS 2 Orchard Manor Special School (Appendix J)

This case-study illustrates the extended use of the Resource Pack to support a range of curriculum areas with a small class of learners with a high level of additional educational needs, specifically high functioning Autism (ASD). This would have been the second time the children would have seen a Theatre Alibi performance.

⁹⁸ Pupil Premium is a government awarded grant aimed at reducing disadvantage and raising attainment for children who are in receipt of Free School Meals, are Looked After Children or children whose parents are members of the armed forces. A higher percentage of PP is an indicator of higher levels of disadvantage.

Case-study Four – Year 6 College Road Primary School (Appendix K)

College Road Primary school is a mid-scale inner city school with a high percentage of PP. This case-study explores the impact of teacher intervention, focusing on a range of curriculum areas, including literacy, with older children who are regular watchers of Theatre Alibi productions. The case-study offers comparative data with a Year 5 class who had no additional intervention and explores the longitudinal impact of the performance and teacher intervention. It also explores the use of additional research methods employed to capture the children's opinions.

Case-study Five – Year 5/6 St David's Primary School (Appendix L)

This case-study represents older children from a small city school with a high percentage of PP children where *Table Mates* was their first Theatre Alibi performance. The case-study demonstrates how the teacher integrated the performances into the most formal aspects of the literacy curriculum, a formal letter to the company. The longitudinal research offers a comparison with other case-studies through the teacher's choice of intervention and the children's response to writing for a specific audience.

Case-study Six – Year 3 /4 Kilmington Primary School (Appendix M)

This class of children, from a small rural primary school with an average percentage of PP children, demonstrates how a teacher uses post-performance discussion and incorporates the performance into regular informal literacy work. It explores how the children's emotional response to the performance changes because of the teacher's intervention.

Case-study Seven – Year 4 Willand School (Appendix N)

Similar to Case-study Six, the children are regular watchers of Theatre Alibi performances. The children from this large village school with a lower percentage of PP children, demonstrates the longitudinal impact of child-led response to the performance. It also provides a comparison with another class of Year 4 children where there had been no further intervention.

Explanation of the data

To provide an analytical comparison on the impact of teacher intervention on the children I have referred to statistical data, obtained by the VQ method. When interpreting the data, the term 'significant' is used when there is a noticeable variation (at least 10%) between the responses of all children who took part in the *Table Mates* field-study and children from the case-study school or when there is a noticeable variation between responses of the same children over time.

Post-performance Discussion (Findings 3 and 4)

As cognitive scientist Daniel Willingham asserts, 'Memory is the residue of thought' (2010:54), therefore providing time for the children to think, digest and reflect on the performance is important. The teacher's role is to help children make sense of what they have watched, open new areas of exploration, consolidate their learning and support children to monitor and clarify their own thinking. An important role for teachers, following a Theatre Alibi performance where many abstract ideas have been presented in a multi-sensory style, is to provide a framework whereby the overarching themes, new concepts and meaning can be understood by the children. The performance can be used as a means of developing critical, generic skills which can aid further thought, 'As our knowledge becomes deeper and more comprehensive, our capacity for critical thinking, problem solving and creativity within that domain unfolds' (Willingham 2007 in Mccrea 2018:17). A key aspect of Theatre Alibi's performances for such a wide age-range is the way they 'make children think', presenting abstract ideas which encourage critical thinking.

During the *Table Mates* tour, the educational value of the discussion was seen to have two underpinning benefits, either to provide opportunity for developing Speaking and Listening aspects of literacy, or to clarify and make sense of what had been seen. Teacher intervention of any kind, but particularly discussion, has additional importance, as psychologists Hogg and Reid point out, 'Our knowledge of the value of information is constrained by our limited personal experience... As a result, we are sensitive to cues from others about the relative value of information – particularly from people we identify with, trust and respect' (Hogg and Reid 2006 in McCrea 2018:12).

Therefore, the teacher, a person whom the children trust, taking time to focus on post-performance discussion, adds value to the performance itself.

A child needs to make sense of the new information or experience by connecting it to their own prior knowledge or experience to have a lasting impact and understanding to take place. The teacher's role in discussion is to activate the child's understanding through effective open questioning.

Use of discussion to build understanding

Recognising the importance of the teacher in activating understanding, was confirmed by Scott Pitt, a Year 1 teacher from Case-study One, who saw post-performance discussion as an essential part of the children's understanding of the performance, by helping the children to clarify and summarise what they had seen. He approached the open discussion as he would approach a guided reading session to check their understanding:

having an open forum allows the children who are not quite sure of what they have just seen, or not quite sure of certain points, such as "Was she wearing a crown?", "Is she really the Queen?" It gives them that opportunity to rethink and re-structure what they have seen in their minds (Pitt 2018:1).

Unlike other examples, where I observed post-performance discussion, this teacher saw the discussion not as a one-off event but as part of a process, returning to the performance over several days and interweaving it into literacy-based work.

From the initial post-performance discussion, Mr Pitt thought the children had remembered and understood more than he had expected. He was surprised how his young class realised that the performance was based on flashbacks and thought they followed the timeline well, recognising that the use of black and white images implied that it was set in the past.

Following the intervention of discussion and literacy work from the resource pack over the subsequent two days, the teacher was surprised how the children recognised mixed emotions of 'happiness' and 'sadness', which he saw as being 'quite a mature concept, particularly for five year olds' (Pitt 2018:1). The children in discussion had

exceeded his expectation, understanding inferences which were not explicit about the characters' backgrounds and surprising him, 'there were things that I expected them to comment on but actually they were able to comment on more than I would have maybe given them credit for' (Pitt 2018:1).

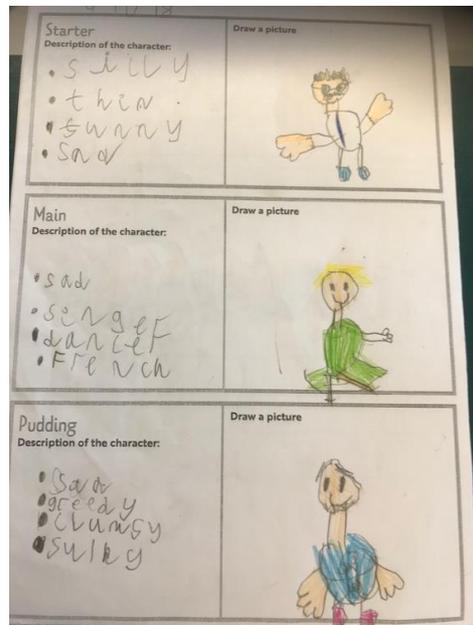


Fig.21 Example of Year 1 work using the Resource Pack – Case-study One.

As Theatre Alibi performances are often non-naturalistic and multi-layered for different ages within the audiences he thought discussion was important to develop younger children's understanding:

if you want them to really value the experience they have had, that they understand it more deeply. It's the same with anything in teaching and learning, a deeper understanding is going to engender a deeper sense of learning. If you really want them to understand and appreciate what they have just watched, then I think there is a responsibility for the adults who accompany the children to the show to engage in some sort of dialogue afterwards (Pitt 2018:5).

What this teacher illustrates is how the discussion helps the child synthesise the performance resulting in a greater depth of learning due to strong connections being made. Over the course of the field-studies, I have witnessed other teachers using discussion, but not as extensively as Scott Pitt.

Use of discussion to promote emotional development

In contrast to Case-study One, where the intention of discussion and the use of the resource pack focused on developing understanding of the characters and plot, the teacher in Case-study Two used post-performance discussion to support the children’s personal, social and emotional development. Despite the children being very engaged during the performance, the class of 12 seven-eight-year-old girls appeared subdued at the start of the post-performance discussion. When using the VQ asking the children to express how they were feeling before and after the performance, there was a significantly less positive response from children from this case-study than the overall field-study.

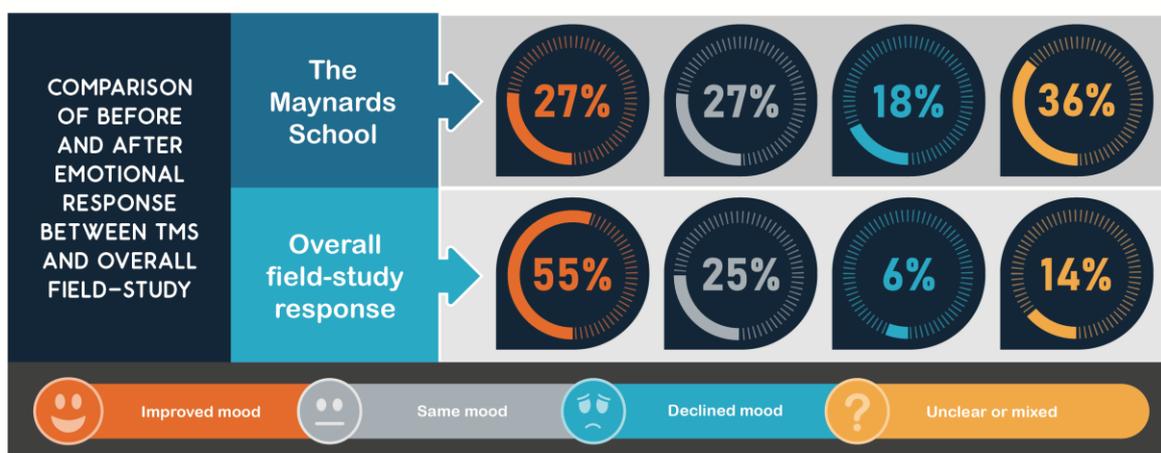


Table 19. Comparison of TMS (n=12) and overall field-study (n=213) of changes in mood before and after the performance of *Table Mates*.

The 30-minute discussion took the form of teacher-led questioning with an emphasis on how the performance made the children feel. There was a strong focus on moments of sadness, such as Main’s homesickness, Starter being sent to boarding school and having to eat food he didn’t like. One child said ‘They didn’t come to collect him. They were too busy. They were talking, sewing and reading the newspaper’, and another ‘When Starter went to school he was forced to eat food...Eating fish five times a week was treating him like a baby’ (TM-FS06-TMS:4).

The teacher then expanded the style of questioning to allow for deeper, critical thinking with one child suggesting Starter’s finicky food habits may be due to him not liking the texture or having an allergy(TM-FS06-TMS:5). The children were keen to participate

throughout the discussion, although some of the children looked visibly sad when discussing the heightened emotion from the performance, and animated when discussing how they enjoyed cooking with family members. Observing the discussion with the children and the teacher, it was clear that this group of girls benefitted from discussing the performance as it helped them to understand and negotiate their negative feelings.

As shown in Table 20 below, using data from the VQ before, post-performance and again after the discussion the children's emotional response was significantly more positive post-discussion.⁹⁹ The teacher's choice to use discussion was important, not only as a lesson focused on developing the children's personal, social and emotional development, but also as a means of increasing the positive attitude towards the performance. The change brought about by the post-performance discussion demonstrated the children felt the emotions from the performance deeply and needed to make sense of their feelings by being able to express and release them fully in the discussion.

The impact of post-performance discussion over time (Finding 5 and 6)

When I returned two months later to interview the children from Case-study Two they remembered more detail per child than other case-study groups. The children quoted some of the lines verbatim, using the vocal intonation from the original performance. Their memories were extensive, covering the character's back-story including minor characters who were not normally mentioned, the food which was cooked, and how the actors portrayed many characters. The music, the character Nibbles and the set featured less in discussion but were evident in the children's drawings of their memories.

The children offered responses confidently and sensitively correcting or building upon other children's responses. When using the VQ to ask how the children remembered feeling after the performance of *Table Mates* and how they felt about being asked to remember, the children responded positively. Rather than remembering how they felt

⁹⁹ For further visual representations of the emotions expressed before and after the performance see Appendix I.

post-performance, the children’s memory had absorbed the more positive post-discussion emotion. The intervention of post-performance discussion, aimed at contributing to the PSHE curriculum, had enhanced and enriched the learning. Although the discussion two months later focused on ‘darker’ and more emotional events from the character’s lives, these did not have a negative emotional impact over time. One child had negotiated her memory to make it more palatable by building upon and adding imagined happier events to the narrative memory by recalling, ‘I liked it when Main lived with her parents and was walking with corn around her and the sun shining throughout’ (TM-FSTI-TMS:2); an event which was not part of the performance.

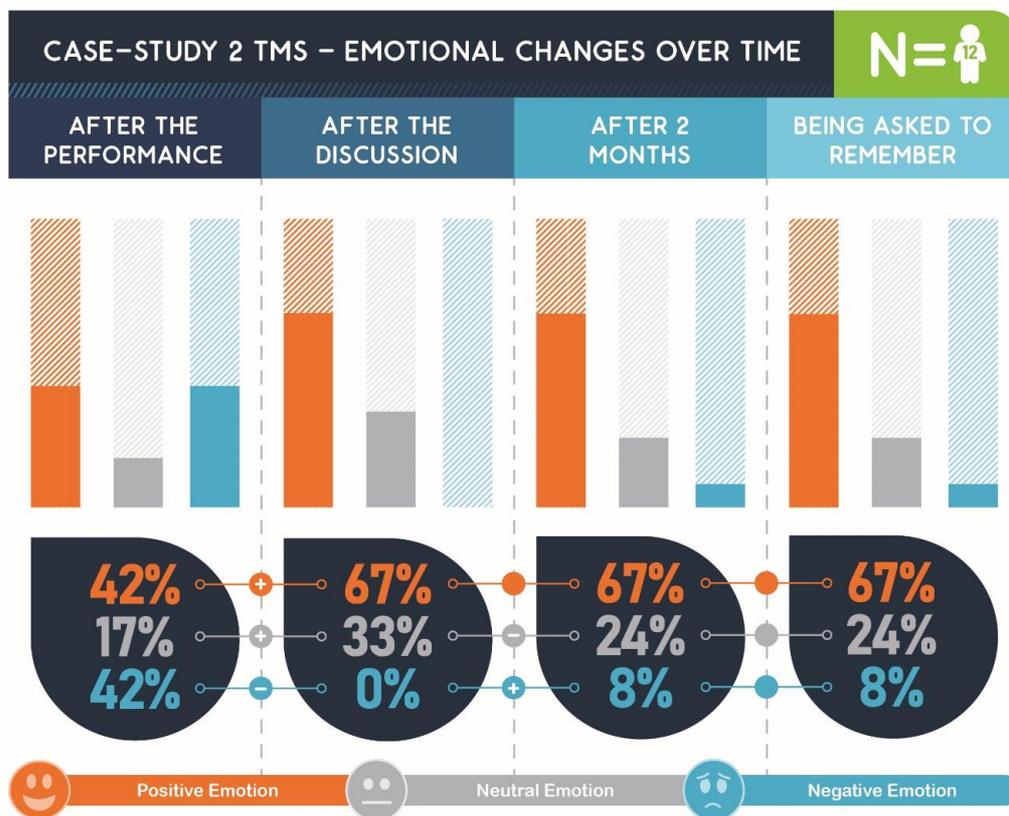


Table 20. Case-study Two Emotional changes over time.

The teacher was surprised how much the children had remembered from two months previously. As well as recalling detail, they said how much they had enjoyed remembering *Table Mates*. This was further supported by the VQ response asking how they felt about being asked to remember, with the children reporting

overwhelmingly positive, as illustrated above, and was the most positive of all case-study schools. This positive response was particularly surprising as the children from this case-study gave the lowest emotional response post-performance of the twenty classes visited throughout the *Table Mates* field-study.

In Case-study One with Year 1 children, when returning after two weeks, there was also stronger recall of the performance after the intervention of discussion and literacy work than on the day of the performance. The children's memories focused on the characters, which may have been influenced by the piece of work they went on to do after the discussion, and consequently, eliminated many more general details from the performance. This would support Finding 5, suggesting additional interventions influence the recall of the performance. The children placed strong emphasis on visual elements and appearance, referring to the character's size, height, such as being 'thin and big', 'fat', 'pretty' and 'she wore a big blue floaty dress' (TM-FSTI-H1:2), which again may have been more easily recalled from their drawings as illustrated p.224 and Appendix H.

Being a younger audience, the children's memories were often connected to their own experiences from childhood, such as Pudding being fed in small spoonfuls, like a baby. One aspect which surprised the teacher was the way the children recognised how the actor who played Pudding also played Nanny Sheila and 'he ran the school'(TM-FSTI-H1:2). Identifying the different characters played by the same actor was a more sophisticated response than the teacher had expected showing a developed understanding of quite complex ideas. I asked the children what they thought they would remember from the performance if I were to return. In response, instead of listing previously discussed ideas, the children mentioned new, emotional, and previously unshared memories such as Pudding's sadness when his mother had to put a note on the doorstep because they could not afford to buy milk (TM-FSTI-H1:3). Although the children may identify with the emotion, such as feeling 'sad' at the end of the performance, it is over time as a result of being able to process the emotions through discussion in a safe environment, which allows the children to negotiate and share the more negative emotions.

Although I did not use the VQ to understand how the children felt about recalling the performance, the children appeared to be relaxed and very happy to remember and share their recollections. There was also broad agreement from the children that they had liked doing the work on the characters, and enjoyed talking about it again.

Other case-study teachers also used post-performance discussion as part of their intervention. In contrast to Case-study One and Two, being asked to recall the performance with Year 3/4 children from Case-study Six who had also used discussion was not as positive. From using the VQ a month after the performance, the emotional memory of the class appeared to be the same as after the performance. Although the overall emotional memory of how they remember feeling after the performance was positive, being asked how they felt about remembering was less positive with 26% of the class expressing a negative response, particularly feeling 'scared' or 'angry about not being able to remember' (TM-FSTI-K:18).¹⁰⁰

In the discussion, the children recalled a wider range of aspects of the performance, including the set, visual comedy, characters, narrative and emotional connection with every child contributing. Like other case-studies, the teacher thought the children had remembered considerable detail after a month, more than anticipated.

The children's response to being asked to draw what they remembered was positive, and in some cases, showed greater detail. One child contributed extra detail and new information from the performance in discussion, having inferred aspects about Starter's parents, saying, 'He was being forced to attend because his parents were horrible. They thought this was not what they had expected in a child so they sent him to boarding school, or perhaps they were too busy' (Child I, TM-FSTI-K:14). The children from this Year 3/4 class where post-performance discussion was used as a springboard for further literacy work, remembered significantly more detail than a Year 5/6 from the same school who had no further intervention after the performance (TM-FSTI-K 18-19). Unlike Case-study One who also completed a literacy exercise, this

¹⁰⁰ VQ response to how they remembered *Table Mates* made them feel-76% positive, 21% neutral, 3% negative (a lower than average negative response); whilst being asked how they felt about remembering-37% positive, 37% neutral, 26% negative was much lower. See Appendix M and Table 25:244 for further information.

class of children had a much broader memory which was not shaped by the work they had completed and showed more examples of inference and further thought. The children being more mature is an obvious reason for this depth, but the Year 3/4 children were not constrained to write about one aspect of the performance, the characters. The follow-up work, focused on 'Likes, Dislikes, Patterns and Puzzles',¹⁰¹ gave the children greater agency over their writing, drawing upon the whole performance. This was not only important when being asked to recall the performance a month later, but was also significant in what the children felt about being asked to incorporate the performance into classwork. The children gave a very positive approval rating to the work, with 80% offering a positive emotional response, 12% neutral and 8% negative responses, which will be explored later.

Conclusions on the impact of post-performance discussion (Findings 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7)

Emerging conclusions from the three case-studies where discussion was a prominent teacher intervention show it enhanced the children's memory of the performance. However, where the children went on to complete further work, such as in Case-study One on characters, this often shaped the children's memory. Where the children had been given a more open task and given choice in their literacy response, as in Case-study Six, the discussion was important in affecting how the children felt about the work and the breadth of what they remembered. In both Case-studies Two and Six where visual questionnaires were employed, the performance was remembered as positively after one or two months as on the day of the performance. It is noteworthy in Case-study Two, the children remembered how they felt following the teacher intervention of post-performance discussion, which was more positive and showed an enhanced emotional response. In this case-study, where there had been no additional intervention, the children were more confident, enjoyed remembering and remembered considerably more detail after two months, than in Case-studies One and Six, where there had been further intervention.

¹⁰¹ See Appendix M for further examples of children's work and pp.241-2.

The use of post-performance discussion which focused specifically on the emotions generated by the performance, as in Case-study Two, provided a useful opportunity to build emotional resilience in the learners. In this case-study where it had been a feature, the children were more confident and willing to discuss the emotional issues from the performance on my return visit. Therefore, I would suggest the discussion helped the children negotiate difficult, negative emotions which were felt deeply and helped build emotional resilience. For these children, discussion in a safe environment helped them recognise the experience and know how to cope with such emotions when asked to remember.

As the teacher in Case-study One identified, the younger children could appreciate more complex ideas, forming a connection between the world of the performance and the child's own life because of the discussion. However, as Case-studies Two and Six illustrate, if teachers want the children to remember the performance more generally, they need to be aware of the impact their intervention may have on narrowing the focus of the memory of the performance over time.

All three case-studies demonstrated that the children enjoyed the teacher intervention of discussion following the performance which is supported by different case-study children considered later when using Q methodology.¹⁰²

Impact of using the Teacher Resource Pack (Finding 2)

The teacher in Case-study Three (Appendix J) extensively used the resource pack as a learning tool, evidenced by a display of written work, art work and photographs displayed on the classroom wall when I visited two months after the performance. The children had used the resources for four weeks, and although the teacher thought they had responded well, some children also responded with their more negative default response of not liking the performance or 'not doing this again'.

¹⁰² Discussed further pp. 248-250.



Fig. 22 Display of Children's work. TM-FSTI-OMSS

The teacher had connected the performance to a range of curriculum subjects, English, Art, Drama, PSHE and Science, using many of the resources within the pack and had differentiated these to meet the needs of her diverse class.¹⁰³ The *Magic Cake* exercise, which she had anticipated the children would find more difficult due to their additional needs, had worked well.

Overall, Case-study Three was more difficult to evaluate due to the diverse responses from the children on my return visit which made the findings inconclusive. Whilst half of the group clearly had enjoyed the performance and the work, other group members shared different views, feeling that the work had gone on too long. However, from further semi-structured discussion with the children when they were speaking about their work, it was clear they felt proud of their extended writing. It was evident that their earlier comments on not enjoying the work was not apparent from the high quality of the work they produced, compared with other work in their books. The children particularly enjoyed the more practical and creative work they completed, such as tasting different foods and using *The Magic Cake* role-play exercise (TM-FSTI-OMSS:3). Due to the high level of additional needs within this group of children and their short concentration span, I did not feel it appropriate to use other research

¹⁰³ Resources used include -Resource 1a, 1c – Tasting Food Blind Folded, Lesson 3 -Food and Identity, Tradition and Customs – 3d Dinner Plate, Drama lesson 4j-Magic Cake.

methods, such as the VQ, arts-based methods or Q methodology, which I had employed in the other case-studies and therefore, any future research may require adapted or alternative methods, including more sensory methods.

The teacher confirmed that the resource pack had been useful in suggesting ideas and the motivation of the students and the quality of the work produced was at least in line, and in many cases significantly higher than expected (Finding 9). Like other case-studies, children also demonstrated a more extended memory of the performance than they had post-performance.

This case-study is important as it offers a teacher's perspective on the resource pack which offers high-quality differentiated resources across the curriculum, for a diverse group of children who are hard to engage in the learning process. For the teacher, the use of the pack was transactional and expedient and a means of reducing work load. The quality of the resources, which conformed to the National Curriculum were of better quality than she could have produced without demanding a considerable amount of time.

In contrast in Case-study Four with Year 6 children, the teacher was more selective over the activities which were used with her class, one before and one after the performance. Although the class were following a thematic curriculum which did not fit with the *Table Mates* theme, the teacher chose to suspend the planned curriculum and devote a day's lessons to the performance, conscientiously using the performance, and particularly the associated resource pack, as a stimulus for learning before and after the performance.

Before the performance, the class had used an adapted starter activity from the Resource Pack which focused on Literacy, PSHE, and Cultural Education, exploring the children's cultural backgrounds and their feelings about food. Participation was high with the children keen to share their home experiences with the rest of the class allowing one child, originally from Iraq, to share his cultural traditions surrounding food.

Despite the Year 6 children being less positive in their emotional response before the performance, the VQ after the performance showed significant improvement with a

rise of 40% in positive emotions expressed. The above average neutral responses of 'tired', 'sleepy' or 'ill' before the performance were transformed into more positive responses which reflected the shift in positivity. There was also no mention of feeling 'sad', other than one child expressing sadness that the show was over and that they wished to see it again because it was so good, which was analysed as being a positive response.

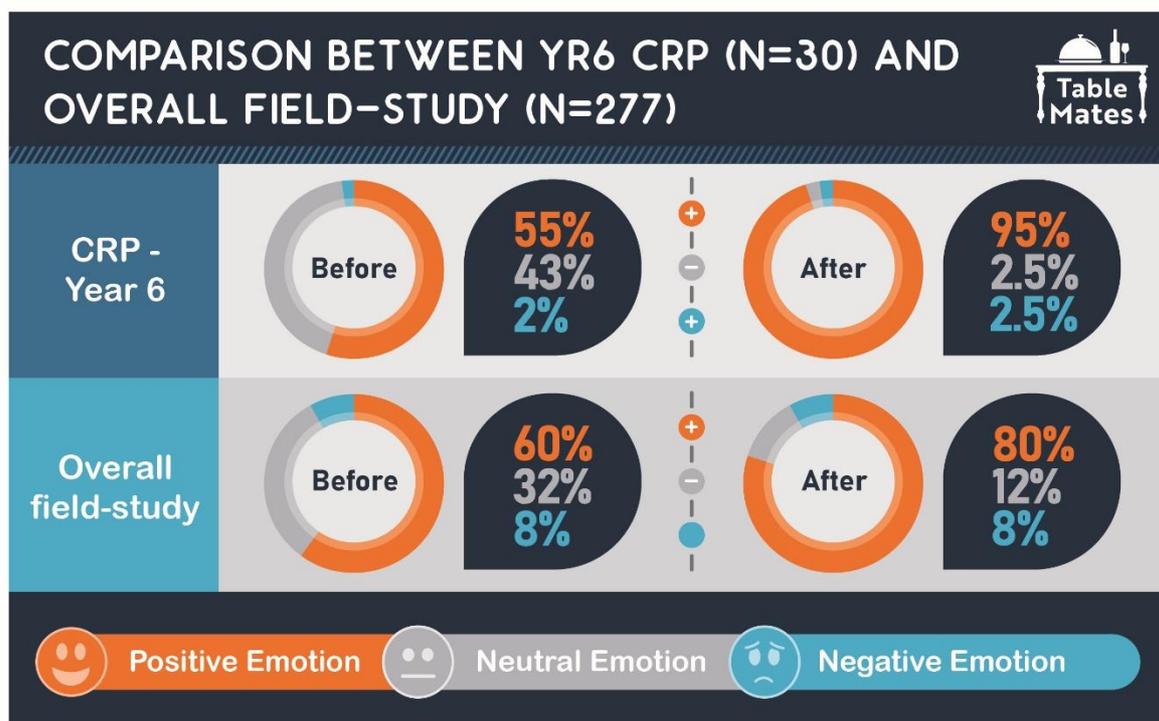


Table 21. Comparison between before and after emotional responses between Year 6 children from Case-study Four and overall data from field-study of *Table Mates*.

The lower negative and mixed responses were unusual when compared with responses in other schools. This may suggest the children in this class did not dwell on negative emotions and had a more positive overall well-being.

Post-performance the teacher used a further resource from the education pack, *The Magic Cake*, also used in Case-study Three above, which had the learning objective of encouraging collaboration, imagination and empathy.¹⁰⁴ The activity supported the school's ethos of focusing on values-based education, and offered opportunity for

¹⁰⁴ Appendix R - Resource 4j p.48.

personal, social and emotional development being centred on creating an imaginary and magical cake which was designed to cheer up one person in the group. The lesson, which provided a creative activity where the children were supporting and listening to each other, was enjoyed by the children who were overheard to say, ‘it was really good to use the play’, ‘brilliant’, ‘fun’ and ‘silly’ (TM-FS15-CRP:7). This positive verbal response to the activity was further evidenced by the VQ responses, which took place after the *Magic Cake* activity, which showed 84% of the children feeling positive about completing work based on the performance (Finding 8).

Although there was a decline in the positive emotions expressed, it was above the ‘before’ response and above the overall field-study ‘after’ response. It could be argued, therefore, if increased positivity was the key criteria on measuring well-being, that the activity brought about enhanced well-being from the original ‘before’ assessment and ‘class-work’ based on the performance. When asked to give their opinions, the children were overwhelmingly positive and used a significantly wider differentiated emotional vocabulary from the other two assessments. It is also noteworthy that some children had not used emotions to express how they were feeling but values or qualities such as ‘kindness, friendship, working together, enthusiasm’ etc., which had been explored in the post-performance work.

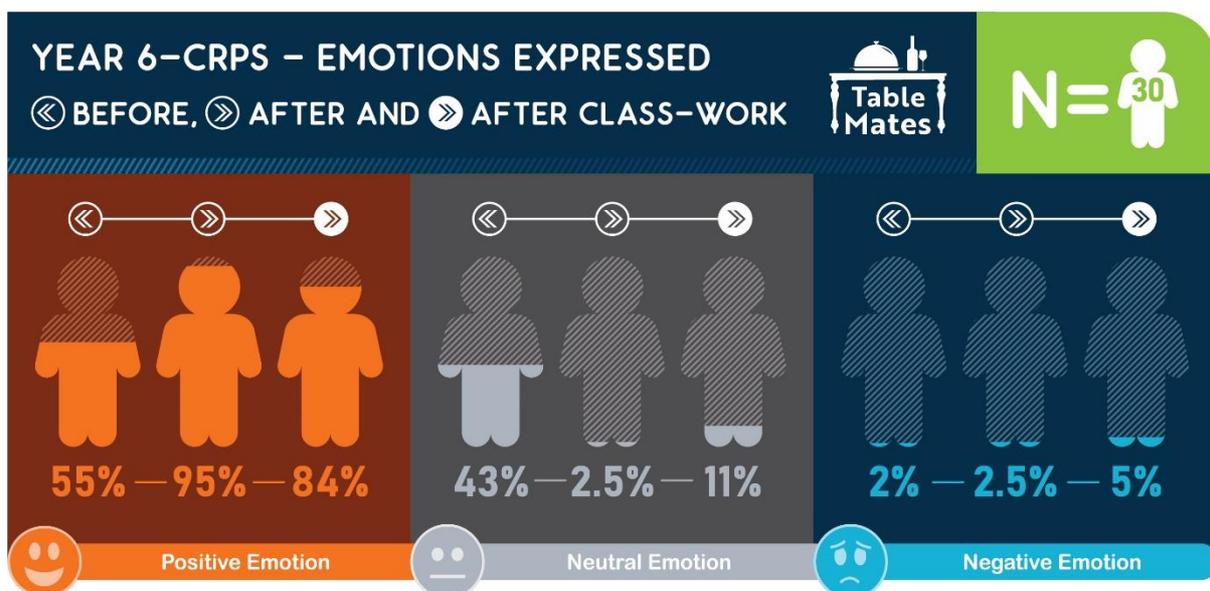


Table 22. Comparison between emotions expressed before, after and after class-work. (TM-FS15-CRP)

When returning to the class three months after the performance the children mentioned in detail the characters and narrative memories. There was also reference to the set, music and projection which may have been influenced by the children also writing a persuasive review of the performance, shaping the children's recall (Finding 5). When recalling the music and Nibbles, they offered perceptive comments:

'Nibbles did the music but she took part in some acting. Whenever they ate the food they made a weird sound.'...

'Nibbles provided the music. She played an electric violin.'...

'The music was faster when they were making the food and slower when they were telling the characters' stories.'... (TM-FSTI-CRP:3).

The child's observation on the pace of the music during moments of making the food and the characters' backstories was surprising both in terms of memory and understanding of the musical quality. The cooking sequences did have a lighter tone, a more up-beat rhythm and the music during the stories, particularly Starter's and Main's tended to have a slower, more emotional quality.

Teachers and children from the three Case-studies (One, Three and Four) where the resource pack was employed considered it to have a positive impact. Both classes who used the *Magic Cake* activity remembered it well and saw it as enhancing usual lessons (Appendix J and K). The younger children from Case-study One also enjoyed the literacy and drawing activity from the pack although this tended to shape their longitudinal memory.

Teacher Intervention focussing on Literacy (Finding 8 and 9)

The teacher in Case-study Four used contrasting interventions, creative work highlighted above, and more formal English, writing a persuasive review of the performance. Using the VQ after three months, the children's opinion on the work was still positive although there had been a 22% significant shift from positive to neutral responses.

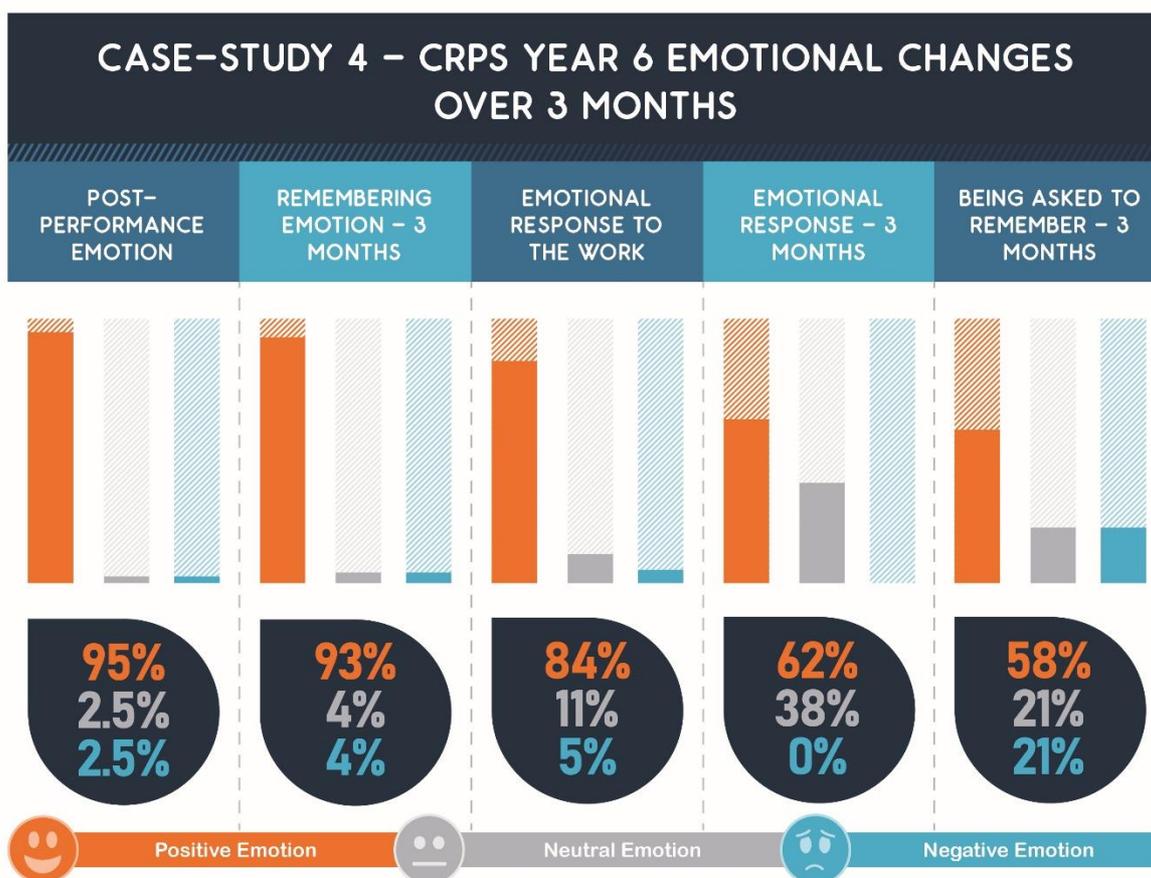


Table 23. Comparison with emotional response on the performance, the work and remembering over time.

This may have been due to the children not being able to remember the work as easily, or due to the positivity of creative work being more ethereal and shorter lived, although the children remembered the *Magic Cake* activity in considerable detail. It may also be due to the original survey taking place after the *Magic Cake* activity, before the written activity, however the children commented on all class-work after three months. There were no negative emotions about the work after three months, whereas 5% of the class had not enjoyed the work originally. This could be accounted for by the children remembering more positively or due to the two children who felt more negatively not being present three months later. Overall the children were still positive about the work and very positive about the performance showing teacher intervention did not impact negatively on the memory of performance.

After three months, many children reported enhanced emotions, ‘super happy’ at being asked to remember the performance and activities which they had clearly

enjoyed, feeling 'proud' for having remembered so much. Others reported feeling 'worried', 'unsure' or 'confused' about not being able to remember (TM-FSTI-CRP:6). For most children in this case-study the act of remembering was substantially more positive than other case-studies and a Year 5 class from the same school who had no intervention following the performance where only 14% felt positive emotions about remembering.¹⁰⁵ When asked to recall the performance, the Year 6 children where there had been intervention were significantly more positive about the performance, gave more detail and were more accurate in their recall and more confident about being asked to remember.

Case-study Four was a successful example of how Theatre *with* Education can work together to the mutual benefit of education and theatre. The teacher was delighted with the progress the children had made, considering the written work produced to be in line and in many cases better than the usual classwork in the time provided. She also confirmed that the children's motivation and engagement throughout the day had been very positive from all abilities. She had been surprised by the students' verbal and VQ feedback on how positive they had felt about the work (TM-FS15-CRP:9) examples of which can be seen in Appendix K.

Formal Letter writing

In Case-study Five, the teacher chose to align the performance with the NC English requirement of children being able to write a formal letter for a specific audience, and was therefore the most prescribed of all the case-studies. Unlike Case-study Four, above, the letter was sent to the company, which provided an additional motivation for the children, giving the work a specific purpose and relevance. Many children spoke about how this made them feel excited but also anxious as to how their letter would be received, whether it was good enough, and curious about the response. The children not only spoke about being proud of their work, which was on display in the school hall when I visited six months after the performance, but also making the

¹⁰⁵ For further graphical comparison on the emotional memory of the performance between the Year 5 (no intervention) and Year 6 (intervention) see Appendix K.

company proud of their performance when they read the letters. Writing for a real and specific audience was important for the children.¹⁰⁶

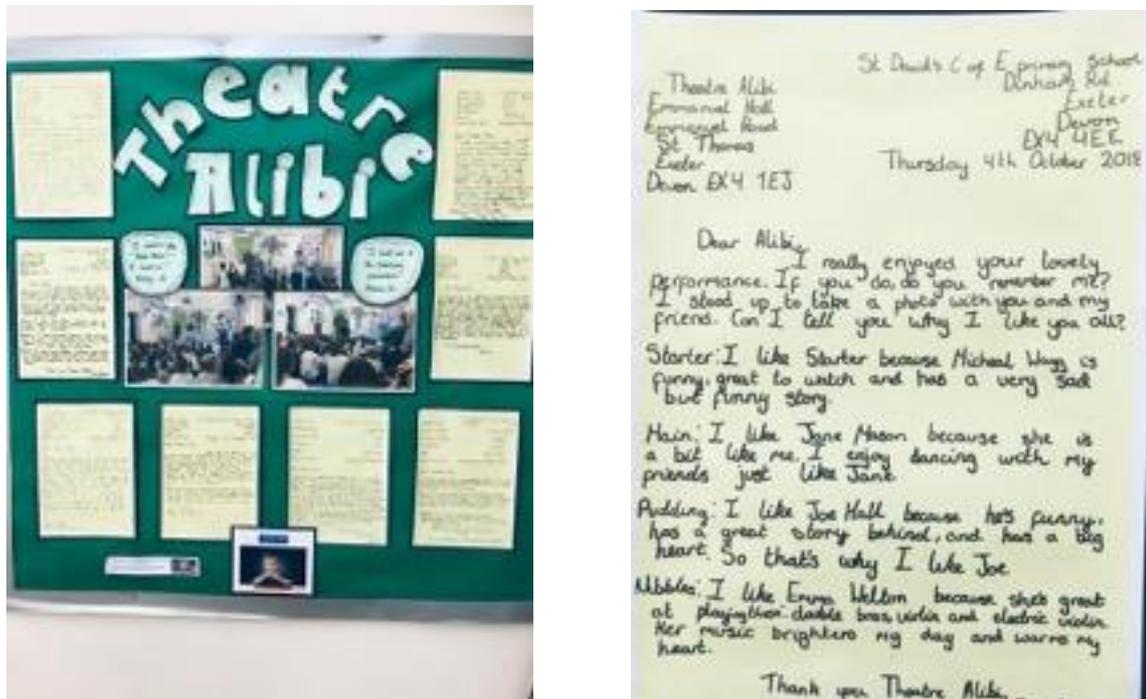


Fig. 23 Display at St. David's School of photos and work as a response to *Table Mates*.¹⁰⁷

The teacher felt the motivation for completing the work was high with all children producing high quality extended pieces of writing which was at least as expected and for most children above expectation (TM-FSTI-StD:2).

After six months, the children remembered the performance less well when judged on quantity, but demonstrated greater thought in their responses, explaining the meaning and messages from the performance (TM-FSTI-STD:1).

¹⁰⁶ Further examples of the children's work can be seen in Appendix M.

¹⁰⁷ Transcription of letter (right) 'Dear Alibi, I really enjoyed your performance. If you do, do you remember me? I stood up to take a photo with you and my friend. Can I tell you why I like you all? Starter: I like Starter because Michael Wagg is funny, great to watch and has a very sad but funny story. Main: I like Jane Mason because she is a bit like me. I enjoy dancing with my friends just like Jane. Pudding: I like Joe Hall because he's funny, has a great story behind, and has a big heart. So that is why I like Joe. Nibbles: I like Emma Welton because she's great at playing the double bass, violin and electric violin. Her music brightens my day and warms my heart. Thank you Theatre Alibi'.

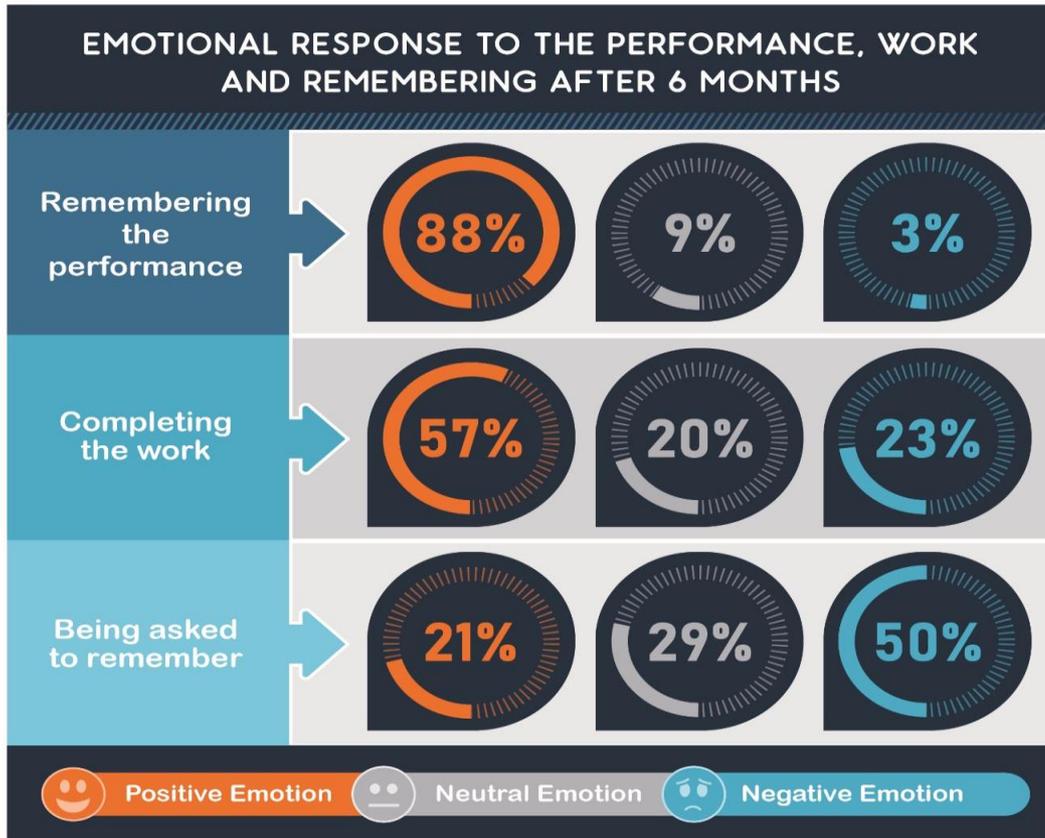


Table 24. Emotional response to performance, work and remembering after six months – TM-FSTI-St D.

From the VQ, the children’s emotional response to the performance was more positive at 88% than the post-performance response from the whole field-study evidence of 80%. However, although the class overall felt positive about completing the work, almost a quarter reported negative emotions about doing work. When asked how they felt about being asked to remember, 50% of the children reported feeling anxious about being asked to remember and being unable to ‘get it right’. This was the most negative of all case-studies and may have been due to the extended time lapse between the original performance and the research visit. It is also interesting to compare the response to being asked to remember with the children’s later response on remembering the performance using Q Methodology, where they strongly agreed that they remembered the performance pp.248-250.

The activity chosen by the teacher in Case-study Five was the most closely aligned to everyday literacy work, conducted over the several days and incorporated drafting and redrafting. Whilst writing for an audience was important for the children, it also added

additional anxiety as to whether the work would be received well by the audience from the company.

Other ways the performance was used to support literacy

Thematic analysis of the post-performance discussion from Case-study Six with a mixed-age class of Year 3/4 children, showed Year 4 children appreciated the more sophisticated humour and emotional aspects of the characters' flashback, whilst Year 3 children often mentioned the visual humour. Unexpectedly, they also commented on the ability of the actors to play multiple roles (TM-FSTI-K:2-3). The teacher also commented that higher-ability children discussed the more emotive parts of the performance that involved inference, whilst the lower-ability children enjoyed the humour (TM-FSTI-K:4).

Following the class discussion, the children completed a familiar literacy exercise, in which they were asked to identify their likes, dislikes, patterns and puzzles.¹⁰⁸

Likes	Dislikes
<p><i>What caught your attention? What made you want to keep watching? What did you like about the performance?</i></p> <p>What caught my attention was that there was a bit where it said "I can't be a queen" and it was quite interesting. The thing that made me want to keep watching was that she jumped off the table at the end and I wanted to keep watching. I liked the play because one of the men did not eat fish and I don't like fish either.</p>	<p><i>Was there anything you didn't like? Was there anything that put you off watching?</i></p> <p>Yes, there was something that I did not like. It was that Nibbles did not do any talking and it was very annoying because I wanted to know about Nibbles.</p>
Patterns	Puzzles

¹⁰⁸ Further examples of the discussion and work can be found in Appendix M.

<p><i>Were there any patterns you noticed? Did it remind you of anything? Did anything repeat?</i></p>	<p><i>Was there anything you found strange or surprising? Is there anything you want to know more about?</i></p>
<p>The thing that was a pattern was the lady kept going on the table and jumping off.</p>	<p>I found that it was surprising because they were playing different parts so he and the other man did ballet.</p>

Fig. 24 Example transcript of R's work – TM-FSTI-K:11.

An example of one Year 3 child's literacy work demonstrates how teacher intervention can provide a fuller account of the child's thoughts about the performance beyond the discussion and how understanding develops over time. It also illustrates that the use of different research methods provides richer information. The teacher had observed this Year 3 middle-ability child during the performance and, in her observation comments, had identified her as showing greater concentration, the same level of enjoyment and had fidgeted less than usual (TM-FS11-K:7). In post-performance discussion, however the child commented briefly saying that she 'didn't like it because Nibbles didn't talk' (TM-FS11-K:4) whilst her literacy work gives far more detail and evidence of further thought including the connection between her own experience and Starter not liking fish. She also was surprised by men doing ballet!

When I returned a month later, the same child not only remembered feeling 'really good' from seeing the performance, she also felt completing the work 'made me happy when I talked to my Mum about the play', demonstrating how the performance and the consolidation of thoughts and learning continued in discussion beyond the performance itself, but also continued with her parent at home. As part of my return I asked the class to express how they felt at being asked to remember, R, said 'I was angry because I really, really want to see it again'. (TM-FS11-K:17) Although a mixed response, on the surface a negative expression of 'anger', the expression also demonstrates the enjoyment of seeing the performance.

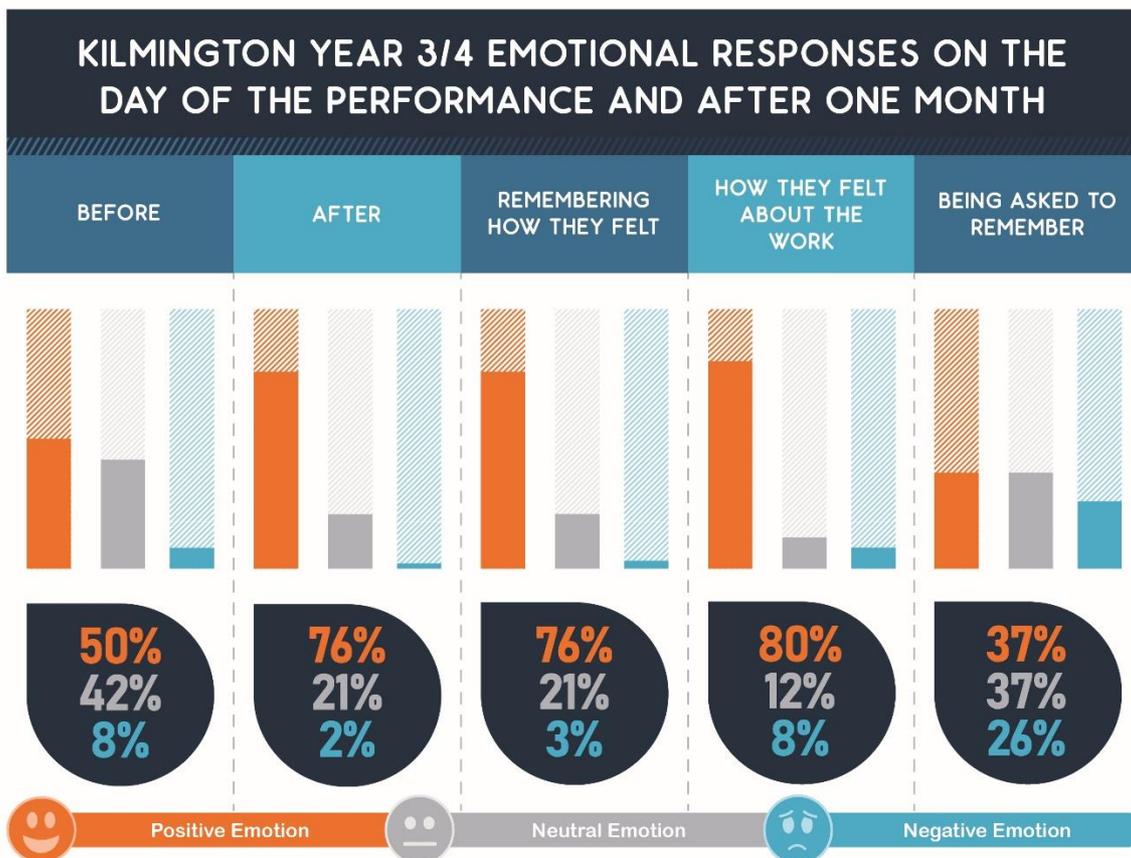


Table 25. Year 3/4 emotional responses over time incorporating the performance and work completed.

In this class of Year 3/4 children, the teacher’s choice of a relatively short, half-day intervention of incorporating the performance into the every-day literacy approach was successful with the children expressing slightly more positive emotions about the work than the performance when asked their opinions a month later.

The impact of child-led Intervention (Finding 7 and 8)

In Case-study Seven (Year 4M), the children were given more choice and freedom over how the work was presented and whether they wrote or drew their responses to be sent to Theatre Alibi. The activity had been child-instigated following their post-performance enthusiasm and persuading the teacher to change her plans. The class had not discussed the performance but spontaneously commenced the work, taking no more than 15 minutes from curriculum time.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ A range of the work can be seen in Appendix N.

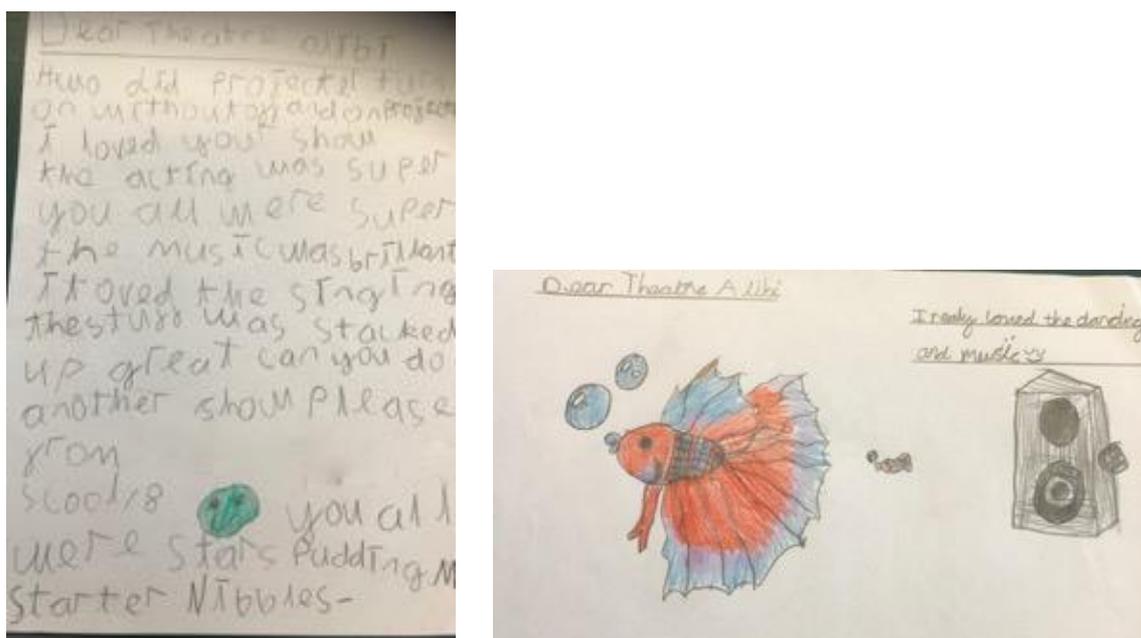


Fig. 25 Examples of children's work sent to Theatre Alibi following the performance - TM-FSTI-Wi1¹¹⁰.

Using the VQ, one month after the performance and completion of the work, the children remembered both the performance and work very positively. They clearly enjoyed completing the work and sending it to Theatre Alibi, even though as the teacher suggested, it was not 'best quality'. When the children were asked their opinion on completing work after the performance, they explained how writing about the performance helped them remember more, 'It made me feel excited because we got to do our favourite bits' and 'It made me think more because I had to write my own work and not put my hand up' (TM-FSTI-Wi1:4). The teacher was surprised that no child gave a negative response and only one child said they felt 'tired' by the work.

¹¹⁰ Transcription of work (Left) 'Dear Theatre Alibi How did the projector turn on without off and on projector. I loved your show [...] the acting was super[...] you all were super[...] the music was brilliant [...] I loved the singing. The stuff was stacked up great [...] Can you do another show please [smiling face} You all were stars Pudding Main Starter and Nibbles' (Right) 'Dear Theatre Alibi. I really (sic) loved the dancing and the music'.

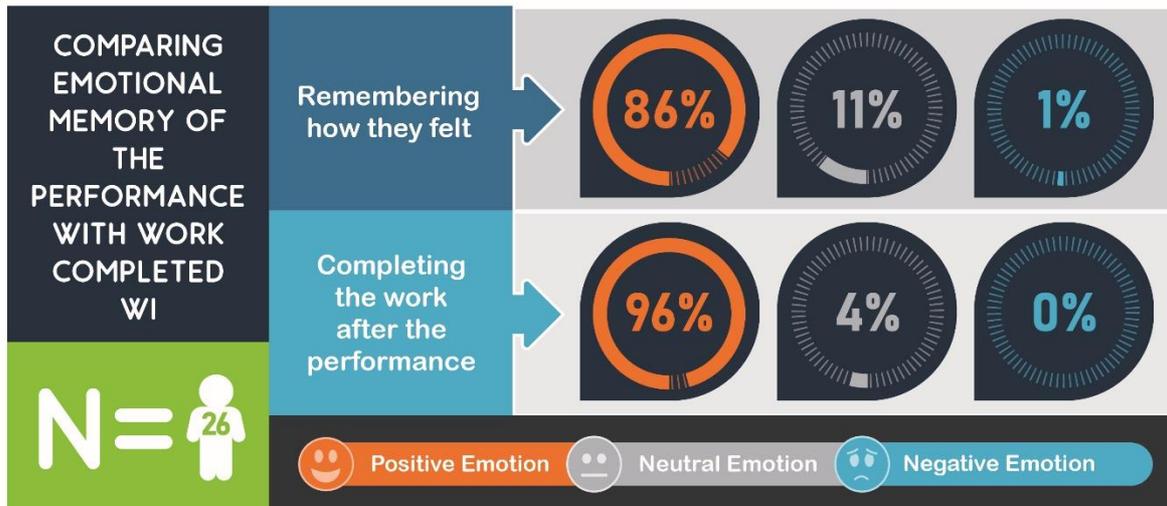


Table 26. Comparison of the emotional response to the performance and work – after one month (TM-FSTI-Wi1:2-3).

When asked what they remembered about the performance the children were keen to offer memories but did not give as much detail as in other case-studies, which may have been due to the short time for the intervention and the lack of class discussion; the activity had been personal rather than shared, with the children not keeping a copy. One child placed the performance in context with school suggesting, it was 'hard to remember because I've been working hard at school' (TM-FSTI-Wi1:3). The children were keen to participate and enjoyed remembering the performance after one month.

As a comparison, I also visited a parallel Year 4 class (4C), where I had conducted a VQ after the performance and again after a month. It showed a significant decline in positive comments with a shift to more neutral comments, shown graphically below. With 4M there was no post-performance data, only their memory of how they felt after a month. An initial conclusion suggests that completing the work confirmed or enhanced the emotional memory of the performance. 4M, where the children had completed work, also reported a predominantly positive response to being asked to remember, with 66% of children expressing positive emotions, 19% expressing neutral emotions and 16% negative emotions; 62% also reported that it was easy to remember and 38% found it hard or quite hard. Compared with children's responses to the same question in other case-studies, children from 4M found the memories much easier to locate, which may be due to their high level of positivity or may be due to the children having autonomy in their work.

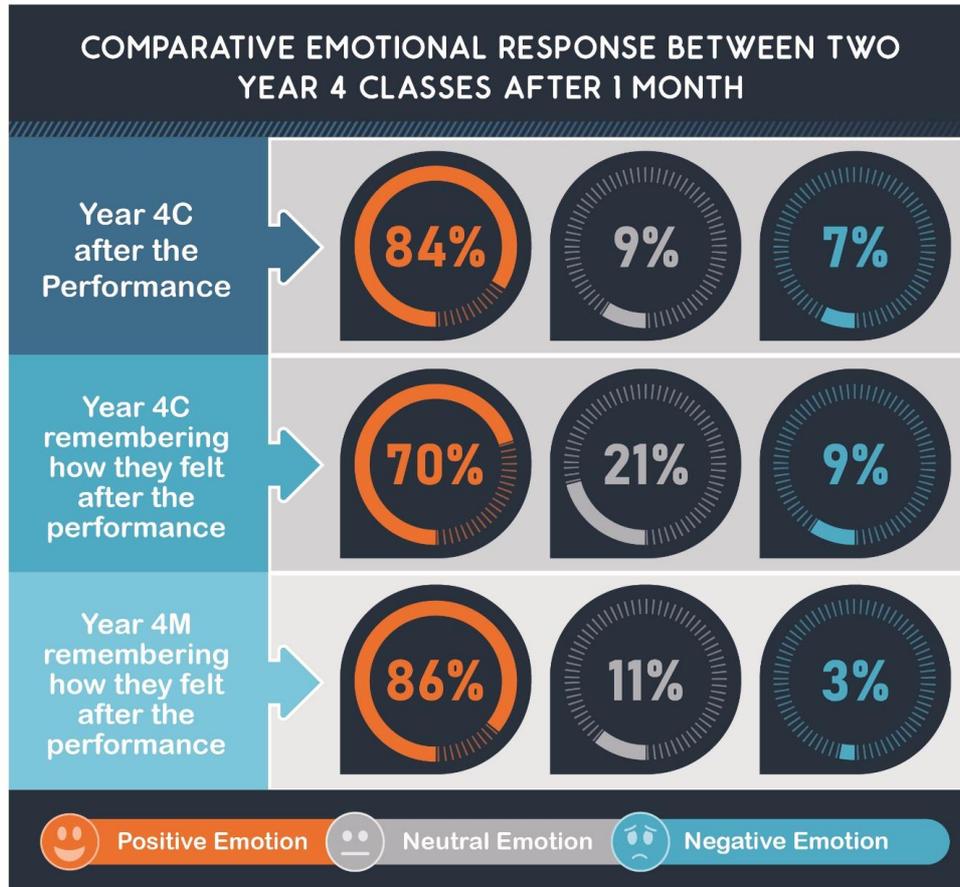


Table 27. Comparison between two Year 4 classes (4C –no intervention, 4M with intervention) and how they remembered feeling following *Table Mates* after one month.

However, the positivity towards the completion of work declined over time. When revisited four months later, the children remained positive about the performance but less positive about the work. Although the detailed recall of the performance had reduced, other aspects became more significant, such as the interaction between the actor and the audience at the beginning and the Q&A at the end. The enjoyment of the performance had encompassed the total event rather than the performance alone.

There was also a greater diversity between children when asked to remember the performance. Many children showed clear enjoyment at being asked to remember and revisit the performance expressing ‘it was like reliving it again’ and used heightened emotions such as ‘very happy’, ‘really happy’, ‘super happy’, ‘amazed’, ‘awesome’ and ‘brilliant’ (TM-FSTI-Wi2:3-4). This may suggest that for some children the emotional intensity of the performance grows over time.

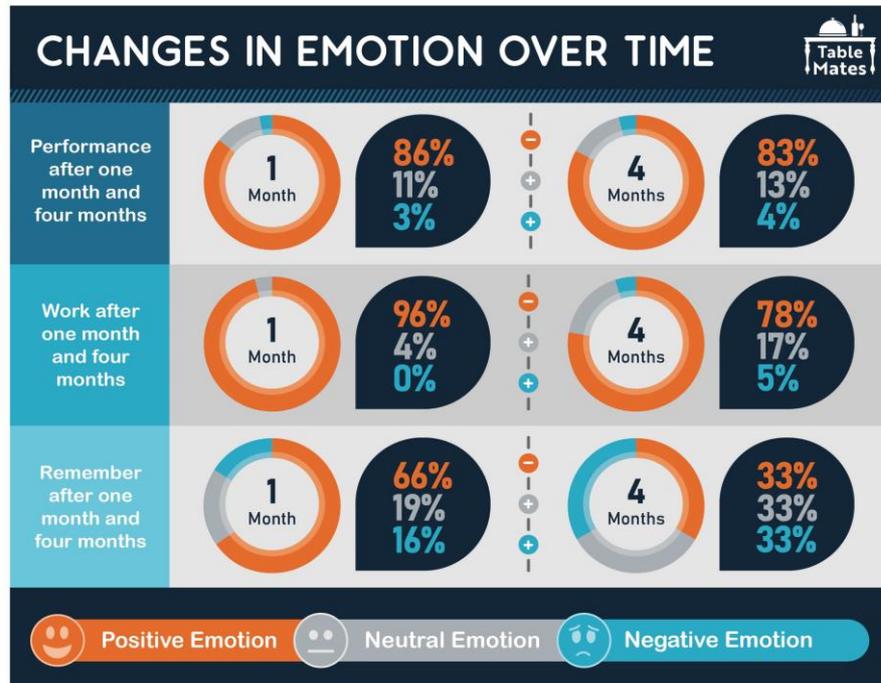


Table 28. Case-study Seven children’s changes in emotional responses to the memory of the performance, completion of the work and being asked to remember after one month and four months.

However, after four months, there was a significant decrease in positivity in how the children felt about being asked to remember. Their memory of the performance was still positive, so although they found it harder to remember the details, the emotional impression of overall enjoyment of the performance remained. The children were more anxious about remembering and less positive about remembering the work than when I visited after one month. This could be due to the time-lapse, or due to the children finding it more difficult to recall the work rather than the performance. As the work was a 10–15 minute task, it is understandable that the children found it hard to recall the work four months later.

Throughout the visit, I chose to use free-call without triggers to prompt the memory. If I had chosen visual prompts (photos of the performance) or brought copies of their work which was sent to Theatre Alibi, the children may have found it easier to remember and their response may have been different.

Q methodology – an additional method¹¹¹

In addition to using the VQ, semi-structured interviews and observation, I trialled the use of Q methodology with three schools when revisiting. As identified when discussing this method earlier, p.112, analysing Q methodology results enabled triangulation between the methods and offered additional analysis on the consistency of the responses. The children were asked to rank the ten statement cards on a five-point scale by the strength of their opinion from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). They were also given four blank cards where they could devise their own responses, if they wished. Unlike the conventional Q methodology process, used in the Social Sciences, this was conducted with the whole class rather than small groups, involving 73 children in total. It was not possible to interview the children individually after the activity to discuss the reasons behind their decisions, although some children wrote on the back of the cards to justify their opinion. They also used the blank cards to give additional statements and scores, such as, 'I thought the acting in *Table Mates* was very good', 'I would recommend the performance to other people', '*Table Mates* was more enjoyable than other performances', '*Table Mates* was appropriate for all ages' or '*Table Mates* was very funny'.

Over the three case-studies the method was adapted to include additional production aspects, and specific questions related to the intervention used by the school. A summary of responses from Case-study Four (College Road Primary), Case-study Five (St. David's) and Case-study Seven (Willand) is shown below:

Summary of school average scores from Q methodology - all schools three – four months after the performance

¹¹¹ A research method used in the Social Sciences – SAGE Handbook 2010 for information-Q methodology sage-handbook-of-mixed-methods-social-behavioral-research-2e.

	Willand Year 4 (student-led response - 20 mins)	St David's Year 5/ 6 (formal letter – three days' literacy work)	CRPS Year 6 (various activities– one day)	Overall score
No of students	26	22	25	73
I enjoy eating tomatoes (trial)	2.19	2.0	3.0	2.55
I remember the performance of <i>Table Mates</i>	3.81	4.10	3.64	3.84
I enjoyed watching <i>Table Mates</i>	4.70	4.64	4.52	4.62
Discussing the performance after the show is good	3.81	4.00	3.76	3.85
I enjoyed doing the work on <i>Table Mates</i> (St David's adaptation – see below)	3.89	X (3.46)	4.44	4.16 (3.95 with St David's)
I would have preferred it if we had not followed up the performance with work	2.08	3.00	2.88	2.71
I enjoy seeing performances at school	4.23	3.91	3.32	3.82
I prefer watching a performance in a theatre	3.81	3.37	3.84	3.69
I enjoyed the music in the performance	4.35	4.41	4.20	4.32
I thought the set was very effective	3.96	X	X	3.96
I enjoyed writing a review of <i>Table Mates</i>	X	3.41	3.52	3.47
I enjoyed being able to choose what we did for <i>Table Mates</i>	4.5	X	X	4.50
I feel okay completing the work but would like to have been given a choice on the type of work I did (St David's)	X	3.46 (see above)	X	3.46
I felt proud that my work was sent to Theatre Alibi (St David's only)	X	3.5	X	3.5

Analysis of the responses to the performance

The children most strongly agreed that they enjoyed watching *Table Mates* with every school scoring at least 4.5. Analysis from individual responses showed no one strongly disagreed with the statement and 66% strongly agreed.¹¹² As music is one of the most mentioned aspects of the post-performance discussion, but was less likely to be remembered over time, it was interesting to review the children's opinion, which showed strong agreement that the children in all schools enjoyed the music when specifically asked. This would not have been evident from using other research methods, although music was clearly important for the children when asked directly.

Remembering the performance was also interesting, offering seemingly contradictory results with the same children when compared with the VQ response which showed the children felt more anxious about remembering after three or four months. This paradox was particularly evident from the younger children from Willand School where 11% of children disagreed that they remembered the performance, compared with 33% offering negative comments in the VQ; and 59% agreeing or strongly agreeing they remembered the performance compared with 33% offering positive emotions on the same day. My interpretation, when considering the Q methodology statement 'I remember the performance of *Table Mates*', was that the children took a more general view, remembering the performance overall and differentiating their response on a five-point scale, whilst when using the VQ, the children felt more anxious at recalling the exact or 'right' detail. However overall, 10% of children from the study disagreed with the statement, of which over half stated they strongly disagreed. Therefore, it would be incorrect to suggest all children remember the performance, as for a minority, it has not entered their long-term memory and has little or no impact after three-six months. Further analysis of individual responses suggested that for those children who found it difficult to remember the performance, they also scored more negatively on teacher intervention.

¹¹² A fuller summary of responses including analysis for each school can be seen in Appendix O.

Responses to Teacher Intervention (Finding 8)

Overall the children were positive about the ways teachers incorporated the performance into classwork. 60% of Year 6 children from Case-study Four, where there had been a wider range of creative activities, strongly agreed that they enjoyed doing the work, which confirmed their positive response using the VQ. A counter question, 'I would have preferred if we had not followed up the performance with work' further confirmed the overall children's opinion by mildly disagreeing with the statement. However, at Willand School, where the children had been given choice only three children (11%) agreed with the statement compared with 44% who strongly disagreed, confirming their positivity for classwork which was self-selected and took a short amount of time.

When considering specific interventions there was broad agreement that discussion of the performance was good, particularly at St David's, where more time had been given to discussion as part of formal literacy work. Overall discussion also scored slightly higher than writing a review, except for Willand School where there had been no discussion. Choice was clearly important for Willand school with 58% of children showing strong agreement for the statement, 'I enjoyed being able to choose what we did for *Table Mates*' and only one child disagreeing, additionally commenting that he preferred to be told by the teacher what to do. St David's children were also asked about choice and compared to other questions this scored the highest number of neither agreeing or disagreeing responses; however, when asked about the writing of the review more children responded affirmatively. When considering written work, in the form of a review, the children from both schools were similarly positive, although there was greater variation in responses from the children from St David's.

Q methodology provides useful supplementary information offering children's opinions on different aspects of intervention, but this would need to be used with more groups of children and to be organised to have sufficient time for individual discussion giving greater depth on how they had formed their opinion.

Findings, Conclusions and Implications

When Theatre Alibi perform in a school it may have been chosen by the school with a very clear purpose in mind; a cultural event, entertainment, or as a stimulus to support the curriculum. This may be clearly identified to the teachers within the school by the headteacher: however, in other schools the purpose may not be explicit. The teacher will have been given a choice, therefore, what the teacher does, or does not do impacts on the child's learning. Through a variety of teacher interventions, the performance is moderated for the child. Adopting the role of mediator, the teacher can create a safe and creative environment where children can question, discuss and develop their ideas on the performance. As educationalist Graham Nuthall explains, just as learning is complex, teaching is challenging, requiring considerable skill on the part of the teacher:

In my experience, teaching is about sensitivity and adaptation. It is about adjusting to the here-and-now circumstances of particular students... What can be done quickly with one group has to be taken very slowly with another group. What one student finds easy to understand may confuse another student.... To be precise, it is about understanding learning (2007:15).

Good teachers are highly responsive, deciding whether they will follow-up the performance after seeing it for themselves, depending on the performance content and the reaction of the children in their class. Therefore, the experience of a Theatre Alibi performance will vary from school to school, from class to class, and often, if there has been no additional intervention, from child to child.

The teacher in Case-study One illustrates the importance of balance between using the performance to support learning but not making it too instrumental. When asked whether he thought the performance should be used as a resource for additional learning or whether it should be kept as a stand-alone event for the child, he did not see using the performance as a binary but recognised the value of discussion, particularly for younger audiences:

I think giving the children the opportunity to do some follow-up work is important, because as we said, it gives them the opportunity to clarify, to summarise, to question – important skills that they would be applying normally through their reading...I don't think it is asking too

much of children to engage in the post-show discussion and I know the children certainly enjoy drawing the pictures from the show. I don't think any follow-up work has to be heavy (Pitt 2018:5).

He also suggested that making the children do extensive work, such as a review of the performance, may have a detrimental effect and,

could put off some children in wanting to engage with the theatre later, because if their only memory of the show was "I watched a show and I am expected to do a huge piece of writing afterwards", then perhaps that might deter them from enjoying the show. It seems like work (Pitt 2018:5).

This teacher exemplifies many of the tensions between the elements of theatre and education when theatre companies cross the boundaries and perform in schools.

From case-study evidence where teachers in varying degrees integrated the performance into their curriculum, all teachers mentioned their intervention resulting in the children producing working which showed similar or improved progress and attainment and was educationally worthwhile. This chapter has further considered how their intervention has affected the children's enjoyment, memory and understanding of the performance and whether this had a positive, neutral or negative impact on their views of the performance.

Case-studies One, Two and Six focused on post-performance discussion, which is likely to be the most common intervention used by teachers who book a Theatre Alibi performance as a short-focused intervention which bridges the performance and everyday class work. Case-study evidence suggests this is an expedient way of helping the children gain a better understanding of the performance through consolidation and clarification and increases their recall. As Case-study Two illustrated, post-performance discussion had a sustained positive emotional impact on the children. The consequence of discussion was the information and emotions being more easily retrieved from long-term memory, and made the act of remembering more positive.

When using the VQ to analyse, all teacher interventions were judged to be positive by the children, although, in Case-studies Four and Seven the positivity became weaker over time, being absorbed into the emotion of the performance.

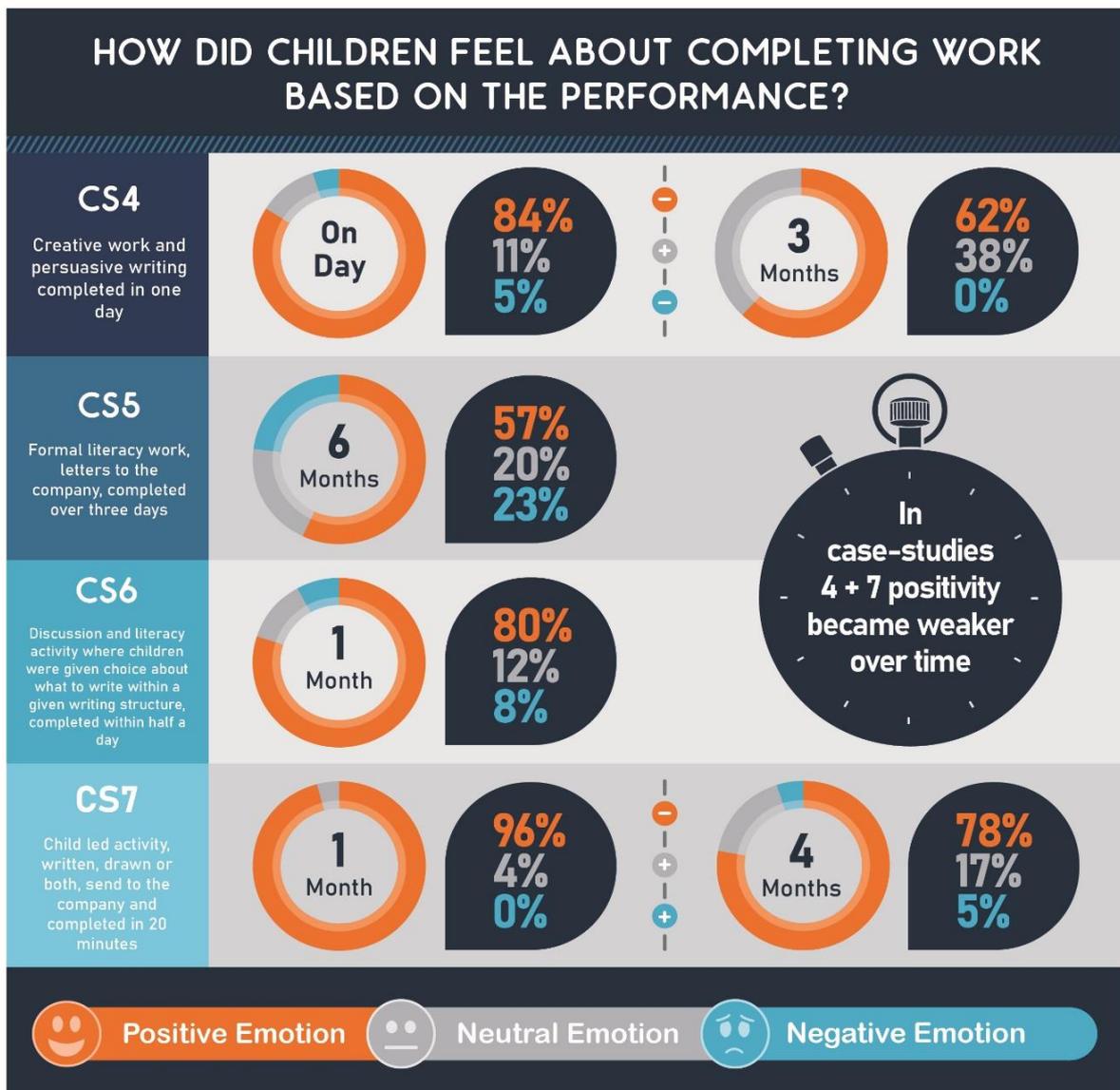


Table 29. Illustration of how the children reported feeling about completing work based on *Table Mates*, and how this changes over time by case-study (CS) Four-Seven.

It is possible to conclude that the amount of time it took to complete the post-performance task and having greater agency in completing written tasks was more important and resulted in a more positive response from the children. Incorporating the performance into classwork was confirmed as positive by the children using the Q

methodology and the VQ, whichever intervention was used, the enjoyment of the performance being retained.

At the start of my research, as a former headteacher, I was keen that the performance should be maximised by the teachers both as an inspirational and creative resource which would enhance children's learning, and as a means of justifying the cost of the production. At that time, I was also fearful that using the performance would be to the detriment of the children's enjoyment of the performance itself. I expected teacher intervention to alter negatively the impact of the performance. However, my research has shown that the children were able to separate their emotional response to the performance from their emotional response to the work. I was surprised how positive the children were towards the intervention, whether this was discussion, creative work, written work, teacher-led or student-led. Clearly the amount of time spent on the activity was important in stopping the children seeing the performance as 'ordinary' or 'everyday' or 'just another piece of work'. Children having some autonomy within the work also seems to be important, rather than conforming to the same task or being closely aligned to specific learning objectives.

Teacher intervention, through integrating the performance of *Table Mates* into classwork, particularly when considering the Q methodology results, does have a positive impact on children's emotional response and enjoyment of completing the tasks. Researchers also need to be aware of the concern some children feel about being asked to remember and wanting to get the answer right. Greater use of memory prompts may support this.

Capturing ethnographic research in schools was challenging, as teachers were unclear whether they would follow-up the performance or not until they had seen it. I am very grateful to those schools and teachers, who are representative of a wide range of teaching experience, who allowed me to conduct my research with their classes. The methods employed when working with different ages of children were varied and needed to be adaptable. Using a grounded theory approach, as hypotheses emerged I was keen to return to some schools or visit new classes to test the theory. Therefore, many of the conclusions and findings are presented knowing

that further investigation is required to give substance and authority to the results, in a more standardised way.

I would conclude that the concept of Theatre *with* Education is possible and beneficial and argue that teacher intervention using the theatre performance of *Tables Mates*, together with learning provided by the theatre company develops a partnership between Theatre and Education which is to the benefit of both partners and the children. I would also argue that teacher intervention confirms and enriches the learning created by the theatre performance.

Chapter Six – The Longitudinal Impact of Performance: The after-life of theatre performance in children’s minds, imagination and memory.

Drawing upon the emotional and social impact of the ‘one-off’ performance and the impact of teacher intervention discussed in previous chapters, this chapter explores the longevity of Theatre Alibi’s performance, principally how the memory of the performance changes over time and addresses the research question:

- What is the longitudinal impact of Theatre Alibi’s work over time?

A summary of findings follows.

Summary of findings on memory

1. Children remembered in more detail and understood the meaning of the performance in greater depth after three months or one year rather than post-performance.
2. Children need time to process the performance. Evidence of greater thought develops over time.
3. Initially children remembered sensory elements, production elements, characterisation, the unexpected, emotional connections and humour. Over time some of these elements, such as music became blended so that after three months or a year, music was irregularly mentioned.
4. The emotional impact of the Theatre Alibi performances on children’s well-being increased over time. Most children enjoyed remembering and reliving the performance which sometimes had a further positive impact.
5. Children who had the opportunity to discuss the performance with their teacher after the show remembered more than twice the amount of data than children where there had been no discussion.

6. Certain props, specific characters, theatrical sleight of hand and humorous events were remembered in detail for at least two years.
7. In most cases children could remember far beyond teacher expectation.
8. Age is important. The children's first encounter, often in Reception left a positive impression. Subsequent Theatre Alibi performances were then remembered in greater detail and with greater enjoyment. This may be due to the developing age of the children but also seemed apparent in those who first see Theatre Alibi when they are older. Many significant memories were reported when the children were aged six.
9. Older children generally remembered emotional events and characters whilst younger children remembered humorous events and incidents.
10. Over time, after a year, the performance became rediscovered and re-created, demonstrating increased creativity in some children.

Based upon field-study research of Theatre Alibi's *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* performed in primary schools over the last two years¹¹³, this chapter will explore the way children not only recall, but also re-live and re-create the original performance. It aims to address the common refrain in the field of performance studies on the lack of longitudinal research as an 'untapped resource' (Reinelt et al 2014:9). Therefore, the findings from my research into the memory of performance in children's minds and its long-lasting impact is both distinctive and offers new perspectives for academics, theatre-makers and educators.

***The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* – performance outline**

Based on the book by David Almond, *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* tells the quirky story of Paul, a lonely, shy boy, living in the basement of a large block of flats, who has an unusual idea that the moon is a hole in the sky. With help from an array of characters, he not only reaches the moon but also gains confidence and friends along the way. The play explores positive themes of co-operation, friendship,

¹¹³ *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* originally toured between September to December 2016 and was re-toured to a small number of schools in March 2018.

resilience and having extraordinary ideas, as well as darker themes of loneliness, war and depression. Through vivid storytelling the female cast take on multiple roles using a range of accents, physical movements, and props, transporting the audience to multiple imaginary spaces including inside and outside the flats, the city, a garden, a battlefield and inside the moon.



Fig. 26 *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* – The Pilot, Paul and Fortuna

The central child characters of Paul and Fortuna are puppets, which has a significant stylistic influence on the performance. Fortuna, a sparkly girl puppet with a colourful costume depicting the 'stars' in the sky contrasts with the ordinariness of Paul with his everyday shorts, rolled down socks and T-shirt. Fortuna is an extraordinary orphan girl, who has been fired from a cannon over the Pyramids and, due to misfortune, landed on the Moon. The character of Fortuna creates considerable emotion and empathy in the audience which is saddened by her loneliness and abandonment. When Paul is required to return to his home, through careful pausing and gesture, they are touched by Fortuna's request, 'Take me with you'. Besides Paul and Fortuna, the production has a further puppet character, Clarence, a flying, speaking poodle, and several other minor puppet objects to add scale and perspective to the production. Other more recognisable characters are not played by puppets, such as Paul's mum and dad, identical twins Molly and Mabel and more bizarre characters, Clara, Clarence's owner, a fighter pilot and Benjamin. Benjamin, a melancholic and lonely character suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder brought on by war, first

appears with a bag on his head as he is too depressed to leave his garden shed. He is another character with extraordinary ideas, providing much of the emotional tension in the performance, talking of his experiences in the war when he led a passive act of resistance by feigning death and bringing about the end of the war. Benjamin also provides much humour with the ability to change his mood from depression to extreme happiness in an instant.

The set has strong visual impact, being defined by a square 'night-sky' floor cloth on which sits an urban industrial environment of factories with towering chimneys and an imposing 29 storey block of flats. Behind the flats is a large moon shaped disc representing the night sky which is turned and lit during the performance to signify time passing from day to night. Through an ingenious 'reveal', the angular, cold, industrial set is transformed into the white, bright, curved and contrasting realm of the moon. To the side of the floor cloth sits the musician with an accordion and hang drum, an unusual percussion instrument, which creates an ethereal lunar sound when Paul climbs into the moon. The music is an integral aspect of the production, adding an additional layer of storytelling, often holding the emotion and guiding the atmosphere.

The storytelling is supported by representational objects, including a butterfly to represent a garden and a yellow car to signify a taxi. The moon is full of unexpected objects, a miniature missile, a helicopter, a hot-air balloon, a bi-plane and an astronaut which are used momentarily but are well-crafted, demonstrating high production values. The audience is required to use their imagination 'to fill in the gaps' when the aspects are told through story, not represented or mimed, such as the transportation of a large ladder by the 'friends and neighbours', lifting it outside the block of flats to the top of the building to help Paul reach the moon.

The performance is full of humour, such as a taxi-ride which appears to go nowhere due to persistently turning left or right, and ending up where they started. Visual slapstick humour is useful, appealing to the younger members of the audience, absurd humour such as a flying, talking poodle breaks emotional tension, and the surprise of identical twin sisters and word-play puns, adds humour for older audience members. These comic devices enhance the enjoyment and entertainment quality of the performance, as does the 'magical' appearance of pears apparently from nowhere,

through deft sleight of hand. Ultimately the story is resolved by great things being possible when people work together, using their imaginations, determination and high aspirations.



Fig. 27 *The Boy Who Climbed into the Moon*

Following a survey of existing literature on the memory of theatre performance, I re-examine the suitability, limitation and scope of my mixed-methods approach, with over 900 mixed-ability children aged between 5-11 years, from 21 different schools. The research findings are drawn from the original tour of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* (2016) and retour (2018) and, for comparative purposes, *Apple John* (2017). This interdisciplinary research explores the knowledge, attitudes and emotions that remain after the theatre company has left. I briefly draw from the field of memory studies outlining theories of remembering, forgetting and memory triggers in relation to cognitive science. The significance of memory development within the classroom is a growing field of study within education and therefore needs to be considered when reflecting on why children can retain aspects from the performance and easily forget recently taught knowledge and skill acquisition.

Research findings within this chapter are organised into three parts with differing emphasis and purpose: 'Discovery' illustrates the memory post-performance and up to three months later and provides evidence for Finding 1,2,3,4, and 5; 'Rediscovery' explores what remains in children's memory of performance a year later and provides

evidence for Findings 1,2,6 and 7, considering the impact of performance style and how children's memory of performance differs from adults; and 'Recreation and Re-Invention' discusses how, as a process of further thought, rehearsal and re-working, the performance is re-invented and re-kindled after two years or longer and provides evidence for Finding 1,2, 8,9 and 10. Whilst I recognise, as many academics from the fields of memory studies and theatre studies suggest, 'memory can be faulty or unreliable', (Gale and Featherstone 2011:24), I also celebrate the creative dialogue between past and present of children's performance memory when it is rediscovered after one or even two years.

This chapter aims to refute that performance is transient, disappearing the moment its eventfulness is over. It explores the 'dialectic relationship between the past and the present' (Nicholson 2014:94) when primary-aged children watch and remember theatre performance. It aims to demonstrate how the memory of performance is organic and part of a creative learning process that is currently an unrecognised and under-utilised resource.

1.Learning from existing literature on the memory of performance

Although there is a lack of research into the memory of performance, existing studies, while predominantly concerning adult audiences in a theatre setting, offer methodological approaches and findings which provide an interesting starting point for my longitudinal research. Wilkinson, in the *Spirit of Theatre Project* (2012), traces the memory of a performance of *Mother Courage*, contacting audience members who had previously completed questionnaires a week after the performance (2015:134). Using narrative analysis, she found respondents attributed considerable value to the experience of attending the play, illustrating the importance of 'liveness', continuing to find the performance 'thought-provoking' and 'being lost in the moment of the play' (Wilkinson 2015:137). Respondents enjoyed revisiting the memory of the performance by discussing it with friends and family or the researcher, using their experience 'to explore other people's motivation and re-frame their relationships' (Wilkinson

2015:150). Her conclusion notes how 'audience members *select* what material is relevant to their interests' when discussing characters and incidents from the play (Wilkinson 2015:150). Similarly, in my research, I was interested to explore what children recalled and whether liveness, ideas and immersive moments for children were as significant as for adults. *Spirit of Theatre Project* was a pilot to the AHRC study, *Critical Mass: Theatre Spectatorship and Value Attribution* (2014) which built upon and developed this longitudinal research, having a specific aim to explore how time and memory impacted on value attribution: 'one key question we wanted to ask was whether spectators' views of the theatre they see changes across time, and if so, in what ways' (Reinelt et al 2014:25). Building upon the *Spirit of Theatre Project*, this study of 220 adult participants from three regional theatres over a nine-month period, also included a smaller sample of respondents who recounted their memories of performances they had seen a year earlier. The *Critical Mass* study as discussed previously¹¹⁴ found: 'Spectators value theatre for a complex variety of reasons, but the top indicators are liveness, thoughtfulness and artistic production elements such as company, actors and design.' (Reinelt et al 2014:88-89). They also suggest 'a clear correlation between the number of times one thinks about a show and the high value assigned to it' (Reinelt et al 2014:51). The *Critical Mass* report makes clear the significance of seeing theatre at a young age, with many participants reporting cherished memories of attending theatre with family members or as part of a school trip before the age of ten (Reinelt et al 2014:24). They also found 'for those spectators who begin their theatre experience in early life, theatre becomes a form of 'life-long learning' where meaning accumulates over time' (Reinelt et al 2014:72). This study is significantly different from my research, as the AHRC study participants were predominantly highly educated, female, and regular theatre goers, with 70% of respondents having at least a first degree and the majority having post-graduate qualifications, whilst my research is more inclusive, focusing on children from a broad socio-demographic background who may or may not have chosen to watch the performance had they been given the choice.

Reinelt's article *What UK Spectators Know* (2014) offering a more detailed commentary on the AHRC report, notes 'On the question of memories, we were

¹¹⁴ See p.81.

pleased to find that quite strong memories do linger, even after a year has passed' (2014:354). However, she also suggests memories fade as well as linger, noticing after two months many respondents' memories had lost the connections between the plays and their lives. This decline continued as time progressed with just over a third of respondents making connections after a year (Reinelt 2014:355-357). Her conclusion of the impact of time 'indicates that the strongest connections are fostered in the immediate aftermath of the theatre experience, but this should be verified by more comprehensive research' (Reinelt 2014:359), although noting that further research using a big data approach would require extensive funding. The scope of my research and longitudinal design goes beyond the *Critical Mass* study, covering at least two years and showing the connection between the performance, its memory and the children's experience.¹¹⁵

Regularly revisiting a memory of performance was an important aspect in Joanna Bucknall's work based on personal reflections of spectator response over time following an immersive performance explored in *The "Reflective Participant," "(Remember)ing" and "(Remember)ance": A (Syn)aesthetic Approach to the Documentation of Audience Experience (2017)*. Interesting in Bucknall's research is the importance she places on affective recall, focussing beyond the recall of facts and connections. Bucknall uses the process of hypermnesis which is based on repeated 'vivid recall of events' to create an affective recall which can be 'summoned, reactivated and re-enacted' on demand (2017:2). Her practice-based research employs a variety of techniques: automatic writing initially, to capture immediate recall, music from the performance when revisiting a week later, and using previous documentation from these experiences as a trigger a year later. Both capturing memory over time, and its focus on being able to recapture the primary experience of the performance, 'in the moment of an encounter' (Bucknall 2017:6), rather than the secondary experience of recalling the memory was appropriate for my research. Whilst not applying Bucknall's practice-based research with children, I was keen to recognise an emotional connection to the performance. Children, like adults, continue to make sense of the performance over time. Therefore, I was aware that repeatedly

¹¹⁵ A summary on the range and scope of the research and its longitudinal design can be seen in Table 1 and 2 p.104. and p.105.

revisiting the performance, as an intentional act of remembering, may impact positively on their ability to remember and add to the sense-making process. Bucknall's work offers an interesting inter-disciplinary perspective, drawing upon the fields of theatre, audience reception and memory.

Two additional pieces of research into spectator memory are relevant as they are child-centred, although involving older participants than my research. Colette Conroy, Sarah-Jane Dickenson and Giuliana Mazzoni's study '*The Not Knowns*': *memory, narrative and applied theatre* (2018) explores the science of memory and partnership between an experimental psychologist, a theatre practitioner and script-writer when working in a non-traditional theatre setting. Their work centres on the challenges memory science provides when working on auto-biographical memories and oral accounts of their participants, the 'not knowns', young adults in Hull who were not on any government registers. Through applied theatre exploration, the research questions memory and truth when exploring individual and shared testimony in relation to perceptions of self (Conroy et al 2018:62), asserting that 'remembering is an active process' (Conroy et al 2018:62). Commentary on memories and recollections can often be placed into a binary of 'true' or 'false', however, Conroy et al suggest 'to say that a memory is 'false' is to misunderstand memory; the individual uses memory for all sorts of purposes, and memory is changeable and adaptable' (2018:62). In their conclusion, having explored the connection between theatre practice, creative writing and psychology research, the writers recognise 'the process of deviating from an agreed common version is not just likely, it is inevitable' (Conroy et al 2018:70). The way children in my research change and adapt their memory of performance as a creative process is not to be discounted and will be explored later where I argue the act and production of remembering may be a rich and under-recognised resource for creativity and learning.

Finally, Roger Deldime and Jeanne Pigeon's work *The Memory of the Spectator* (2000) offers extensive case-study research based on reflections from 541 spectators of 1022 performances from 26 productions at the Le Théâtre des Jeunes Années, Lyon over a two-year period (2000:75). Although drawing from performances in a traditional theatre setting, it is arguably the most closely aligned to my research objective of exploring the residue of live performance. The article on their findings

gives little detail of their methodology or age of the participants. However, based on the productions, I deduce the audience is older children and young adults. Deldime and Pigeon suggest the aspects which are most clearly remembered over time are characters, setting and scenery. They found 'about 80% to 90% of spectators remember the central character or those seen as such by the audiences', believing this is due to the emotional connection between the central character and the audience being 'the engine that starts the memory' (Deldime and Pigeon 2000:77). Peripheral characters are remembered less well, becoming blurred or blended with other characters in the spectator's mind. One exception is 'theatrically striking' minor characters who may be unimportant to the plot but memorable for other reasons such as 'the outstanding way in which they were performed' (Deldime and Pigeon 2000:78-79). Comprehension and understanding of the plot and the characters were significant for memory retention, 'It is obvious that a show based on a simple plot, with visually emphasized components, is more easily organized within the memory than a more complicated or abstract one' (Deldime and Pigeon 2000:79). This observation offers an opportunity for comparative analysis with my research as *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* has a quirky plot with unusual characters whilst *Apple John* is more linear but presented in an abstract style.

When considering setting and scenery Deldime and Pigeon found memories of the set, its design, colour and material, varied from one production to another but spectators tend to privilege stage props which were most attached to the central character (2000:81). They draw upon memory research recognising that much of performance is sensory, being stored in the short-term memory before being decoded into the long-term memory and therefore, 'A massive forgetting is likely to happen in this short-term period of time!' (Deldime and Pigeon 2000:82). What was clear from Deldime and Pigeon's study was:

Overall pleasure provided by a show plays an important role in the building up of memories. This is the affective component. Affective approval postpones the moment and forgetting, whereas this interest anticipates it...Audience pleasure derives from the emotional load, intensity and theatrical relevance of the images. Artistic productions with the requisite stimuli will elicit such pleasure. However, when the gap between the audience and the show is too wide, the spectators are unable to cross it (2000:84).

Deldime and Pigeon suggest that their study 'provided preliminary guidelines to understanding the process of audience memory' offering a 'first inkling of the extreme complexity of the studied phenomenon' and recognising 'the problem is so complex that it demands much additional research involving all the related fields in a thorough and exhaustive study' (2000:75). My research does not claim to provide either an exhaustive study or to relate to other fields beyond skimming the surface of theatre, education and memory studies, but does offer additional research into what children remember over a two-year period and how they continue to engage emotionally and cognitively with the performance.

Capturing memories from children - methodological design

Scope and Longitudinal Research Design

For comparative research, I draw upon the non-verbal and stylistically different production of *Apple John* to provide an interesting contrast to *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*. As has been outlined earlier, the range and scope of my study has been broad, involving children who saw the performance when they were in Reception (aged four/ five) as their first experience of theatre and those who were regular Theatre Alibi spectators.

The durational design involved gathering data on emotional well-being pre-and post-performance and returning to the class after one–three months, depending on convenience for the school. This was a more common activity during *Apple John* and the re-tour of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* rather than the original tour. When Theatre Alibi returned annually, if time allowed, I gathered memory data from the children prior to them seeing the new performance to avoid comparison and confusion. To enable greater depth to my research and to maintain a balance between a collective and individual response, I employed a range of ethnographic and arts-based methods. With most classes, as well as whole class or small group discussion, I chose to use Reason's art-based methodology highlighted in *The Young Audience*, where I spoke to the children whilst they drew their recollections (2010:46,52,122). Reason's participatory arts-based methodology enabled the children freedom to draw their own interpretations of the performance and use the act of drawing as a reflective tool. The

children engaged well with this method and I saw it as an opportunity to question them about their sense-making from the performance.

Over the course of the two-year study, I became concerned by the limitations of the arts-based method, with its tendency to privilege the visual aspects of the performance; which lent themselves to be more easily drawn. Children would frequently draw a boy climbing a ladder to a circular or crescent moon or draw a large block of flats with little explanation. Some children were concerned about their drawing skills, particularly as they only had 10-20 minutes to complete the task following discussion. Therefore, as the research study progressed, the children were given greater flexibility, being invited to write or draw their memories, which proved more successful with some children.

On reflection, my methodology, relying on generalised, free recall questions tended to privilege information on *what* they remembered rather than the experiential memory, *how* the performance made them feel or how it linked with their lives. Re-using the VQ to obtain the emotional memory of the performance and using more open-ended questions either collectively, through whole class discussion, or individually, whilst the children were writing or drawing, allowed for greater variation and emotional depth in the response. Giving children the opportunity to speak and discuss their memories allowed them to incorporate ephemeral aspects including how they felt, what they imagined had happened, and how they engaged with the whole experience.

The child participants

When gathering data, I needed to be systematic and flexible, generating both statistical and ethnographic evidence derived from VQ, discussion and arts-based methods as well as responding to the many challenges faced when conducting longitudinal studies within a school environment. One such challenge concerned wanting to meet the same children over the two-year period. This was not always possible: some KS2 children transferred to secondary education, schools visited in 2016 did not book Theatre Alibi the subsequent year, or schools did not give me access to the same class of children.

One unanticipated barrier to capturing longitudinal data was the introduction of the GDPR Act on data protection which came into force in May 2018 giving control to individuals, or their parents, over their personal data. Schools have responded to this change in legislation in a variety of ways. Many schools, who were particularly cautious in their interpretation of the Act, became more restricted in granting permission to work with children. This resulted in my not being able to work with children with whom I had previously worked, or being given access to a small group of children where parents/carers had previously returned permission slips. I was concerned that this additional restriction may alter the inclusive socio-economic demographic of the children I met, being only those children from more 'organised' families. To counterbalance this concern, I was mindful that new schools visited were as socio-economically inclusive as possible and I had representation across the whole 5–11 age range. In some schools, there were no additional limitations due to GDPR with Headteachers taking the view that as I was working in classes with teachers present, and all data was anonymised, this was not an issue for the school.

The consequence of the GDPR Act, changes to school governance due to Academisation of schools into more corporate organisations, and restrictions in school funding has meant the range of schools visited in my final year has become more diverse with more children coming from previously unvisited schools. Therefore, I accept that the variation of research participants throughout the research period may not be seen as being part of a scientifically controlled approach. However, having a range of new students each year as well as a core group I followed throughout the two years, has meant that there has been a reduction in researcher influence, either in children wanting to please the researcher or in the researcher presence prompting and stimulating memory through re-visiting. The influence of hypermnesia, referring to Bucknall's work discussed previously, where recall is enhanced by repeated revisiting will be discussed in greater detail later.

Within the data set for both case-studies, *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* and *Apple John*, I have also included children whom I may have met only post-performance and not longitudinally, recognising that any discussion of the performance was based on memory recall. I therefore support Wilkinson's assertion in *Dissatisfied ghosts: Theatre Spectatorship and the production of cultural value*, that 'All investigation of

audience response, unless conducted in the auditorium at the time of the performance, is investigation of memory' (2015:134).

Using the literature from *Critical Mass* and other studies, the time between visits was important as it ensured the memory of the performance had transferred from the children's sensory or short-term memory into their long-term memory. Having been sure aspects were stored, the issue would be how to retrieve the information. My research methods focus on free recall; although I took photos of the performance as a memory trigger to aid children's memory and avoid the anxiety of not being able to recall the performance, the photos were used only with two classes who had seen the performance the year earlier when they were in Reception. From the 18 case-study schools (23 classes) who saw *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* in Autumn 2016, only a handful of children chose not to participate as they did not feel they could remember anything.

My research aimed to explore how memory changed emotionally and which aspects from the performance were remembered: what children felt about being asked to remember; whether there was a difference in memory based on the age at which the children saw the performance; and whether there was a variation between two different productions. I would also consider how my findings compared to other studies, particularly, as my research focused on children, not adults, and took place in the non-traditional theatre setting of a school hall which would be considered as a place of learning rather than entertainment.

Before discussing my findings, it is important to place the children's responses within the context of memory study research and consider how we remember over time.

2. A brief introduction to the key elements of memory and its importance when children remember performances

To understand the after-life of theatre performance in children's minds, it is necessary to understand what memory is and why and how we remember or forget. This section will draw upon the historical foundation of memory as presented by the founding-

fathers of memory studies, Hermann Ebbinghaus's work on 'forgetting' and Frederick C. Bartlett's work on 'remembering' (Kintsch 1995:ix, Foster 2009:1). This will be followed by considering studies from more modern psychologists since the late 1960s which consider the functional structures and elements of memory including the tripartite system of encoding, storage and retrieval (Foster 2009:6).

Psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus published *On Memory* in 1885 which, through observation and experimentation, explores rates of forgetting information that has been learnt over a period of time. Ebbinghaus's *Forgetting Curve*, often quoted within the education system, shows how quickly we lose our retention of information from 100% to 30% in the first two days, 30%-25% over the next few days and reducing further to 20% within the first week where it is retained over time (Foster 2009:8). Ebbinghaus's research also informs us that once the skill or information has been learnt, e.g. learning a language, it can be re-learnt at a faster rate than in someone who has not learnt the language in the first place (Foster 2009:9). Therefore, there must be a residual amount left within the long-term memory. This would suggest that frequently revisiting knowledge, practising a new skill, or in my research revisiting a performance, is important for learning. Memories which are continually re-thought and re-worked become strengthened and developed over time through regular retrieval and revisiting. Applying Ebbinghaus's theory to my research, returning after a time gap of more than a week, I could assume the memory of the performance had been rehearsed and re-thought, being no longer retained within the children's working memory and transferred into their long-term memory.

Within the field of education, Ebbinghaus's findings not on forgetting, but more importantly on revisiting to retain information, revision of topics or revisiting new knowledge taught during a lesson, has grown in importance due to the current preoccupation with exams. When focusing on testing, recent research suggests the longer the delay between re-visiting information to be recalled the greater the memory loss (Wallner and Bauml 2018:890). Therefore, returning after a period of one–three months, one year and two years may have a negative effect on memory due to difficulties in retrieval. In contrast, Bucknall, in her work on hypermnesia quotes Jacqueline Bergstein and Matthew Erdelyi's assertion that 'recall reliably improves with repeated testing, but only with certain stimuli'. For Bucknall music became the

essential trigger, 'music became, for me, a carrier of memory that could be used to trigger the hypermnesic recollection' (2017:17). I occasionally employed visual triggers but, due to practical reasons, did not consider other sensory intervention to stimulate recall such as music.

In contrast to Ebbinghaus's work on forgetting, Walter Kintsch in his introduction to Frederick Bartlett's research *Remembering* (1932), suggests, 'Personal experience and general knowledge, reproduction and reconstruction are all aspects of "memory"' (Kintsch 1995: xi). Bartlett refutes the suggestion that 'memories are "fixed and lifeless"' (1995:311). His study focused on a culturally unfamiliar narrative, *The War of the Ghosts*, and how participants when remembering, made sense of the narrative by connecting it to their own experience, emotions or culture. Whilst, Bartlett found, participants shortened the story, he also argued 'what people remember is, to some extent, mediated by their emotional and personal commitment to—and investment in – the original to be remembered event' (Foster 2009:12). He also found when recalling the story participants 'reconstructed' it with their own general knowledge and cultural experience to increase sense-making. Significant to my research, is Bartlett's notion of memory as 'reconstructive' rather than 'reproductive'. Psychologist Jonathan Foster suggests the act of 'reconstructing' memories is often unconscious, 'people think they are remembering accurately whereas they are reconstructing' (2009:13). Similarly, I need to consider how much the children reconstruct what they have seen in a performance by 'filling in the gaps' unconsciously with what they expect to happen or drawing from their own knowledge of the world or experiences, which may be quite limited in the case of the younger children. As Theatre Alibi's performances have many un-representational elements this may be more of an issue due to the wider age range of the children. Due to some of the abstract issues explored in a performance, of which the children may not have knowledge or experience, therefore re-constructions may be distortions of what they have seen or understood.¹¹⁶

Memory research since the 1960s has focused on its functionality; how memory is stored and retrieved, particularly Richard Atkinson and Richard Shiffrin's (1968) three-stage model. They considered information to be briefly stored and quickly lost in the

¹¹⁶ Examples of distortions or re-constructions will be discussed later, p.301, p.318.

sensory memory before being transferred into the short-term memory (also referred to as working memory). The short-term memory with its limited capacity is a temporary repository for information until, through additional thought processes, it is transferred into the long-term memory, which has unlimited capacity and where information is held until it is needed for retrieval. Memories can only be stored in the long-term memory and later retrieved if they have been rehearsed or played over and then stored (Foster 2009:27-31).

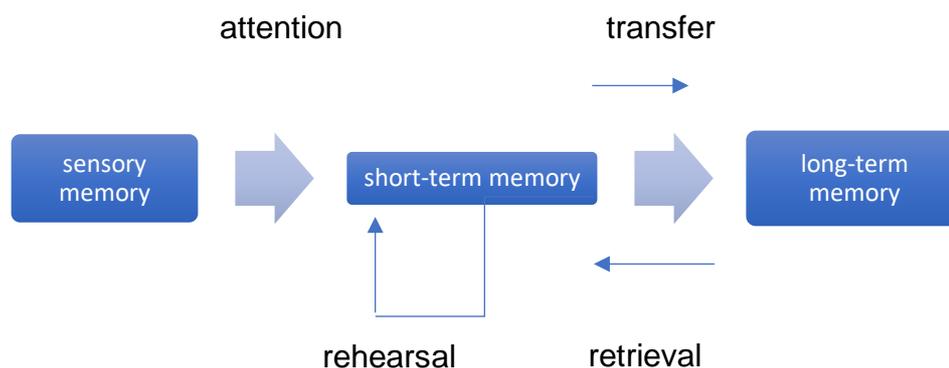


Fig 28. Atkinson and Shiffrin's multi-store model of memory

This aspect of accessing the long-term memory is significant for my research when I revisit children. Applying Atkinson and Shiffrin's theory, I deduce that what the child remembers is because of deeper thought processes, with the child having rehearsed and given thought to the events, characters and emotions for it to have entered the long-term memory and be able to be retrieved.

George Sperling's memory experiments in the 1960s, asking participants to remember a long list of 20-30 words found, due to the short-term memory becoming full, it was only the last items which were remembered. This may be relevant to the memory of performances with children having greater recall of the latter part of the performance.

Endel Tulving's work on episodic memory and semantic memory within our long-term memory system may also be relevant to my research. Wheeler, Struss and Tulving describes episodic memory as 'awareness experienced when one thinks back to a specific moment in one's personal past and consciously recollects some prior episode or state as it previously experienced' (1997:33 in Eysenck and Keane 2010:253). In

contrast, semantic memory is ‘the aspect of human memory that corresponds to general knowledge...without connection to any particular time or place’ (Eysenck and Keane 2010:255). However, Tulving also suggests over time the knowledge from events becomes semantic and therefore there is a blending of semantic and episodic memory (1999:21). Younger children watching a performance in the school hall, particularly if this is their first encounter with theatre, may not have the semantic memory to know ‘how to behave’ or have previous episodic memories to draw upon. This was illustrated when Reception age children entered the hall and stood, for the first few minutes of the performance (BM-FS01-SMC1), or other children who want to chat throughout the performance (AJ-FS02-WB1), or who empathise so much with a character that they want to re-assure them by calling out, ‘Don’t worry... It will be alright’ (TM-FS14-GPS).

I accept the recall of a performance may be susceptible to a context, for example, Theatre Alibi returning each year may increase the ability to retrieve and reprocess previous performances. For some children, my visits to the same classroom for research became synonymous with the theatre company, such as, ‘You’re Theatre Alibi’. In one school, a child whom I had seen annually to recall her memory of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, was drawing a picture of Fortuna. When I looked at the picture she had drawn I noticed the character had thick curly hair, as I have. The girl said, ‘I’ve drawn her to look like you as I remember you better’ (TM-FS01-WB). As a researcher, I need to be mindful of my presence and the influence this may have on the children’s recall. It was therefore important for me to work with a range of children, those who knew me and those who did not.

Our recall is influenced by our motivation, interests, general knowledge and our reasoning. Children’s memory of performance will be influenced by the way they engage with the performance, how it connects with their lives, whether it interests them and whether they understand the content and concepts being performed. This is particularly relevant when considering the wide age range of Theatre Alibi audiences.

Within an educational context, memory is inextricably linked to learning and is a growing area of research. Psychologists, Susan Gathercole and Tracy Packiam Alloway, members of the Centre for Working Memory and Learning at the Universities

of York and Durham, suggest working memory is the preferred term to short-term memory. They describe it as 'the ability we have to hold in mind and mentally manipulate information over short periods of time' describing it as a 'mental workspace that we can use to store important information in the course of our mental activities' (Gathercole and Packiam Alloway 2007:4). In a curriculum that is predominantly knowledge-based and functional, remembering such things as facts, mental arithmetic, correct spellings and 'right answers' are all tested elements where children need accuracy based on an effective working memory. As there is a fluidity and transference of thoughts between the working and long-term memory, the issue of recall may be connected to issues of retrieval, the memories are stored but not easily accessed except through effective memory triggers. When considering memory capacity and the influence of age, they suggest generally working memory grows as children develop until teenage years. However, working memory is not fixed by age, with considerable variation in capacity within a class of children of the same age. In a typical class of seven-eight year olds, there will be children who have a poor working memory having the capacity of a four-year old and others having the capacity of an eleven-year old (Gathercole and Packlam Alloway 2007:7). This research may go some way to explain why children in my research remember varying aspects of a performance; however, many teachers have noted children from their classes who have poor working memory and they had not expected them to remember many details have exceptional recall of the performance. This would suggest their heightened memory, demonstrated through enhanced recall of the performance, is due to other factors, such as a stronger interest or emotional connection.

Part One: *Discovery*

3.The Viscosity of the memory of performance

This section looks at discovery and principally focuses on ethnographic evidence gathered immediately after the performance, and after a period of one to three months.

Findings on the memory of performance

As has been illustrated in Chapters Four and Five, children's experience of being asked to reflect on a performance varies greatly between schools. Some children will have watched the performance and it will not be referred to again by the teacher, whilst others may have the opportunity to discuss or have spent a series of lessons inspired by the performance. However, all children will have their own memories which will permeate, be filtered and reshaped over time.

Immediately after the performance or within a day

As cognitive neuro-scientist Michael Gazzaniga suggests, 'Everything in life is memory, save for the thin edge of the present' (Gazzaniga quoted in Foster 2009:2), therefore it was important to consider children's initial responses. With post-performance discussion immediately after the performance sensory elements, production elements, characterisation, the unexpected, emotional connections and humour are all prominent in the children's memory. Like the *Critical Mass* study with adults, children placed value on sensory aspects of the performance, particularly music. In *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* the hang drum provided an unusual, astral sound which added an other-worldly quality as well as intrigue. As one child remarked,

The drum was brilliant. It made me think of Minecraft music...It was like the sound of astronauts high in the sky...it was new and exciting...it was floating music and helped Paul and Fortuna float around...The drum was brilliant when Paul jumped down from the ladder on the moon...the drum was just right – you wouldn't have been able to use a guitar. It wouldn't be as good (Yr4 child FS-BM105-WBS).

Not only was the boy interested in the instrument itself, he had also started to draw upon his own experience of computer games, integrate the music into the action and review the appropriateness of instrument selection. In many schools, children asked what the instruments were and commented on enjoying the music and it adding to the emotion of the performance:

C: The music stopped it [the play] from being boring and it added to the theme.

S: The speed of the music made it more exciting or made you feel sad, particularly the accordion (FS-BM101-SVP Year 4), or

I: The beginning music-the song- made me feel really happy.

D: I liked the music – it was like a full stop. It makes you feel different (FS-BM101-SVP Year 3).

Whilst being asked for their initial responses the children would often unconsciously mimic physical actions from the performance when they spoke, such as the ‘hup, hup, hey’ movement as a giant mimed ladder is lifted up the outside of the building, or tilting from side to side as they copied the actions of a taxi ride going around in circles.



Fig. 29 *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* – The Taxi Ride

Production elements are also prominently discussed: ‘When the flats and the moon lit up it was fantastic’ (FS-BM105-WBS Year 4), the unexpected set reveal when the block of flats is turned into an illuminated interior of the moon, the puppets and objects used throughout the production. The children regularly mentioned the unexpected events, such as props being used to signify something else, ‘It was really clever the way they used the cloth to show [Paul] going up the stairs’ (FS-BM109-Wi1 Year 3), particularly if by sleight of hand they have appeared from nowhere.

Along with the set and props, discussion of the central characters being puppets dominated the debate, with some children believing the characters were ‘real’ rather than puppets, commenting ‘the puppets acted well’ (FS-BM101-SVP-Year 3). Conversely, the children were both emotionally attached as well as being curious about how they were manipulated, particularly Clarence’s ability to fly at the end of the

performance (FS-BM101-SVP-Year 3). Infrequently, children did not enjoy the use of puppets either because they were frightened by them or because they would have preferred 'a real person' (FS-BM106-HoPS Year 2, BM-FS01- SMC).

The acting is regularly mentioned in post-performance discussion with the children being amazed by the skill of the actors who, in one breath could be playing many roles with different accents and characteristics. Upper KS2 classes appreciated the acting and characterisation as this often linked to their school productions or forthcoming school plays where the characters need to be convincing.

Post-performance, the children particularly remembered the humour and skill of the taxi-ride sequence. As one child remarked;

The taxi-ride was amazing. It must be hard to get the timing together as a shared movement, knowing what was next...the way they held the little car...The way they moved when they were in the taxi was very funny (FS-BM101-SVP Year 4).

They frequently mentioned the slapstick humour of Benjamin's mood change and Clarence's transformational ability to fly and speak on his seventh birthday. Older children reported different aspects being funny, such as the irony of Paul exhaustedly climbing several flights of stairs and then seeing there was a lift (FS-BM105-WBS Year 4).



Fig.30 *The Boy Who Climbed Into the Moon* – Clarence and Paul

Recurrently children would comment, often excitedly, on moments where they had felt a strong emotional connection, such as feeling sadness when they saw Benjamin wearing a bag over his head and his melancholy of fighting in the war, or feeling despair at the possibility of Fortuna being abandoned in the Moon. One child commented, 'If it wasn't theatre, it would be sad' (BM-FS02-SIS Year 5). What was unusual in this comment was her recognition that they were watching fiction rather than reality and her ability to separate her emotional response.

Discussion of characters was mainly confined to the puppet characters, Benjamin, the twins, Molly and Mabel, and the protectiveness of Mum and Dad. However, one Year 2 child wanted to speak about an imaginary character, created only by a story-teller's voice, a 'shouting man' at the bottom of the block of flats (FS-BM108-WB1 Year 2), who may have borne some connection to the child's own experience.

Children also took delight in repeating key words or phrases from the performance in the discussion; the phrase 'Sausages are better than War' was often repeated and the show was described as 'magnificent', a word which the central character, Paul used. Although most children focused their discussion on the plot, the production and characterisation, a few older children had started to engage with the meaning beyond the plot even though they had only seen it an hour earlier. Whilst having 'incredible ideas' was a common theme, one child had started to add his own creativity to what they had seen and started to expand the performance, 'It's about Paul at school. Teachers were telling him how silly his ideas were but Benjamin showed him his ideas were better like "Sausages are better than War"' (FS-BM109-Wil Year 6). Similarly, in a different school, another child had clearly thought about how the performance related to her own experience and aspirations,

The play's about proving your ideas, they may be wacky but everything is possible. You could go on to be a writer. So, everything is possible. People didn't believe him. The man at the bottom of the building kept putting him down. Adults make judgement (BM-FS02-SIS Year 5).

When asked what they thought they would remember, because they had enjoyed the performance so much, the children often replied, 'All of it', 'It was unforgettable' and

went on to specifically refer to the pear magically appearing and the puppets, Paul, Fortuna and Clarence.

4. What memories remain over time? Recalling the performance after one-three months

Greater detail emerges (Finding 1)

Data drawn from 194 children¹¹⁷ found children often remembered and shared greater detail from the performance at the time of the returning visit than they did during the post-performance discussion. This was surprising and unexpected. All children could draw some facet of the performance. I suggest the children needed time to process the performance and had spoken about it with their friends or enjoyed remembering aspects in their imagination; as a result, the memory of the performance appeared to be accurate and real. They often remembered specific elements, such as

There was a neighbour who was an artist – she painted a picture of all of the people who lived in the flats. She did loads of paintings(ME-BM01-SMC1),

or

There was a girl in the moon who had been fired out of a cannon in Egypt. Her uncle put too much gunpowder in the cannon and she flew too far and landed in the moon (ME-BM01-SaS).

Class discussion showed most children remembered at least three aspects of the performance, whilst others remembered considerably more in greater detail:

Paul wanted to touch the sky. He met a lady. She asked if she was the nephew of Mabel. She said she was Molly, Mabel's twin sister. Mabel was an artist and had gone on holiday. Molly kept practising what she said "Hello – I'm Molly, Mabel's twin sister and she gone on holiday". In the end, Mabel turned up and that was a surprise. There was a taxi ride and they kept turning around and around. They got a huge ladder up the building up to the sky where Paul met Fortuna who was in the sky. She was fired from a cannon over the pyramids and went too far and landed in the moon. I also remember the twin sisters had a brother. When Paul went to the moon he met a bomber pilot (Child R),

¹¹⁷ 48 children following 2016 tour and 146 children following 2018 tour.

and

I remembered it so well because it was the best performance. When the boy climbed into the moon, I remember there was a girl there. She had been fired out of a cannon. There were twins—one of them liked cooking sausages and giving them to people. The boy thought the moon was a hole in the sky. “Sausages are better the War”. There was a person who put a sack over his head because he was scared in the war (Child M),

or

There was a man who took a bag off his head. My favourite bit was when he met a friend in the moon. He was grateful to have friends—they are very important... Benjamin had been 12 years with his bag on his head. The play was about having dreams... both Paul and Benjamin overcame their fears—not being shy and they became friends (Child T) (ME-BM01-SMC1/2/3).

As the examples above suggest, there was an increase of narrative memory, including momentary incidents within the performance. It is also interesting how the children above remembered the character’s names. Many memories resulted from emotional connections as well as a growing number which involved a personal association to the child.

Immediately after the performance the children thought they would remember puppets; this is only partially the case. The children remember the three puppet characters Paul, Fortuna and Clarence well but do not mention that they are puppets. In the case of Paul and Fortuna they have become humanised as a boy or girl. From 194 children who were interviewed within this time-frame only three children mentioned they were puppet characters, two of whom mentioned this because they did not like the use of puppets (BM-FS01-SMC2). When teachers revealed they were puppets many of the children were surprised to be reminded of this. Similarly, when the children were asked to draw their memories, the puppets were remembered as real children; only one child drew a puppeteer holding Paul and another included a small rod behind Paul’s head allowing the puppeteer to manipulate it (FS-BM103-APS2). In the case of drawing their memory, this may be partially due to the limitations of the children’s drawing ability, however, in all cases, including the two cases where the children recognised the characters as puppets, the puppets were given facial expressions, often smiling faces, and some include words they may have said. What

seemed to be important for the children was the emotional connection the puppet characters had with them:

S: It didn't matter that Paul was a puppet. You could just imagine he was a boy. I felt really sad when Fortuna didn't have a mum and dad. It made me cry on the inside.

E: The girl in the stripy shirt [actor Kirsty] used so many different voices. I liked it when she was funny Clarence and felt sad when she was Benjamin (FS-BM103-APS2 Year 4).

Characters and plot begin to have greater depth and development (Finding 2)

Similar to Deldime and Pigeon's conclusions, the children started to become selective over which characters they remember and which they forgot. Paul, as the central character was always remembered. The children often retained more detail about Fortuna, particularly her back-story with many remembering her by name as 'The Great Fortuna' (FS-BM111-HPS Year 6). The child characters particularly became more important, but also strange or quirky characters; Clarence is remembered along with 'the lady with the fancy clothes' [Clara] (ME-BM01-SaS). The character's back-story took on new importance and was remembered in considerable detail with the children recalling narrated sections as if they had been enacted as shown by child R, M and T above. Fortuna is regularly drawn in mid-flight or with a sad face in the moon encouraging Paul to collect her. The flight was a narrated story within the play rather than enacted but due to its strong visual impact is very well remembered. Surprises or unusual aspects of the performance are also remembered, such as 'Molly was pretending to be Mabel' (ME-BM01-SaS) and Mabel being a great artist, and appearing at the end of the performance. Relationships between characters are also remembered, 'Benjamin was Molly's brother. He fought in the war. When he was in the war he saw a bomber flying into the moon' and 'There was an uncle in the Moon who liked making machines and was making a ladder to visit Venus' (Child P and S respectively—ME-BM01-SaS) The fighter pilot, although referred to as an uncle by Child S, was never mentioned post-performance, but has emerged after three months. Universally, Clarence, the flying, speaking poodle is remembered affectionately and in greater detail. In one school, he was compared to Paul with both having dreams that no-one believed and were realised (ME-BM01-SMC3). Unlike *The Memory of the*

Spectator, it is not only the central characters which are remembered but also many of the minor characters. This may be a conflicting finding to Deldime and Pigeon's research or may be explained by the quirkiness of the characters and use of puppets in *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*.

Sensory Elements (Finding 3)

When I revisited after one-three months it became clear from the children's responses and drawings that, unlike the findings of *Critical Mass* with adults where sensory elements are forgotten, in children many of the sensory elements are still remembered, particularly the physical elements and liveness. The children would often sway from side to side when recalling, 'They were driving in a car going around in a circle', and 'There was a ladder sequence –Hup, Hup, Hey' (ME-BM01-SMC1), accompanied enthusiastically by repeated actions associated with the community helping Paul climb the ladder.

Conversely, an area of significant change is music and the recall of musical instruments, which are rarely mentioned beyond the initial performance except by the very occasional child who remembers the unusual instruments, 'there was an accordion and a hang drum' (ME-BM01-SMC1). Music has become ephemeral, being absorbed into the overall emotion of the performance. Within the data sample of nearly 200 children only two children mentioned the music, one cited above and another suggested that 'the music helped make it more like real life, a story' (FS-BM103-APS).

When asked to draw their memories, the children regularly drew the set, and the 'Wow' of the reveal and the lights coming on (ME-BM01-SMC2).

Evidence of further thought and understanding (Finding 2)

Like the *Critical Mass* study the children remembered many of the central themes from the plot and developed their ideas on the meaning of the play. 'Sausage are better than War' was regularly remembered by every class visited. As more detail emerges over time than from the post-performance discussion this suggests evidence of further thought. Messages and meaning from the play are given more significance, such as

Paul's dream being realised and him becoming resilient. Broader themes when the community help Paul by lifting the ladder, 'To get the moon they had help from their neighbours'(ME-BM01-SMC1) and Benjamin's experience of war have emerged as important, 'There was a person with a sack on his head because he had been to war...He wouldn't take the bag of his head because he was embarrassed' (ME-BM01-SMC3). The connection between the themes, the characters and the children's lives was often discussed. Associations between the play and the children's own lives were significant as illustrated with Trent, pp.286-7.

Cognitive scientist Daniel Willingham suggests, 'Memory is the residue of thought' (2010:54). Therefore, whether the performance is discussed in the classroom or not, it does not mean that it has not been deliberated in the children's minds or with friends. From the intensity of some children's memory it is clear they have thought a great deal about the performance. An example of this deliberation was seen when a five-year old child approached an actress at the end of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* (March 2018) and spoke about the previous production, *Apple John*, seen four months earlier. Not only had he recognised the same actress but he also wanted to tell her how he had been thinking about the previous performance. He proceeded to talk confidently about how he now understood the performance, talking about the abstract idea, and how the boy's life had been linked to the life cycle of the tree (ME-AJ01-M). The teacher looked on amazed by his understanding and memory, particularly as she had viewed him as a quiet, unexceptional learner.

Emotional recollection and impact of the performance is more positive and long-lasting (Finding 4)

When asked to recall the performance, the children did this with relative ease, with few children having little or no memory. If the children were asked to write or draw their memories they set to the task quickly and with enthusiasm. What was evident from discussions with the children or when they were drawing was the heightened enjoyment the performance had left behind.

Evidence from using the VQ during the re-tour of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, where children were asked 'How did the performance make you feel?', I was

able to assess how emotional impact of the performance changes over time. This suggested that the emotional memory of the performance improved positively over time.

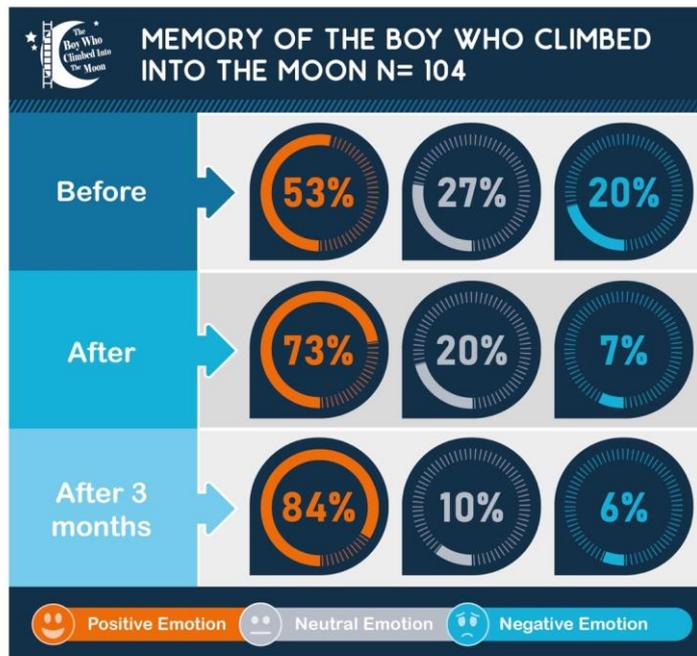


Table 30. Emotional Memory of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* (2018).

It is noteworthy how long-lasting the positive emotions were when comparing responses between ‘before’ and ‘after three months’ showing 29% improved positivity, and conversely, the reduction in neutral emotions, particularly ‘tired’, which children regularly reported following a performance. Further data analysis showed improved positivity was particularly strong in those children who had reported multiple or contrasting emotions originally, who now felt clearer positive memories of how the performance had made them feel. Those children who reported strongly negative or strongly positive emotions remained constant. This did not mean that the children did not remember the sadder parts, quite the opposite, but the overall residue of the performance had grown more positive.

Whilst a one-off performance might not seem to be worth the expense in time and money by the school, in fact, it can be more significant than it might seem. For some children, the emotional impact of the performance continued beyond a feeling of ‘happiness’ to a more significant change with the memory of the performance and

subsequent discussion being intense. Often the teacher may not have been aware of the impact, it being evident only to the child and their close friends who revisited the performance in their discussion; as Lisa explained, when discussing the impact of the performance of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* on her friend Trent, who was 'always talking about the play' (ME-BM01-SMC: 2).

I met Trent, a Year 5 child, as he completed his pre-performance VQ. He was supported by a Learning Support Assistant for his emotional difficulties and sat quietly in the class, looking anxious and nervous. When he completed his questionnaire, he had highlighted three apples and written 'nervous', 'worried' and 'scared'. His teacher explained that he hated puppets and masks, or any form of dressing up, and, as he knew the performance's central character was a puppet, he did not expect Trent to stay in the hall very long. My observation of him showed the teacher was correct, as Trent left the performance within the first five minutes but returned after a few minutes and gradually engaged with the performance. At the end, he was smiling and said how much he had enjoyed the performance, how he had related to Paul, the puppet central character. He wrote 'so happy' twice on his VQ. When I returned three months later, I asked the children to draw their recollections of the performance and identify how they remembered feeling. Trent was keen to speak with me. He spoke confidently and no longer appeared to be supported by additional staff. Trent was pleased to see me again and asked if I remembered how the play made him happy. Smiling throughout, he told me,

Seeing *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* changed me...I'm so more confident, I'm not scared anymore... I don't have nightmares anymore ...I sleep better. I'm different—aren't I, Lisa? (talking to the girl next to him) (ME-BM01-SMC).

Trent told me how he used to be terrified by his phobia and that he often could not sleep due to nightmares, but since the performance he had slept well which had helped him in school. Lisa, his friend, confirmed Trent's story. He explained how he interacted with the performance, how the puppets 'were normal people' and Paul 'was a normal boy...like me. He overcame his fears... and Benjamin overcame his fears... and so have I. That's what I have done' (ME-BM01-SMC). Trent recalled his emotional journey whilst watching the performance, using a traffic light system, to explain how

his emotions changed. Although he had told his friend, he had not shared the story with his teacher, who noticed that Trent had grown in confidence during the summer to the extent that he was now getting into trouble. When I revisited after a year, Trent continued to speak positively about the performance but the heightened positive emotional impact had reduced. Due to his growing maturity or the passing of time, he placed the performance within a wider context, explaining he would still not choose to see a play with puppets, but his phobia had diminished. He also reported that he had occasional 'bad dreams' but these were not as intense as before the performance (ME-BM02-SMC:1).

The impact of post-performance discussion (Finding 5)

As has been discussed in Chapter Five, post-performance discussion helps the children to process the performance and when seen in the context of memory leads to enhanced recall. The children from classes where there had been discussion were also more confident when asked to recall the performance. This was clear from field-study notes of a re-visit to one school with three classes; one class where there had been discussion following the performance and two classes which did not engage in any post-performance discussion. The recall after three months was significantly richer in the class where there had been discussion, as illustrated by child R, p.280; the children were more engaged in recalling action and in drawing their memories of the performance. Due to the detail of her recollection I asked whether she had read the book, and she said she hadn't but had 'loved the performance and thought about it a lot' (ME-BM01-SMC). In the other classes, children were more cautious about remembering. Some children were initially anxious about their lack of memory, but after a few suggestions from class mates, often based on the arc of the narrative, memories flowed. However, contributions were often from two to three individuals, such as child T and M, p.281, rather than the whole class. Drawings of the memory of the performance also contained more detail and more variety, going beyond the cursory recollection of set or plot, in the case where there had been discussion.

However, although post-performance discussion is important to help children interpret, understand and process the performance, we should not underestimate the impact of the performance alone without teacher intervention, as in the case of Trent. Applying

memory and educational research, the time gap between the initial performance and my return visit was important for my study. It was clear, using Ebbinghaus's memory research on rates of forgetting, Bartlett's research on the cultural adaptation and importance of story when recalling, and Atkinson and Shiffrin's study on the transfer and retrieval of data between the short-term and long-term memory that the performance had been well rehearsed in the children's minds.

From classes where there was no discussion, it is also possible to conclude that individual children must have spent time, 'playing it over in their minds', thinking about the performance repeatedly for it to be able to move from their working memory to long-term memory, even if they remembered less than children who had the performance confirmed and enhanced by classroom discussion. However, at one school, the deputy head teacher was amazed when Child M, p.281, proceeded to give a more detailed account to his classmates. She explained afterwards that M was a lower-ability child with a poor working memory who had not remembered to turn up for an appointment yesterday despite two reminders (ME-BM01-SMC1).

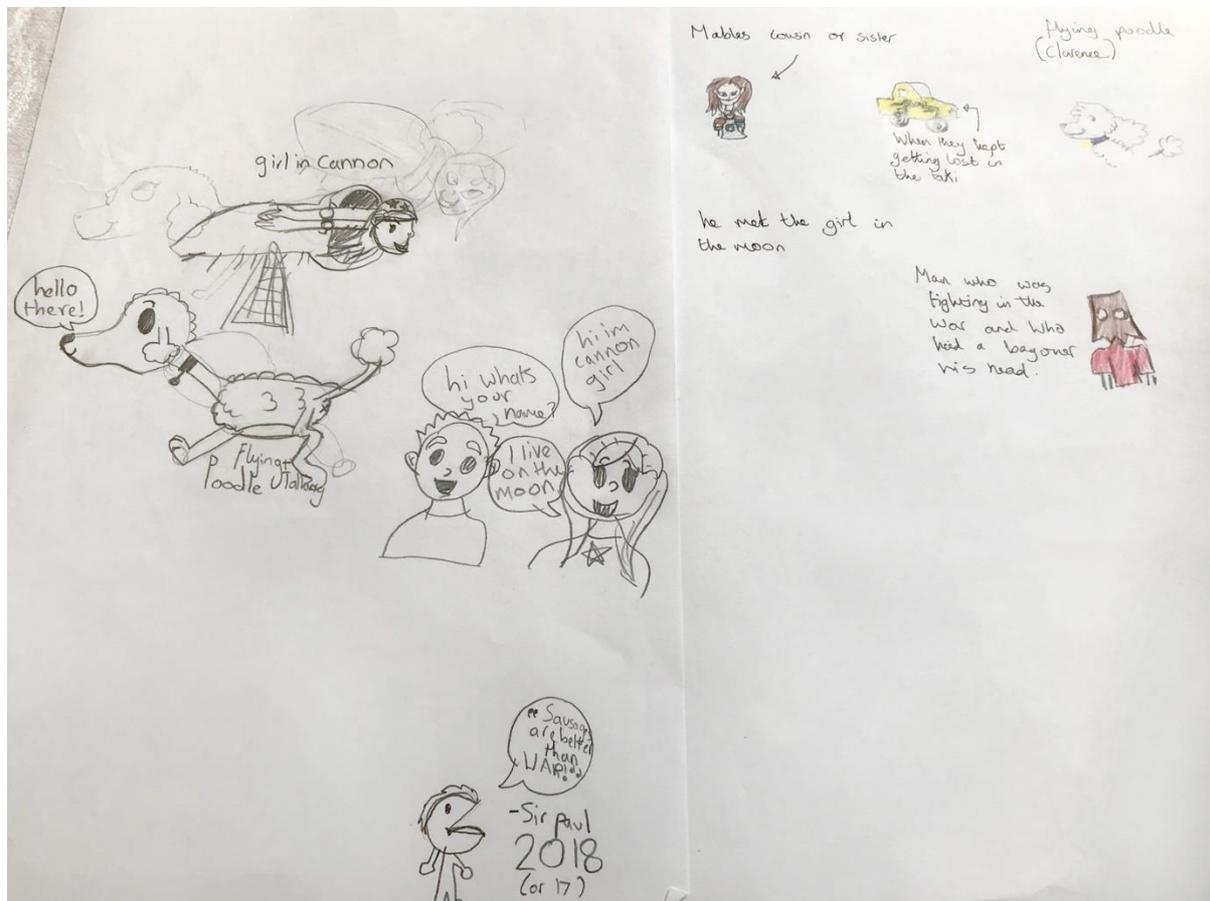
Part Two: *Re-discovery*

Focusing on one year after the performance allows for closer comparison with other studies and a further Theatre Alibi production, *Apple John*, which highlights the impact of memory of a non-verbal performance, particularly with audience members with additional needs. I end this section with a further comparison between my research with children and other previously mentioned studies with adults, *The Memory of the Spectator* and *Critical Mass*, analysing the similarities and differences.

5. Revisiting the performance after a year (Finding 1 and 2)

The data set of children asked to recall the performance of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* after a year is larger than that after three months as most evidence was collected in conjunction with the *Apple John* tour in Autumn 2017 and memories

collected from the original tour the previous year.¹¹⁸ In many ways, there was little variation in the depth of memory between three months and one year, however, some children needed a prompt to be able to relocate where this memory was stored. A conversation with a partner or photograph from the performance helped rediscover the performance and led to new recollections from the performance, such as the pilot who flew into the moon being discussed. When remembering the back-stories of characters, recall was similar to nine months earlier, however, two major differences were in the recall of props and objects not previously mentioned and the way the deeper meaning of the performance emerged. This was illustrated with the reflections on war, Benjamin's back-story and the dependence of Paul on the community of neighbours for him to reach his goal.



¹¹⁸ Two schools were also re-visited after the 2018 retour during the *Table Mates* production.

Fig.31 Child S drawings after ten weeks (left) and after one year (right) (ME-BM01-SMC and ME-BM02-SMC).¹¹⁹

These drawings from S help to illustrate how she remembers different memories of the same performance across time. It is also interesting to note the emotions of the puppet characters in the earlier drawing.

For many children, Paul became a more developed character, often judged to have been unhappy at school. The emotional connection between the character and the children is important; they enjoy seeing a version of themselves but also remember contrasting characters such as Benjamin sitting with a bag over his head, living alone in a lovely garden and being sad because of going to war. Benjamin has taken on a new significance with details previously not mentioned. The children remembered not only that he was in the war but also how he remembered seeing a fighter pilot flying into the moon and not returning.

After a year detailed memories persist for many children, as can be seen from the more nuanced comments below:

The war veteran didn't like talking about it. It brought back memories and he heard the sounds of the war in his ears, like the sounds of bombs, whistles and bangs and so he put a bag on his head to escape,

and

When the man was in the war he saw a fighter plane and it disappeared...When he was in the war, they all dropped down dead to stop the war. The man had a bag over his head because he couldn't cope with the war,

and

There was a person who had a bag over his head. He was depressed from the war, which was something like 70 years earlier, and he wore a bag over his head and shut himself away ever since. The person

¹¹⁹ Transcription of drawings (Left drawing after ten weeks) 'a girl in a cannon', 'Flying and talking poodle saying "hello there!", conversation "Hi what's your name?" "Hi I'm cannon girl. I live on the moon", person at the bottom of the page "Sausages are better than WAR", (Right drawing after one year) 'Mables (sic) cousin or sister', 'Flying poodle (Clarence)', 'When they kept getting lost in the taxi', 'he met the girl in the moon', 'Man who was fighting in the war and who had a bag over his head'.

talked about a pilot he had seen in the war who had disappeared (ME-BM02-SMC3).

These three examples help to illustrate the importance of Benjamin, growing empathy for him and an understanding of why he behaved as he did. Comments from semi-structured interviews when the children were drawing their memories also showed development of other characters, so Mabel 'was on holiday, so her sister was in her flat, and then she [Mabel] came back at the end' (ME-BM02-SMC2). A further change in memory is a greater recognition that Paul, Fortuna and Clarence are puppets. Clarence is also remembered in greater detail and with humour,

The dog was able to talk when he was flying, At the beginning he could only bark and he kept barking in his owner's ear and told her what would happen and he was right and it did come true (ME-BM02-SMC2).

When recalling the taxi-ride in one school, a girl remembered not only the physicality of the journey but also some of the people and places the taxi passed (ME-BM02-IPS). There continued to be a blending of the performance from mistaken memory to re-invention with children adding emotions to Paul such as, 'The boy climbed up the ladder and said "I'm scared, it's too high"' (ME-BM02-IPS).

The children often mentioned momentary narrated and mimed sections which over time have now taken on a new reality in the children's minds; for example, when Molly knocks on the window and a pigeon flies away, created by the actor's and puppet's gaze accompanied by the actor making a fluttering sound, has become real in the children's minds (ME-BM02-SVPS1). Memories such as this become prominent in the time lapse between the performance but are rarely mentioned immediately after in the post-performance discussion.

Memory of Props and Objects (Finding 6)

Due to Theatre Alibi's high production values, props which may appear momentarily, such as the objects which are found in the moon, are regularly remembered. There is recall of minor props which have not previously been mentioned such as 'A girl, Fortuna, was shot out of a cannon and landed in the moon. There was also a poster

of “The Great Fortuna” which we saw’ (ME-BM02-SMC3). The children also recalled with great accuracy the items which were in the Moon including a missile which Fortuna threw only for it to reappear as a small rod puppet seconds later. They remembered the flying objects in the Moon – the hot air balloon, the astronaut and ‘a German fighter plane’. In recall drawings, the set is remembered in less detail, however, the children had increasingly drawn faces, often smiling, in the windows of the block of flats. Some children remembered a disc at the back of the block of flats which was rotated to create an urban landscape but the inside of the moon and the ‘reveal’ which had a ‘wow’ effect initially was not remembered by many, only being mentioned by three children. However, the props which relate to the Moon are well remembered. The pterodactyl is remembered as a character or prop rather than being a sound effect made by an actor (ME-BM02-IPS). Objects that are linked to humour or action are also remembered; the small yellow taxi and the humorous taxi-ride remained a frequently remembered event. The magical appearance of the pear appearing from nowhere is also well remembered, ‘When she pulled the tree, a pear appeared from nowhere’ (ME-BM02-IPS). Over time many of the props have taken on a greater significance than during the post-performance discussion or after three months.

Key lines from the performance, such as ‘Sausages are better than War’ and ‘Magnificent’ were rarely mentioned after three months. This would suggest they have become absorbed into the general memory of Benjamin’s war and the overall emotional memory of the performance. The deeper meaning behind the performance also became more prominent with the children such as Paul needing the help of everyone who lived in the building to help lift the ladder through the windows onto the roof so he could realise his ambitions.

To summarise the changing impact of performance over different time spans, I would like to use the image of a ripple, in which the post-performance experience is at its core and the changing features ripple out, changing in value and prominence over time spans of up to three months and after one year.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ See also Appendix Q which illustrates changes in the memory beyond one year.

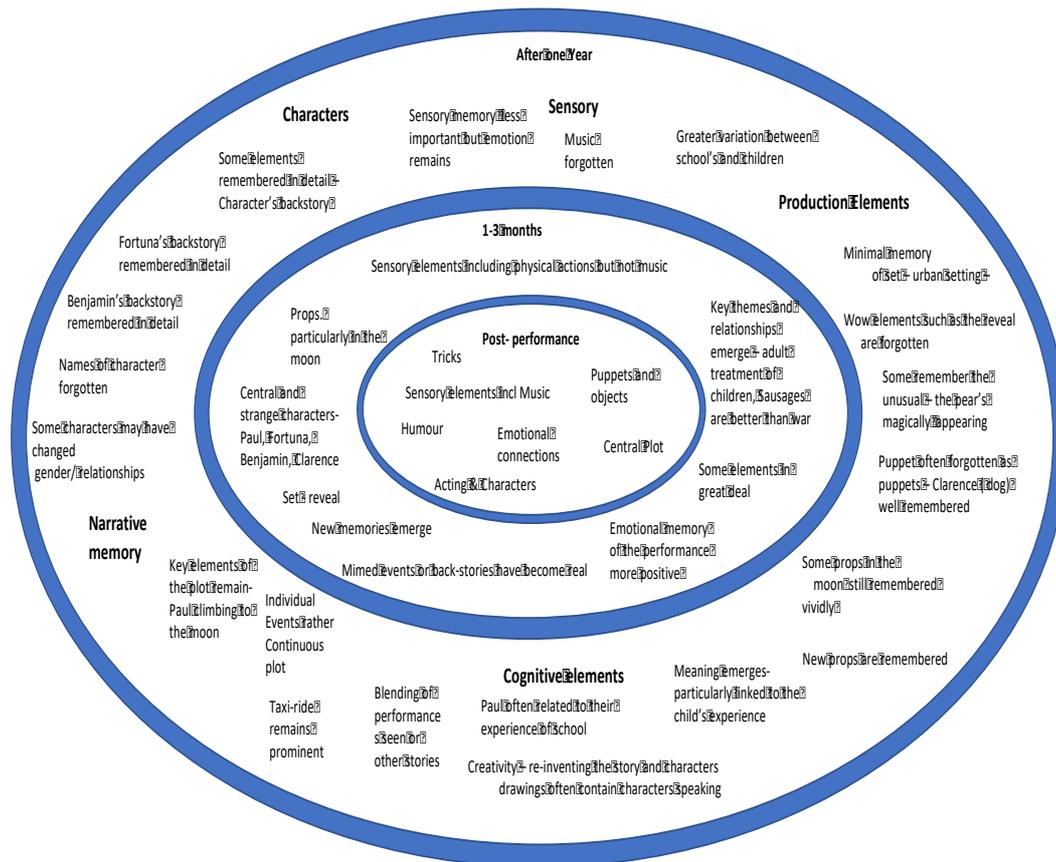


Fig. 32 Memory of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* up to one year.

Children remember beyond teacher expectation (Finding 7)

When the children were asked to recall *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, there was genuine pleasure at being asked to revisit the memory of the performance. Teachers who observed my discussion with the children were amazed by the depth and detail of the children's recall, particularly from some children, often saying how much they had forgotten that the children had remembered. In one school the teacher was surprised by the level of recall and understanding, particularly when placed into the context of the class being bereaved following a recent death of a classmate ten days before the performance and this impacting on them emotionally and reducing their ability to concentrate (ME-BM02-SMC3). Teachers also compared the memory of the performance with usual classroom activities over time. As one teacher commented, 'How come they can remember a performance after a year and not remember an English lesson yesterday?' (ME-BM02-KPS).

As has been shown from data collected after three months, not surprisingly children who had the opportunity to discuss and develop their understanding post-performance remembered the performance in greater detail. On average, classes of children where there had been discussion remembered more than twice the amount of data (10-18 items after a year) compared with classes where there had been no discussion (three-seven items). This was to be expected; the children have processed the information, gathered new knowledge which had been further explained and reinforced.

Children enjoyed remembering and discussing the performance

It is clear from the discussion with children post-performance or after a period of weeks, months, or years, that the performance had been re-lived, re-enjoyed and re-discovered, demonstrating how aspects of the performances had been retrieved from their long-term memory. Children liked being asked to remember and revisit the performance (FS-BM108-WB1). Obviously, the effect of the 'one-off' performance, is not as dramatic for all children as for Trent, cited earlier, although I have uncovered other accounts from children and teachers of impact, particularly in children identifying with the central boy character, Paul's reluctance to go to school, gaining resilience and overcoming inner fear.¹²¹ Paul is an unexpected role model for some children.

6. Does the style of the performance make a difference to memory?

The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon had a greater emphasis on text, puppetry, objects and multiple characters in its storytelling. *Apple John*, being non-verbal, placed greater emphasis on music, physical performance and projected images. The plot was linear and simpler, based on the life-cycle of one character, but, due to its non-verbal portrayal, more abstract and open to interpretation. Across time, after three months and one year, it was generally not as well remembered by all children, but often remembered in detail by a few, as shown from the field-study note from one school after three months:

¹²¹ See p.185.

With *Apple John*, the children clearly remembered the physical aspects, copying the visual vernacular of the tree growing and the train physical movements. They appeared to remember more of the deeper meaning of the performance – e.g. the parallels between the life cycle of the tree and John. The motor cycle accident is remembered but no other emotional aspects. The beginning of the performance with the initial action of the play (the train and the apple being thrown) are prominent, in contrast to *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* where the end of the performance is more prominent)

M: In *Apple John* they didn't say anything. When John was born, a tree started to grow. When he was older he got ill the apple tree got covered in snow. John travelled round the world on a motorbike and joint a gang went to fast [sic]. He fell off his bike broke his bones and went to hospital. Then he found a wife they had a baby and the exactly same happened.

T: Apple John lived for as long as the tree did because he was growing at the same time and had a special joint with the apple tree, so when the trees branch broke off Apple John would break an arm. And when the apple tree was chopped down Apple John would die.

(Field-study notes ME-AJ01-IPS).

M starting to develop the memory as John travelling around the world with a gang is an interesting interpretation. For some children, the familiarity of the plot connecting to the natural environment also added to the longevity of the memory, as shown by a child a year after the performance; 'When I walk by the train station, I pass a tree stump...Every time I see a tree stump by the train station I think of *Apple John*' (ME-AJ02-R1).

Whether it is after three months or a year, the children always remember the non-verbal style and how this made them feel, whether it was positive,

C: I felt amazed...how they told the story without any words...

A: At the start, I thought "What's going on?" But I didn't miss the words...

L: At the start I didn't know there wasn't any speaking ... but in the end, I loved it.

T: I was feeling anxious at the beginning and then I thought it was really interesting (ME-AJ01-SaS).

and

M: It made me feel "weird" and "Wow" – two different feelings at the same time. I felt both how the actors communicated their ideas. I liked having no words. It makes us think we are watching a t.v. I enjoyed how they must have spent so much time doing it and rehearsing.

Mi: It made me feel bizarre because of the acting out [Mimes gestures]... I liked *Apple John*, but it was different.

L: *Apple John*- it was funny, both funny ha, ha and funny strange.

A: Weird – because they didn't talk—hard to understand... but that didn't bother you(ME-AJ01-SHJ).

Or more negatively; in a discussion a year after the performance between two Year 3 boys of differing ability, M, a higher-ability child was keen to tell me firmly, 'I didn't enjoy *Apple John* because I didn't fully understand it', whilst, in contrast, D, a lower-ability boy next to him said, 'I loved it...I enjoyed *Apple John*...It was the best' (ME-AJ02-K). This example may further confirm my finding that upper-ability boys found the abstract, interpretative form of *Apple John* a barrier, possibly due to a lack of resilience and finding 'not knowing' a difficult concept to deal with is sustained.

Narratively, the children remembered moments of emotional engagement, 'it was funny and sad – it was particularly sad when the Dad became ill and died ...I think he died... I'm not sure' (ME-AJ02-Wil1), 'There was a man too. He was stressed' (ME-AJ02-R1) or '*Apple John* was more emotional, I didn't like it when the girl left and the father didn't say he wanted her' (ME-AJ02-K). The emotional impact of a performance can be strong and long-lasting but not always positive. One child seven-year old child, S, who I observed during *Apple John* told me when he returned to the classroom, how angry he felt, although this had not been evident from my observation. His intense anger was due to John participating in a motorcycle race and subsequently crashing; all portrayed through mime and gesture. S felt indignant about John not wearing a helmet for protection and going out without a license or being fully prepared, 'No wonder he had an accident' (AJ-FS15-SaPS:3). S's anger was not short-lived as, when I returned to the class eight months later, the power of his emotional memory had not changed but had become directed less at the character of John but towards his mother (ME-AJ01-SaS). For S, the physical interpretation and the narrative had become intensely real and prolonged.

The motorbike accident, the chainsaw and John's illness are regularly mentioned. When asked to recall *Apple John*, the deepest and most durable memory concerned

the connection between the life cycle of the boy and that of an apple tree as illustrated below.

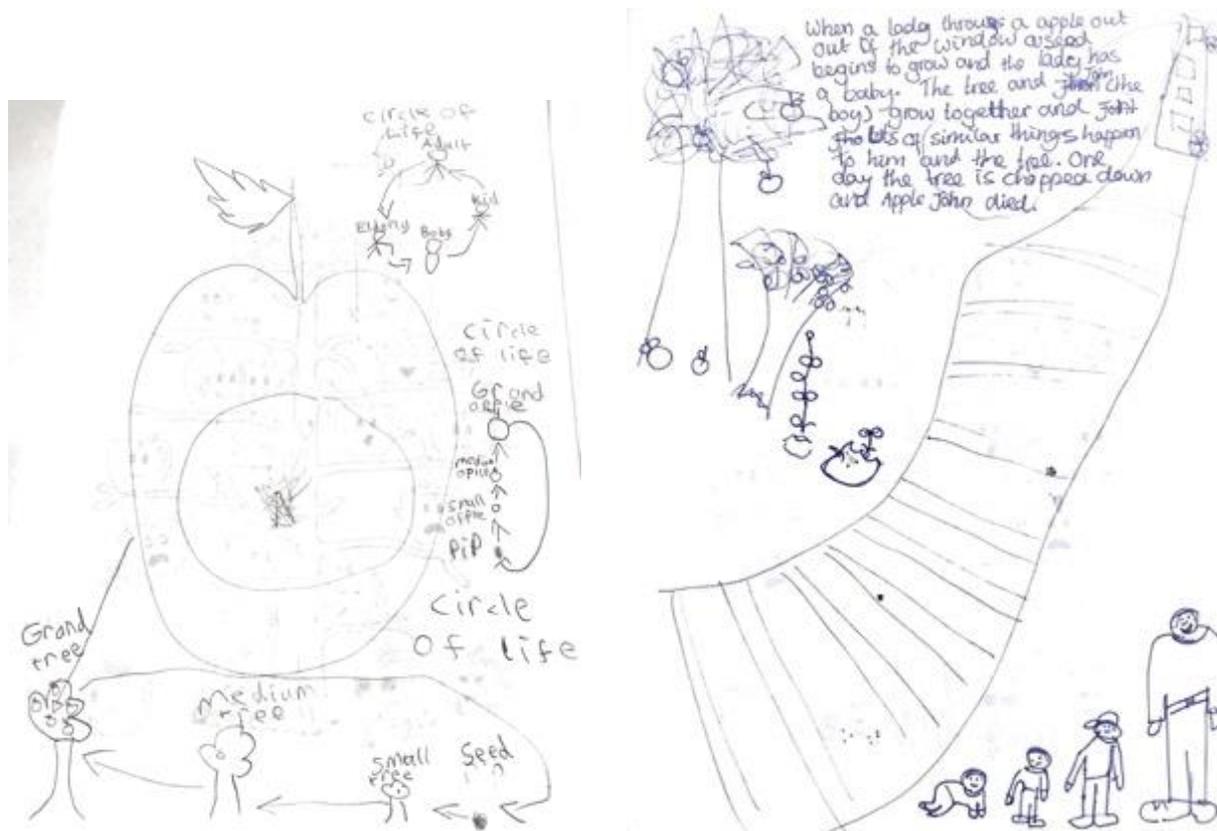


Fig.33 Year 3/4 children recalling *Apple John* after 3 months. ME-AJ01-IPS¹²²

This connection was implied, requiring further thought from younger children to fully understand. It was a surprise to teachers of children who saw the performance when they were aged four-five years that they remembered this a year later (ME-AJ02-HPS1, ME-AJ02-HPS, TM-FS02-H1). The prominence of memories requiring greater thought may be connected to the children having to continually process abstract information during the performance. An additional aspect of the memory being different from the performance was the ending in which the tree was cut down. This was not explicitly connected to John's death in the performance but was predominantly mentioned in the recall after three months or a year. This would suggest the children

¹²² Transcript of drawing (left) 'Circle of Life: Baby–Kid–Adult–Elderly; Circle of Life: pip–small apple–medium apple–grand apple; Circle of Life: Seed–small tree–medium tree–Grand tree' (right) 'When a lady throws a apple out of the window a seed begins to grow and the lady has a baby. The tree and John (the boy) grow together and lots of similar things happen to him and the tree. One day the tree is chopped down and Apple John died (sic).

had continued to process the performance over time and arrived at their own conclusion.

Similar to *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, visual comedy moments, such as a silent movie ambulance dash at John's birth (ME-AJ01-SaS), or the man having 'an ambulance siren on his head' (ME-AJ02-H), and John spilling a plate of spaghetti over himself were well remembered by many children, particularly younger children. A few of the projected images, particularly those of the steam trains, were also recalled but not the various items they were projected onto, which was usually generically identified as 'a white cloth'. The train, which was both an image and portrayed through gesture, is often remembered and drawn as a physical object with a train track, as illustrated by a Year 3/4 student's drawing above.

Music which regularly carried the story and the emotion was remembered more than in *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, both after three months and a year, with children commenting 'they were doing the actions and music added to the meaning...The cello told the story, particularly when she carried it with her when they were rushing about' (ME-AJ02-K). The instruments, perhaps because they were more familiar were also remembered accurately, 'There was a lot of music – and no words in the performance. There was the violin and the electric guitar ... oh, and an accordion' (ME-AJ02-H).

Justine, John's energetic daughter, who was remembered so clearly by the children after the performance, particularly the anger and sadness they felt when she was rejected by her father, is rarely mentioned. As was found in *The Memory of the Spectator* (Deldime and Pigeon 2000), the most significantly remembered aspects were those which concerned the central character, John.

A more significant factor in the differences of recall between *Apple John* and *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* was whether the children had discussed the performance. If there had been further teacher intervention the children had a richer memory and understanding, remembering three times more information after three

months than children who had had no intervention.¹²³ However, the difference is less pronounced after a year with individual children remembering no more than two items from the performance whether they have discussed it further or not.¹²⁴

Although *Apple John* was generally not as well remembered, research from a school for the Deaf offers contrary evidence. In October 2017, I visited Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education (ERADE) and conducted research with a group of GCSE Drama students (aged 14–16). Returning three months after the performance, the class teacher was very apologetic, expecting the students to have little or no recall of the performance based on her experience of student recall of other performances and learning activities. The purpose of my visit had been shared in conversation in the staff room and other staff members had laughed and said, ‘Good luck...they will remember nothing’ (Thomas 2018:1). Although the students needed time to locate the memory through paired discussion, their recall of *Apple John* was detailed, with each student remembering five-six items from the plot, the humour and the projection, mimicking many of the gestures and signs employed in the performance. Conversely, the students had little or no recall of the related lesson I had observed following the performance (ME-AJ01-ER). Interviewing the teacher one month later, she explained how shocked she was by the students’ recall of the performance and having further discussed the performance was surprised when the students explained their detailed recall was due to the interpreter who had signed the performance, when none had existed. The students had invented this person, a ‘false memory’, because they had understood the performance so well they thought there must have been someone signing (Thomas 2018:1).

Returning fifteen months after the performance, an interview with two students revealed the memory of *Apple John* was still very strong with both boys remembering significantly more detail than the previous year. They also recalled notably more than any other field-study children. The boys’ memory appeared to have grown over time

¹²³ ME-AJ01-SaS, ME-AJ01-Wi1, ME-AJ01-SVPS2, ME-AJ01-HPS (no discussion) and ME-AJ01-IPS, ME-AJ01-Wi2, ME-AJ01-TMS, ME-AJ01-SVPS1/SVPS2, ME-AJ01-H3/H5, ME-AJ01-SHJ (post-performance discussion).

¹²⁴ TM- FS11-K, comparative data between one group with discussion and one group without.

as shown from an extract of their conversation which they signed and was interpreted by their teacher who described their communication as 'beautiful and poetic':

M: I enjoyed watching it. It was interesting and there were trains from long ago. There was a train and a tree. It matched the person growing up and the tree was growing up – They were growing up together. I remember a girl. She was crazy and she kept saying stop and getting angry.

J: When the train started, the woman was pregnant. She ate an apple and it rolled and rolled. The seed from the apple started to sprout as the baby was born. He went to college to get a degree. When he was going on a train, his mum said goodbye and they hugged and the train went. He arrived in London – a city, and there was a woman next to him. The man was copying the woman in the lecture.

M: Motorbike. He tried the motorbike and he crashed on the motorbike – the dad. The motorbike fell over. He tried to get back on and kept revving the engine.

J: It started with the girl. They were racing. The man lost control and he broke his arm or his elbow and went to hospital. It was a toy ambulance.

M: The man had a hat with an ambulance siren flashing on top.

J: He was sad after the accident with his arm. He was watching T.V. – he eats some bad food – He has a heart attack and the tree is blown in the wind (J showed what he meant about the man and the tree being connected through the visual vernacular). He goes to hospital and he has to run. When he arrived home, he eats carrots, which he doesn't like, and has to go on the running machine and he gives up.

M: The tree gets chopped down at the very end. It falls but an apple falls as well and the seed goes into the ground.

J: The man died and the woman is pregnant. The girl was pregnant and that links to the tree sprout starting to grow again. I think the man died (ME-AJ02-ER:2).

Their recall not only included the characters and the narrative, but also the production and its abstract meaning. The connection between the tree and the man is very clear and developed in the boys' minds. The clarity of their recall can be attributed to two reasons; firstly, being older than other children from the field-study aided their comprehension, and secondly, due to their heightened emotional engagement with the performance designed for a non-hearing audience. Unlike other children they had a stronger memory of other characters and the emotion between John and his daughter. There is evidence of cognitive and emotional engagement with the production.

The non-verbal nature of *Apple John* necessitated greater interpretation by the children which could lead to misinterpretation if not corrected by the teacher. This was the case with one class of seven-year old girls who had closely connected the eating of an apple to the goodness of the child. The misinterpretation started by one child in the post-performance discussion where she explained how eating the apple led to the child being good and not crying, 'John's mum ate the apple but Joyce didn't eat an apple when the baby was about to be born and so the baby cried' (AJ-FS10-TMS). Returning to the class three months later the connection between the eating of the apple and the behaviour of the child had grown to two children:

I: The apple had a baby, there was a little seed growing inside the core...and the lady had a baby...And ... because the first lady ate an apple it made him good and stopped him crying.

F: When she bit into the apple she looked happy and the popper went off... the second time there was no seed, and there was no noise and she didn't eat an apple and the baby was naughty (ME-AJ01-TMS1).

The collective memory of the class had snowballed when I returned a year later and asked the children to draw what they remembered of the performance of *Apple John*. When talking to the children whilst they were drawing, it was clear how important the apple had become in relation to their understanding of pregnancy and child development; 75% of the class spoke about eating an apple either being the means to conception or how the eating of a 'good' rather than a 'bad' apple led to a 'good' or 'bad' child (TM-FS06-TMS). They had clearly thought further about the importance of the apple since the last visit and may have discussed it amongst themselves. The children had also built on the image of the seed growing within the apple and its links to fertility. They may also have linked the performance to their biblical knowledge of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

7. How does children's memory of performance differ from adults?

My research findings, in this instance from two productions with a child audience, offer an interesting comparison with the adult audience from *Critical Mass* (Reinelt et al 2014) and Wilkinson's project on *The Spirit of Theatre: (2015)*. For adults, the most

important factor in attending the performance was its 'liveness', with 'thinking' and the 'subject matter' being the next important factors, and then 'entertainment'. As shown in Chapter Four, anticipation and excitement prior to the performance, often based on memories of enjoyment from other performances, was a similarly significant factor for children. As the children had little or no prior knowledge of the performance and no choice as to whether they saw it, 'thinking' is not a high priority, although children expressed feeling 'curious' as to what the performance may be about.

Post-performance findings from *Critical Mass* showed 'acting', 'production', 'engagement', 'liveness' and 'music', became the highest rated attributions noting, 'it is clear that the sensual immediacy of the theatre is the first value that is identified by the audience' (Reinelt et al 2014:27). These immersive aspects were also similar in children with post-performance discussion centring on how they felt, the production elements, particularly the set, objects such as puppets and music being a prominent part of the discussions. Children enjoyed the strangeness of the instruments, particularly remembering the palpable and visceral aspects of the sounds, whether this was the hang drum in *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* or the 'heavy metal', head-banging electric guitar playing in *Apple John*. They also recognised how music often added to the emotion in the performance. Remembering how *Apple John* had made him feel, one child said 'Emotional...The music made the play particularly sad and it told the story' (AJ-FS23-RSS). One surprising finding with children was how quickly an aspect of the performance which was intensely remembered in the immediacy of post-performance became absorbed into the collective emotional memory of the performance and was rarely mentioned explicitly unless prompted by a specific question one to three months later. In the case of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*, by the time a year or more had passed, musical instruments featured in the performance had become confused, with many children forgetting the distinctive hang drum and piano-accordion replacing them with more familiar instruments such as a guitar, violin or piano. When considering the longitudinal impact of music, my findings are more contradictory as interviews with two young adults on their memories of Theatre Alibi performances when they were in primary school, aged six, with unknown instruments being an inspiration and contributing to them learning to play the

instrument featured; for Flynn, it was the harp in *How to Hug Trees* (2006), and Ripley it was the cello after seeing a performance of *Teapot* (2002).¹²⁵

A similarity between the *Critical Mass* findings and my research was the immediate importance of affective elements. When asked to identify moments from a performance they had seen within the last 24 hours, almost 80% of adult spectators included explicit references to emotional, affective or sensory qualities (Reinelt et al 2014:27-28). For children reporting affect and emotional connection was equally important, as one child illustrated,

I felt really sorry when she had no Mum and Dad. I was thinking they can't end with her being left. Take her with you. I didn't want a sad ending and then it happened. He took her with him (FS-BM109-Wil).

However, two months after the performance, spectators from the *Critical Mass* study reported greater emphasis on 'thinking' and 'relationships' connections; how the performance related to their lives and world events (Reinelt et al 2014:29). My research also suggests greater thought occurs over time with children also drawing from their own experience and the world in which they live, like Paul not enjoying school and feeling an outsider, or Benjamin having fought in the war and subsequently suffering post-traumatic depression. In the performance, these elements were implied but not explicit. Evidence from this production and *Apple John* suggested children, like adults, needed time to process the performance and provided a much richer recollection one–three months after the performance than post-performance. Whilst there was similar evidence of further thought, visual and sensory elements including production features and physical action remained equally important. In the context of these Theatre Alibi productions, I suggest that visual and sensory elements are more important for children than adults. For children, the importance of imagined images was remembered in considerable detail after a year, such as Paul tapping on a window and a pigeon flying away, or Fortuna flying over the Pyramids, or Benjamin and other soldiers lying down on the battle field – all mimed and narrated rather than accompanied by a physical representation. A strong imaginary memory resided in the children's minds and was recalled either verbally or in their drawings with surprising

¹²⁵ Further details pp.312–3.

detail. With the drawing below, the linear story and the central character are remembered after one year; the appearance of the pear, production elements and the narrated back-stories remain prominent after two years.

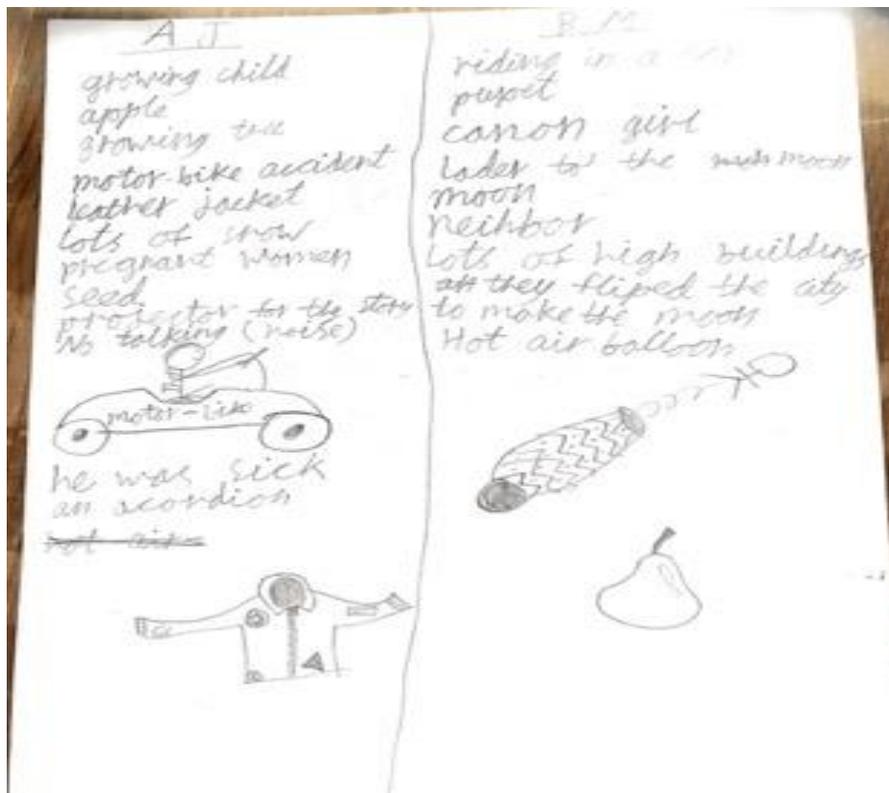


Fig. 34 Child N's memories of *Apple John* after one year (left) and *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* after two years (right) (TM-FS07-SHJ).¹²⁶

In the *Critical Mass* study, those spectators who were asked to recall performances they had seen more than a year earlier cited text, production and enjoyment as the most significant features (Reinelt et al 2014:30). There was a similar trend in children, with the plot being one the first items mentioned, however, once the basic outline of the plot had been recalled, such as 'a boy used a ladder to get to the moon' their memory was triggered and further layers emerged which also included strong production elements including props of items in the moon which had been on stage

¹²⁶ Transcription (left, *Apple John* after one year) 'growing child, apple, growing tree, motor-cycle accident, leather jacket, lots of snow, pregnant woman, seed, projector for the story, no talking (noise), he was sick, an accordion' (sic)(right, *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* after two years) ' riding in a car, puppet, canon girl, ladder to the moon, moon, neighbor, lots of high buildings, they flipped the city to make the moon, hot air balloon' (sic).

for seconds. The affective elements and incidents which have caused emotional connection and enjoyment from the performance were significant and longer-lasting going beyond one or two years. Arguably affective and emotional elements are more important for children than adult spectators.

Part Three: *Re-creation and Re-Invention*

8. How memories linger and develop over two years or longer?

a) Changes in memory after two years

Recalling the performance of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* after two years was like the children remembering an old lost friend, someone from the past where you know the face but are not sure of their name. It materialises more slowly but not less affectionately, with children recognising the name, smiling or laughing with a common expression of fondness, and then moving on to remember surprising detail, such as,

There were two puppets. The boy smelt sausages going up the stairs from the bottom of the block of flats and followed the smell. He climbed up a very long ladder to the moon. There were all sorts of things in the moon which has been lost. Paul thought the moon was a hole in the sky (ME-BM03-SSCP).

Although elements, such as the boy following the smell of sausages may add additional interpretations, new memories continue to emerge, including remembered props in the moon and the appearance of the pears: 'There was a pear tree and a pear appeared' [*Others remember and ask 'How did they do that?'*] and 'There was a hot air-balloon and other things in the moon'(TM-FS07-SHJ), 'In the moon there was lots of rocks and strange things' (ME-BM03-H), and 'When they got to the moon they saw flying machines and lots of space junk that was lost in the moon' (ME-BM03-O).

For most children, the memory of these productions, lives on with the same amount of detail after two years, as it did a year earlier, but with new, previously mislaid features. Children when invited to draw their memories, would draw different aspects of the

performance from one visit to the next. The individual drawings accompanied by writing also gave alternative and sufficiently more information than the class discussion which may be due to the memory needing to be prompted or the child being reluctant to speak in a whole class situation. From 276 interviews with children after two years, I have only met two children who do not remember the performance at all, with at least half of the children remembering three–four details and more than a quarter remembering significantly more.

b) The impact of age on the memory of performance (Finding 8 and 9)

One observation from analysis of memory data, both drawings and discussion, suggests what is remembered may be age-related. What they remember can be, but is not always, determined by the age of the child and when they saw the performance. Children who saw the performance when they were aged four–six years old remember in more detail visual humour and other visual elements, which may be more easily understood, two years later.

Older children who would have seen the original performance when they were aged seven–eight and are now nine–ten years old, often remember more sophisticated but momentary aspects of the performance, such as ‘The boy lived in the bottom flats. He climbed the stairs and then realised there was an escalator’ (TM-FS15-CRP).

The skill of the actors/puppeteers, and the familiarity of remembering seeing actors from different performance are also recalled more easily by older children, ‘There was a lady from *Apple John* who was holding a puppet. She was talking as the puppet and as herself... She sang as the puppet’ (ME-BM03-H). For the younger children, they generally remember the humour and extraordinariness of Clarence, the flying poodle, although a group of children who saw the performance when they were aged five, thoughtfully said ‘I just remembered the puppet’, ‘The puppet had brown hair and wore a red T-shirt’ and ‘The girl was a puppet as well’ (TM-FS13-Wil 1). The memories of the rest of the class were quite poor, with only the taxi ride being remembered, which makes the details of the puppet even more surprising.

Older children also remembered the more emotional aspects. I was surprised when children spoke of the soldiers lying down on the floor and avoiding fighting to bring about peace (TM-FS14-GPS, TM-FS15-CRP, TM-FS11-K, TM-FS11-K1). Other children of this age mentioned Fortuna being an orphan or Benjamin suffering from depression, wearing a bag over his head and not wanting to come out of his garden. Younger children, who saw the production when they were aged four–six and now aged six–eight often placed higher emphasis on the humorous moments like the taxi-ride or Clarence the flying dog. Surprisingly detailed memories of Clarence developed over time, including the relevance of his seventh birthday, his nodding head movement which was often mimicked, and his French accent (TM-FS11-K Year 3/4).

In contrast, children who saw the performance when they were aged seven–eight, rarely mention these elements, tending to remember more thoughtful aspects and moments when they made an emotional connection to the performance. They will regularly refer to Paul being bullied at school or Paul’s aspirations and more detailed aspects for the plot, as illustrated by the drawings and writings of a Year 6 child when they were asked to recall the performance he had seen two years earlier:

The boy who climbed into the Moon

This is the best one and the one I remember the most.

A little boy had a dream about space. He wanted to go to the moon. Long time after, he had a plan. He lived in a flat and went upstairs to look out of the window to look at the moon. He then got a ladder and had the whole flats help him to get to the moon. he then reached the moon and he met a girl. The boy and the girl were puppets!

Accompanying the writing is an annotated drawing of a large block of flats, a boy climbing a ladder, people hanging out of the windows helping him and angry people at the bottom of the ladder. There is also a drawing of a smiling moon with a stick person on top (TM-FS15-CRP:14).

A child in another school also remembered the angry crowd at the bottom of the flats but explained these were policemen who were trying to prevent the boy from climbing a ladder at the top of the building due to Health and Safety reasons (Year 5–TM-FS11-K). She drew upon her knowledge and understanding of the ‘real’ world to explain how police may behave. Applying Tulving’s research on episodic and semantic memory, this would suggest children’s memory is linked to their level of comprehension and

experience. Applying Bartlett's theory of 'reconstructive memory', we are more likely to remember narratives, particularly if we 'fill in the gaps' of comprehension by connecting the narrative to our own lives or cultural experience (Foster 2009:13-14). However, as will be shown later, drawing upon our experience or immediate knowledge at the time of the performance may not be always the case as children may continue to process the performance and re-interpret the memories as their understanding and experience develops.

When considering the age of the audience, the first encounter with Theatre Alibi performance is significant, whether the child sees the performance in Reception or Year 1. Initially, I asked children to recall *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* up to two years previously, but then became curious whether children could remember earlier performances. When interviewing a group of Year 3 children about performances they had seen and how they felt, they remembered the field-study performances over two years in detail, when they were aged five-six, but also remembered *Olive and the Dream Train (2015)* which they would have seen when they were aged four; their first performance. They were unable to recall much detail but remembered the central character, day-dreaming and the pleasure they had felt at seeing the performance (TM-FS12-Wil, TM-FS14-GPS). This impression remembering, where children remember the vaguest imprint of detail of the performance but recall the depth of emotional pleasure, was further evidenced by a child aged ten, who remembered her first encounter with Theatre Alibi, *Mucky Pup (2014)* when she was aged five (TM-FS12-Wil3). Similarly, two children from two different schools remembered *I Believe in Unicorns (2013)* when they were aged five (ME-TM03-SSCS, TM-FS14-GPS). Although hazy in detail, but clear about its positivity in recall, this first encounter lays the foundation for future performances influencing their later enjoyment of theatre.

Remembering a performance in greater detail and the heightened pleasure of recalling it, my research findings suggest that the second encounter when children are aged five-six or when Theatre Alibi returns is significant. For one Year 1 class who saw *Apple John* three months earlier and *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* the previous year, unsurprisingly the memory of the first play is remembered less well than

Apple John, although still remembered, which is surprising as it was in took place in the first weeks of them starting school. The class recalled:

I remember he got a ladder and climbed to the moon...He sat on a building...no, he climbed onto the building... When he got to the moon he saw an astronaut...he lived in London with lots of skyscrapers (ME-BM02-H1).

For one Year 1 child, the motorbike from *Apple John* had become confused with the taxi from *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* as he recalled 'On the motorbike...he went round and round' [*accompanied by the left, left, left actions of the taxi ride*] (ME-BM02-H1), creating a more blended memory. During the same interview the class went on to describe their memories of *Apple John*, which were much richer and more diverse:

John went on a motor bike [*made sound and actions from the performance*],

I remember when he fell off his motorbike and crashed and went to hospital, Apple John had a bandage,

When the lady had a baby,

When she put the baby in the basket [*this maybe a blended memory between the imagined memory and what was seen. The mother brought out a clothes basket and hung up nappies on a washing line and projections of a baby growing appeared*],

The apple tree grew up and the same time as Apple John. They were the same age, [*Child makes a sound similar to the growing theme and makes lots of actions*],

A party popper went off,

When she ate the apple, he pulled the party popper,

I remember the train action [*accompanied by large gestures of steam train wheels turning – others join in and copy*],

They got married,

They ate spaghetti and it was funny [*Teacher surprised- as he had forgotten this*],

It had no words – it was weird,

When I watched *Apple John*, I thought it grew from seeds, from a pip and it grew into a sapling and then it grew up and was cut down because it was old (Field-study notes ME-AJ01-H1).

As can be seen above, the children remembered sensory as well as narrative elements, emotionally positive and negative moments, built on other children's memories, and remembered aspects which their teacher had forgotten. This richer memory may have been due to the short length of time between seeing the performance, three months rather than 15 months, and may have been due to the children understanding more, being a year older. However, from interviewing children throughout my field-studies, the second encounter with a Theatre Albi performance seems to be important for children's memories. I suggest having previously experienced a performance and remembered the emotional connection, particularly the humour, even if they did not fully understand the performance, they are now able to process and encode a future performance better knowing what to expect. They enjoyed the collective experience and respond to the reactions of those around them, mimicking the physical actions of the actors but they also have developed an episodic memory of performance gathered from the previous year's performance.

c) Memory of performance and cognitive development (Finding 2)

Theatre Albi performances are thought-provoking, uncompromising and stretch the audience's intellectual capabilities. It is unlikely the children will understand everything they have seen. Some elements of the performance are often designed for older children than the youngest members, for example, being designed for a whole school audience of 5-11 year olds. Arguably, much of the content and concepts are above the cognitive development of many of the audience. However, field-study evidence of two productions, discussed over the last chapters, has shown how children need time to understand and process what they have seen. I would suggest some children continue the sense-making process over many years until they have sufficient understanding. I was surprised, when children were asked to write or draw their most remembered performance, by Louise, a Year 6 child who wrote about *Mucky Pup* which she had seen when she was six years old:

I remember *Mucky Pup* vividly. It was of a boy who had OCD and was very neat. His mum tried to make him go outdoors, but he couldn't so she bought him a dog. He was told to walk it, but didn't want to. At first, he hated it, because the dog was so messy. After a while, he started liking playing with the dog and he got very messy. He went back home and his mum was relieved that he was messy and happy

again! I enjoyed and remembered *Mucky Pup* most (TM-FS15-CRP:14).

She told me she did not remember speaking about the performance but had thought about it from time to time over the previous five years. What is surprising is not only the detail, but the understanding of psychological terms such as OCD from the age of six years old. Her understanding is likely to have grown over time as her cognitive development allowed for greater comprehension. This example would further support the theory of semantic memory, where our memory expands due to age and broadening knowledge and experience. I would also suggest, applying Ebbinghaus's theory of forgetting, memories needed to be revisited to enter the long-term memory, or the impact of enhanced recall in hypermnesia, Louise may have revisited her memory of *Mucky Pup* every year when Theatre Alibi returned to the school. Louise's memory account contained both plot, characterisation, understanding as well as emotional effect. She remembered because she had enjoyed the performance which dealt with a challenging issue. The emotional connection she had made with the performance and her continued enjoyment were clearly evident.

Other children also spoke in detail about serious or challenging issues which they have encountered through a Theatre Alibi performance which would be outside of their experience. When visiting a Special School for children with high-functioning autism to discuss their memory of a performance of *Apple John* three months later, I met Alec. He recalled the performance in considerable detail, not only the plot, including the abstract connections between John, the tree, seasons and the weather, but also the production elements including individual slides and props contained within the rings of the set. He told me how he had thought the play was 'amazing' and how he 'remembered things far more from plays than books' (AJ-FS23-RSS). As I was leaving, he said his favourite performance was *I Believe in Unicorns*. His teacher was shocked as Alec had seen the performance four years earlier, the class had not studied the book and he had not mentioned this production previously. Alec proceeded to recall the detailed plot set in a small village under siege during a war, mentioning a young boy whose father was fighting and the boy's encounter with books as a means of escape. He remembered the set, the puppetry of 'The Little Match Girl', a story within the performance, an emotional scene involving the destruction of his house, the library

and the death of the librarian. Alec had not read the book, but told me he was able to retain and recall the memory of this performance easily (AJ-FS23-RSS). Although not quite accurate in every detail, similar to the interview with the two students from ERADE, previously discussed, this boy with additional needs retained a rich memory.

From these examples and many others from children across the 5-11 age range, I would suggest the longitudinal impact of memory and understanding gained from watching a Theatre Alibi performance, is an untapped and unrecognised resource which may have further application within schools. Teacher could revisit the memory of the performance when discussing difficult issues, such as mental health or friendship, or use the performance as a stimulus for art-work or creative writing months or a year after the children saw the original performance. More detailed research would be required to clarify how children understand challenging concepts beyond what might be expected from their age.

My longitudinal study has uncovered many hidden stories of the impact of Theatre Alibi performances and its memory not just over two years but much longer. Two such examples centre on the importance of music, specifically musical instruments contrasting with many of my durational findings on the transience of music in performance memory mentioned earlier.

Niamh, who saw a Theatre Alibi performance of *How to Hug Trees and other secrets* (2006) in her primary school when she was six, twelve years earlier, had a very clear memory, not of the performance itself but of the music; particularly the harp. She remembered the position on stage and the way encountering 'this unusual instrument transformed her life' (Flynn 2017:1). Niamh described her feelings of being transfixed, and despite her mother thinking she would forget the instrument, Niamh repeatedly asked to learn to play the harp, being reminded when Alibi returned the following year. Reluctantly, her parents bought her a small, then larger, harp which she now plays all over the world as part of a national youth orchestra. Niamh thought the performance had such a long-term impact she exclaimed; 'Theatre Alibi has changed my life...It's inspired me and shaped my career...I owe everything to *How to Hug Trees*' (Flynn 2017:7).

For Izzy, who remembered seeing *Teapot* (2002) in her school also when she was six, the set and production were significant, 'having something ordinary like the school hall being transformed into something magical' (Ripley 2017:1). Izzy recalled props and puppets from a show 16 years earlier and could remember the key message: 'that you need a measure of hard work and bitter determination', to learn to play the piano, and in life (Ripley 2017:1).¹²⁷ She accepted that it may have been quoted several times at home like a motto for exams but was still well remembered. For Izzy, she remembered clearly the cello from the production and like Niamh, believed this to be the reason she went on to learn to play the instrument. What was also clear when Niamh and Izzy were recollecting their childhood memories was the very present, sheer joy of revisiting and rediscovering the memory. As well as encouraging both Izzy and Niamh to commence playing instruments, both reported seeing Theatre Alibi performances has led to longer term theatre-going. For Izzy this was partially due to the influence of her family. She has seen a variety of theatre and dance in adulthood, although she is keen to continue to see Alibi's productions in theatres when able (Ripley 2017:2). However, Niamh comes from a different background where theatre going would be less prominent. She also explained how seeing theatre at an early age has led her to attending theatre productions in later life, although Theatre Alibi productions hold a special place (Flynn 2017:2).

d) Why do children remember?

Having considered what the children remember, it is also important to summarise why they remember some things and not others and why memory of a performance may be more sustaining and powerful than remembering other school work or everyday events. Drawing upon the fields of cognitive science and memory studies, I would suggest it may be due to the following features:

- **We remember story**

Stories help us to connect with ourselves, our world and this helps with remembering. This may partially account for the enhanced memories of children being able to recall

¹²⁷ It was almost remembered correctly – Ripley forgot 'true grit', but demonstrated a very detailed memory which has lasted 16 years.

performances they have seen in detail over other classroom activity. Applying Bartlett's research *Remembering*, (Bartlett 1995) we remember stories more easily than any other form of data, particularly if the narrative connects to our experience, emotions or culture. Accordingly, we remember more if we can understand the meaning or can associate with the event in some way through personal connection or recognising the relevance in the world in which we live. We therefore can reconstruct the story adding our own lived memories 'to fill in the gaps' and re-interpret to provide sense-making. In most Theatre Alibi productions, children are the central characters, often experiencing conflict or having to negotiate their way through difficulties, whether this is growing up (Apple *John*), not liking school and feeling awkward (*The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon*), being displaced by the lack of creativity and functionality of schools (*Olive and the Dream Train*) or experiencing bullying (*Mucky Pup*). Therefore, the child audience is more easily able to associate with and recall the central characters and the issues they face.

- **We connect with emotion**

As Willingham claims 'Things that create an emotional reaction will be better remembered' and 'Emotion can play an important part in helping us remember' (2010:58). The children not only remember points when they were laughing or happy but also times when they were sad. In *Apple John*, children remember when they felt scared for John when he fell off his motorbike or angry when he rejects his daughter towards the end of the play. Emotional connections are remembered particularly up to three months from the performance and for many significantly longer. Often children will connect with a moment or character which will lead to them discussing their own experience within the class or with their teacher. What also remains across time is the overall emotion from the experience, often the positive response of being part of a live performance. Research over two years of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* suggests there is a balance of both 'funny' incidents and those which make the children 'sad', or as one child said, 'I remember it because it made me happy' (TM-FS15-CRP). Many of the initial memories, recalled after the show or within three months of the performance are different from the memories after a year or two years. Performance memories alter over time which may suggest children continue to process the performance when Theatre Alibi returns the following year.

Research with one child with emotional and behavioural difficulties, Simon, over a 15-month duration, showed he remembered significantly more than his classmates, having strong, but conflicting, emotional responses to both case-study performances. In discussion following *Apple John*, he spoke of his strong anger and after *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* spoke of feeling very happy. These emotional responses remained unaltered over time, but despite this his experience of watching live performance was still positive; 'All of the shows are very different. You don't know what they are going to be like. That's what makes Theatre Alibi so good' (ME-AJ02-SaPS:7). The emotional connection for Simon appears to have added to the performance longevity.

- **We remember because we are curious**

As illustrated by Simon, seeing and experiencing a Theatre Alibi performance is different; a 'special' event which captures the children's imagination more than an everyday English lesson. Children describe themselves as feeling 'excited' or 'happy' prior to the performance, full of expectation. Children love the quirkiness of the characters and story; a boy who dreams he can climb to the moon and see if it is not a moon but a hole in the sky, or thinks 'Sausages are better than war'. They also often remember longitudinally the tricks and 'magical' quality of live performance, such as a 'real' pear appearing from a branch of a mimed tree, a pigeon flying away, created by a fluttering sound and mime. In *Apple John*, the children regularly recall one unusual image which stimulates their imagination: an image of a seed growing within the core of an apple asking, 'Is the tree growing inside an apple?' (ME-TM03-SSCS). This is then often linked to the mother's pregnancy and the life-cycles of both boy and apple tree. Often props arouse the children's curiosity and include 'Olives on a stick growing out of the man's head'(ME-BM03-Wi) remembered three years after the performance of *Olive and the Dream Train*; or a remote control in *Mucky Pup*, a performance four years earlier (ME-BM03-Wi).

Children relish the fact that every Theatre Alibi show is different, never knowing what to expect, as shown by the comments from a Year 6 child who was asked to recall the performances he had seen over the last six years: 'Each one of the Theatre Alibi plays is special in their own way, so I can't decide which is the best. They're all great' (ME-

TM03-SSCS). He had previously recalled shows going back to *I Believe in Unicorns* (2013) which he had seen in Year 1, remembering little more than it was set in a library, but knowing that he remembered seeing the performance as 'special'.

9. Faulty memory, False memory or Creative memory? (Finding 10)

After time, whether this is one year or two, there is a greater emergence of creativity and new thoughts in the children's recall. The fiction of the play has now met the reality of the world the child knows and understands.

As discussed earlier, our prior expectation can shape our memory as illustrated by the group of children from ERADE. What was also interesting from this interview was the boys' insistence there was an interpreter who had signed throughout the performance. When the teacher explained that this was not the case and they had understood the performance due to the skilful presentation of the performance and their heightened understanding, the boys were not convinced. Our prior knowledge can be an asset in interpreting a performance but it can also lead to errors; in this case, the boys' prior experience of performance being signed was subsumed into their memory. As psychologist Jonathan Foster suggests, 'sometimes there can be a blurring between what actually happened and what has been imagined or suggested' (2009:72). Arguably, it is this blurring between the real and the imaginary that theatre draws upon.

Initially in my field-studies, I was disappointed when children misremembered aspects of the performance, feeling that the inaccuracy was 'wrong' or 'incorrect', for example, one child mentioning 'I was feeling very happy because it was very good and I remember the dog jumping over the moon' (ME-BM03-K), blending the plot with a well-known nursery rhyme. At times, character relationships became blended; Fortuna was shot out of a cannon by her grandfather, or Benjamin was Paul's uncle. Another child drew a picture where the moon, which in performance contained 'lost' objects such as a fighter pilot, flying machines, and a cricket ball, in his interpretation, included new items, such as keys, bits of chewing gum and old socks (ME-BM02-IPS). For him, these were all lost items with which he connected. One child, remembering the

performance after two years, also started to re-interpret and relate to Fortuna's story in a more logical way; if Paul travelled to the moon by a ladder then Fortuna must have arrived in the same way. In her version, Fortuna also put a ladder up to the moon, arriving some time before Paul, but her ladder was knocked off, so she had been left marooned until Paul, whose ladder was better designed, having qualities which stuck to the surface of the moon, could rescue her (BM-ME03-Wil1).

I started to re-think my ideas. Rather than wanting the memories to be 'correct', I started to appreciate the way children were re-inventing or re-creating the performance by using their own imagination, adding unwritten elements of the script, and creating more detailed back-stories to the characters of Paul, Fortuna, Benjamin or Clarence. The children had used their creativity, not intentionally misremembering, but believing they were being accurate. They had amalgamated the fiction from the performance with believed reality from their memory, creating a more malleable and blended association. Helen Nicholson, discussing the importance of oral narratives from autobiographical memory of past events, suggests: 'The act of re-telling personal experience creates, as Joan Sangster points out, a dialectic relationship between the past and the present in which the speaker does not 'relive' events, but 're-writes' them' (Nicholson: 2014:94). This 'dialectic relationship' between the past and present is prominent not only in the children's individual memory but also transmitted and transformed through their collective discussion when they were asked to recall the performances on my return visits. This collective recall had the potential to disrupt and change the memory, as in the case of children believing eating an apple resulted in 'good' children, or in the existence of an interpreter signing a performance, or a child correcting another over the gender of a character.

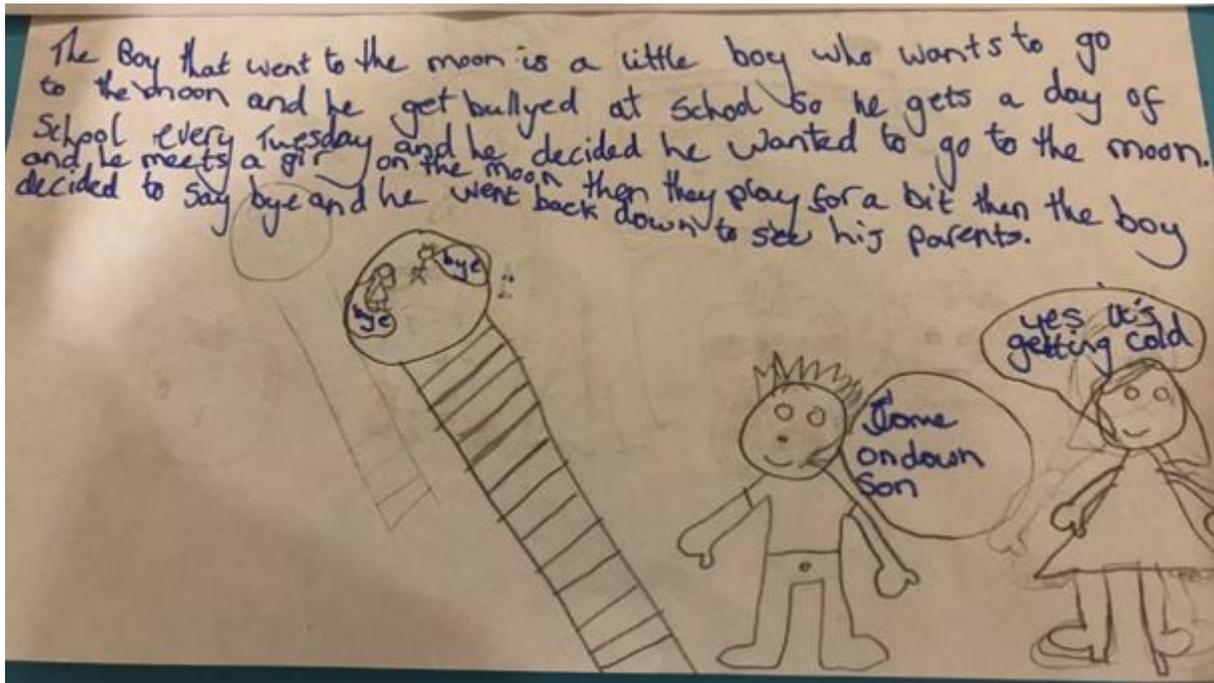


Fig 35. Drawing from child, D, ME-BM02-IPS.¹²⁸

In the example of a child's memory of *The Boy Who Climbed Into The Moon* drawn fifteen months after the performance (above), the character and situation Paul faces has taken on a new reality for the child. The story of Paul has become enriched and transformed; not only is Paul a victim of bullying but also regularly absents himself from school as a means of escape, seeking solace in a visit to the moon. The theme of friendship is explored further by him finding a girl and 'playing for a bit' before returning to the familiar and caring world of his parents. In his version, Fortuna is left on the moon and, at this stage never gets to meet Paul's parents. There is an everyday, casual quality to the response of the parents, as if Paul has been playing outside and now needs to come in for his tea. In the child's mind, the visit may have been a weekly occurrence, on Tuesdays when Paul did not go to school.

The National Advisory Committee on Creativity, Cultural and Education (NACCCE) report, *All Our Futures*, defines creativity as: 'Imaginative activity fashioned so as to

¹²⁸ Transcription of drawing 'The Boy that went to the moon is a little boy who wants to go to the moon and he got bullied at school so he gets a day of school every Thursday and he decided he wanted to go to the moon and, he meets a girl on the moon and they play for a bit then the boy decided to say bye bye and he went back down to see his parents' (sic). Parents at the bottom of the ladder are saying "Come on down lad" and "yes its getting cold".

produce outcomes that are both original and of value' (1999:30). This definition can clearly be applied to D's drawing, demonstrating a creative process which includes adapted and original ideas. Ken Robinson in his introduction to the NACCCE report argues for the inclusivity of creativity: 'all people have creative abilities and we all have them differently' (1999:6). The report argued that schools 'must find ways of enabling young people to explore and express their own emotions and feelings in positive and constructive ways. The conventional academic curriculum is not designed nor intended to do this' (NACCCE 1999:24). I would argue that the potential for exploring the memory of a past performance offers an opportunity for creative discussion in schools by providing a resource for creativity which is both imaginative and enables emotional development. Although the NACCCE report was written twenty years ago, the debate on the importance and need for creativity and creative subjects in schools continues. There is a growing interest in broadening the curriculum beyond the 'academic' focus of numeracy and literacy in the OFSTED 2019 Inspection Framework. Amanda Spielman, Chief Inspector for OFSTED, recently outlined the importance of developing a richer curriculum based on social justice:

to spell out what that looks like in practice for Ofsted, it means our inspectors will consider how schools are equipping pupils with the essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens: how they are introduced to the best that has been thought and said, and how they are helped to a real appreciation of human creativity and achievement (2019).

The concern for creativity and particularly arts subjects being squeezed at the cost of more traditional knowledge-based subjects is echoed by the Durham Commission on Creativity and Education (DHCE) published in October 2019 which asserts:

The commission believes that the arts make an invaluable contribution to the development of creativity in young people. We are therefore deeply concerned about the reduction of status of art subjects including art and design, dance, drama and music within schools but as follows the introduction of the EBacc in secondary education, and that concern is reflected in our recommendations (DHCE 2019:6).

Whilst recognising the improvement in academic standards, the report acknowledges that respondents to the Commission argue this has been 'at the expense of nurturing the creativity of young people' (DHCE 2019:13). Similar to the NACCCE report twenty

years earlier, they define creativity as 'The capacity to imagine, conceive, express, or make something that was not there before' (DHCE 2019:6). Whilst recognising creativity is not the sole preserve of the arts, Nicholas Serota, the Commission's chair confirms, 'our research does highlight the creative advantages conferred by an education rich in art and culture. This should be an essential part of the education of every child' (2019:7). As part of their recommendations the Commission advises 'Arts and Culture should be an essential part of the education of every child' (Recommendation 7 DHCE 2019: 23). To achieve this, they advocate the DfE establish a National Plan for Cultural Education (Serota 2019:7) ensuring all children have equal access to arts and culture rather than it currently being at risk of being the privilege of those who can afford it (Serota 2019:7).

The development of opportunities which enhance children's creative thinking within and beyond the curriculum should not be overlooked. Revisiting theatre performances may offer an unexpected opportunity for children to exercise creativity and imaginative 'play'.

Conclusion

The memory of a theatre performance in children's minds is enduring and often recreated, not transient or forgotten, but living on in the imagination and offering opportunities for creativity. Whilst a 'one-off' performance might not seem to be worth the expense for a school, in fact it can be much more significant than it might seem. Evidence with children suggests the memory of performance is organic and malleable, changing in tiny details every time it is revisited. This offers the children a deep and rich experience across time. My research to date has shown the hidden memory within children's imagination for rediscovering and re-inventing a theatre performance. The performance is not a transitory 'one-off' experience, but particularly with discussion, lives on long after the theatre company's van has finally departed through the school gates.

Chapter – Seven Conclusion

This thesis explores the impact of Theatre Alibi's school-based performance on children's emotions, learning, imagination and memory, seeking to acknowledge the 'hidden' world of performance by listening to the views of children as audience members over a three-year period. Evidence from chapters Three–Six, which encompass the historical contribution of the company, the impact of the performance with and without teacher intervention and the memory of the performance, has provided three over-arching findings. Firstly, the commitment of the company since its formation to provide emotionally challenging storytelling performances impacts on children's emotional development. The children are presented with a range of different, complex and at times difficult emotions, which they may not have previously encountered, within the safe space of their school environment. Secondly, seeing a performance as a whole school community is an enriching experience, offering schools and children an opportunity for shared pleasure and broader learning beyond the classroom. Teacher intervention on field-study productions provides an additional complementary layer of learning alongside that which is transmitted by the performance alone. Finally, in all case-study chapters there has been evidence that the children understood and remembered far more deeply than teachers' expectations.

During this research, I have had to negotiate the challenging relationship between the researcher, the company and the audience research participants. However, I recognise these relationships are problematic and could lead to a 'positive evaluation phenomenon' (Johanson and Glow 2015:255), discussed earlier on p.98. When conducting audience research, Johanson and Glow suggest: 'The nature of social research (qualitative) makes it difficult if not impossible to avoid behaviour that encourages positive responses from audience. If researchers are aware of this they may be able to provide realistic findings' (2015:267). Throughout this research I acknowledge that teachers who admire Theatre Alibi's work are more likely to have a loyalty to the company and book future performances; also teachers who enjoy the performance are more likely to invest the time to complete feedback forms for the company. Therefore, negative responses from schools are less likely. During this

three-year research, I read three negative comments from teachers out of 152 returned forms. One response voiced Health and Safety concerns about the appropriateness of a character appearing with a bag over his head when performing to young children (BM-TAFF-Uf); one teacher did not enjoy the non-verbal style of *Apple John* believing the acting to be exaggerated (AJ-TAFF-SiS) and the other response concerned the appropriateness for a young audience of the emotional content of the performance and 'preferring "lighter" themes' (TM-TAFF-Du).

Within my field-studies I have worked with teachers who have varying experience of seeing a Theatre Alibi performance, and who are often different from the person who booked the performance and completed the Theatre Alibi Feedback form, and therefore may be more neutral in their response. As my case-study research has been with children I have found them to be forthright in voicing their opinions, and therefore have been less positively biased in their feedback. Therefore, with this awareness of the potential positive bias, I am satisfied that I have taken steps to provide 'realistic' findings.

Theatre Alibi do not set out to produce education theatre. This has been evident by many of the strongly felt comments provided by previous and current directors.¹²⁹ Their key aim is to provide story-telling of the highest artistic quality for as many people, as typified by the mission statement in their 2018-22 NPO funding application to the Arts Council:¹³⁰

Theatre Alibi creates outstanding new theatre for audiences of the greatest diversity, touring to a vast range of places and venues. At our core is the belief that a story of searing relevance told with the wealth of means that live theatre has to offer bold, physical, emotionally truthful performance, exquisite live music, intensely beautiful visuals – has the power to allow audiences to walk in someone else's shoes for a short while and to see a particular aspect of the world with startling clarity. Our determination to maintain the quality of our work remains steadfast, whether we're performing to a group of five year olds in their school hall who are seeing a piece of theatre for the very first time or taking a show to the West End.

We have an unswerving commitment to making theatre for the many, not just

¹²⁹ Spicer pp.32-33, Hodge p.35, Jamieson p.77-78, Sved p.199.

¹³⁰ The successful NPO funding application includes the wider theatre work of the company, going beyond the remit of their work with primary schools and the focus of this PhD research.

the few and we place enormous emphasis on how well we engage with others... (TA-NPO-2017:6).

In the context of the company's school-based performances, this research confirms that the company's aim to create high-quality new theatre for young children based on empathetic story-telling told through strong performance, design and live music is clearly met. Comments from children in Chapter Four illustrate the recognition of music as a strong, emotional aspect of storytelling,¹³¹ and empathy with the character of Paul who does not want to attend school;¹³² Chapter Five exemplifies how young children can be drawn into the story and become part of the action, engaging directly with the characters;¹³³ and Chapter Six how the details of the design elements, including puppets and momentarily seen props, and evoked storytelling remain clearly over two years.¹³⁴

This research has shown the productions to be 'historically honed' based on years of experience. Although the stories and themes may differ teachers and children know what to expect. As the three case-study performances show, the audience grapple with challenging themes, such as life and death, loss and belonging, community and trauma, whilst trusting in the story-telling. To change this formula which works would be a risky decision for the company. The production of *Apple John*, being non-verbal, less reliant on text, did move away from the traditional form and provided additional accessibility to audiences for whom English is not their first language, including the Deaf community. There is consistency in the employment of musical directors, set designers, scriptwriter and on many occasions actors with many children and teachers looking forward to seeing actors playing different characters in a new story. Employing actors who are familiar with the company's style is pragmatic but could inadvertently lead to the re-reinforcement of a white, European culture. In drawing upon the familiar, there is a danger that the company may not be fulfilling its commitment to be fully inclusive, 'making theatre for the many, not just the few'. In Chapter Six, I discuss how

¹³¹ p.176.

¹³² p.185.

¹³³ Reception child who holds a conversation with Pudding (p.211) and a child with additional needs ordering Main to 'eat it' and joining the actors on stage to taste the food (p.212).

¹³⁴ p. 291, p.305 and p.318.

children become 'co-creators' in the performance, remembering and re-creating it over time. For those children in the audience from non-European backgrounds, I would question where they may find themselves within the performance and how they connect the stories with their heritage.¹³⁵ Future research into the company might wish to focus on where children from a broad range of backgrounds and heritages find their connection to the performance and whether employing a diverse range of actors, the exploration of non-western instruments or themes have different impact.

Throughout the company's existence and despite changes of artistic directors there is consistency in the company's implicit values articulated in the importance of enjoyment rather than utility.¹³⁶ However, this thesis has shown, whilst learning and education may not be at the company's core they are a central part of the experience for children. In choosing to cross the school threshold and perform in schools the performance is inevitably educational. In part the company contributes to the artistic or educational debate by providing high quality resources which teachers may choose to use.¹³⁷ I recognise presenting a binary position between enjoyment and education may be problematic for many reasons, however the fears that the 'magic' of live performance may be weakened by its usage by teachers is unjustified. Theatre Alibi may wish to celebrate the 'holistic' educational nature of their work as demonstrated by the contribution to children's emotional development and also be reassured that teacher intervention does not impact negatively on the performance impact but, as has been shown in Chapter Five and Six, increases the longevity of the performance. Children are astute spectators and able to differentiate between performance and classroom intervention, benefitting from both experiences. Due to the themes encountered and the theatrical form, this research has aimed to show and confirm the educational value of performances in schools.

¹³⁵ The 2019-20 schools tour, which is beyond the research time frame of this PhD, Theatre Alibi employed an actor of BAME heritage for the tour of *I Believe in Unicorns*.

¹³⁶ p.62, p.191, p.194.

¹³⁷ See Appendix R.

The emerging impact of my research

As my field-study research progressed, having visited some of the same teachers with different classes over two years, I became aware of the emerging impact of my research on their practice, particularly in the use of post-performance discussion. From the initial contact during the *Apple John* field-study two teachers from different schools agreed I might conduct a discussion with their class post-performance. At the time, they were surprised how positively the children from their classes responded to this intervention and how it assisted in the children's understanding (AJ-FS25-KPS, AJ-FS18-H). When I approached them as part of my field-study during the *Table Mates* tour they were keen to assist, commenting how the previous field-study had raised their expectations of the children, and were planning to introduce post-performance discussion, and in one case further used the performance as a springboard for literacy. The impact of my research has also had a more profound effect on one particular school. Following my research into the memory of the performance of *Apple John* at ERADE, discussed in the previous chapter, the teacher who was amazed at the children's depth of recall, reported this back to the whole staff. Consequently, the new Head of Learning at the school decided to rewrite the school's current teaching and learning strategy, an over-supportive approach to learners, with staff not allowing learners time to think. Subsequently the school has adopted a more challenging learning approach based on high expectations, where students are given time to think for themselves before responding (Thomas 2018:1-2).

As my research has progressed, I have shared my initial findings and, where appropriate, shared children's comments with Theatre Alibi. Nikki Sved has confirmed the impact of my PhD has been 'quite fundamental' informing many aspects of the company's practice with schools, as well as confirming what they already knew, 'moving from a hunch to having clear knowledge of the value of the work going into schools' (2020:1). For Sved, my research has confirmed the importance of performing to the whole school across the 5-11 age-range despite, the more conventional approach taken by many other companies, being to target a narrower age-band. It clarified for her, how the company going into the same schools over years makes Alibi part of the school community and a significant part of the children's childhood (Sved 2020:1). On a micro-level giving feedback from teachers and children throughout each

tour has been important, 'The actors and the Alibi team have had a renewed sense of the importance and value of what they are doing', identifying its particular importance 'during a gruelling tour' (Sved 2020:1).

I have shared some of my initial findings with representatives from the Arts Council leadership who are particularly interested in the research as it contains evidence based on broad quantitative data as well as ethnographic. As a consequence of this PhD research, Theatre Alibi have planned a symposium in partnership with the University of Exeter and ASSITEJ UK¹³⁸ entitled *Through Children's Eyes; School Children as Theatre Audience*¹³⁹ for academics, practitioners and policy makers raising the debate into the importance of creating work for children and sharing my findings more broadly.

I am interested in the emotional impact of the next Theatre Alibi production, *Home*, touring schools in Autumn 2020. This production has been inspired by a new approach to the work by, 'trusting in children and inviting them into the process' (Sved 2020:1). As a starting point for the production the director and writer have visited classes of children to gather their views and drawings on what 'home' means to them and how they would make a refugee feel 'at home'. It will be interesting to see how this 'child-centred' approach impacts emotionally on those children who see their ideas brought to life within the performance.

As my research has progressed I have presented my preliminary findings at conferences; to memory scholars at an international conference in Madrid (2019);¹⁴⁰ to theatre practitioners at an international ASSITEJ conference in Norway (2019);¹⁴¹ and an academic conference in Audience Studies in York (2019).¹⁴² My findings have been well received with further interest into whether my methodological approach,

¹³⁸ International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People.

¹³⁹ Initially planned for July 2020, this conference has been temporarily postponed due to the Coronavirus.

¹⁴⁰ Annual Memory Studies Association Conference, Complutense University, Madrid 25-28 June 2019.

¹⁴¹ ASSITEJ Artistic Gathering, Kristiansand, Norway, 2-5 September 2019.

¹⁴² 'Across the Live/ Mediated Divide' Audience and Film Studies Conference, University of York, 17-18 September 2019.

particularly the use of the visual questionnaire, could be replicated to explore the impact of theatre on children in a different context such as a theatre setting.

When setting out my research objectives, I not only wanted to investigate the impact of Theatre Alibi productions on children's emotional development, but also assess whether developing a system for measuring was desirable and could be replicated. Using the Visual Questionnaire was a simple and pragmatic method for capturing emotional response from children before, after and over time. It was also an expedient method in schools when trying to capture information in a short space of time. It helped me recognise patterns in emotional responses from different groups of children and assess the ways in which a theatre performance, and different production styles, affect children. I suggest this method could be replicated for other productions and in different theatre settings, however, using the Visual Questionnaire alone offers a limited perspective of the impact of a theatre performance. Through semi-structured interviews and asking children to draw or write their responses after the performance and on return visits, I have gained a wealth of rich data which offers new insight into what the children felt, experienced and understood. As a researcher, the challenge has been to robustly analyse this wealth of data. It was through the use of a variety of complementary ethnographic methods that the full value of the productions of *The Boy Who Climbed Into the Moon*, *Apple John* and *Table Mates* has emerged.

Returning to *For, In, With, By*

In Chapter Three (pp.115-117) I discussed in the field of Applied Theatre there is a common mantra that theatre performance should be specifically created *for* audiences, *in* their own community, *by and with* them, suggesting they participate in and have agency over the performance or event. Theatre Alibi's school-based performances places the company within the field of educational theatre and under the umbrella term of 'applied theatre' (Nicholson 2014:4). This would meet the initial criterion of being Theatre *for* children. However, this alone would not be sufficient to make the whole performance 'applied'. The performance alone allows children little agency: it does not include their ideas and they have little choice over participation. However, either through teacher intervention or discussion which the children have with friends, the performance has a further 'with' dimension. Unlike theatre *in*

education where there is a clear educational purpose from the outset, Theatre *with* education is mutually complementary without an intended educational bias, being neither in the service of education nor pure entertainment with no educational value; both elements are distinctive and equally balanced. Evidence from my research would suggest that over time children not only recall but also re-work and re-create the performance, taking ownership by changing the memory and meaning: they personalise it to make it their own, building upon their own experiences and values. Therefore, the performance which was initially *for* children, has then been created *with* children through teacher intervention in the classroom and finally recreated *by* each child to become a new organic interpretation.

This thesis contributes new research to the academy and future researchers in its focus on audience reception amongst children rather than adults, on performances in schools rather than theatres, and exploration of quantitative as well as qualitative data. The *Critical Mass* (Reinelt et al 2014) study of adult theatregoers found that most adults remembered seeing a performance before they were ten years old and that seeing theatre at an early age led to life-long theatre going. This thesis has little data that seeing a Theatre Alibi in a school setting has supported this finding one way or another. As little research has been conducted with children, this thesis offers inclusive research, encompassing children from a wide range of backgrounds, abilities and interests, including those who would have chosen not to see a performance had they been given the choice. It therefore provides valuable data on the impact of theatre on a currently under-researched audience for theatre makers, educators, academics and policy makers.

As this thesis progressed I began to realise with the wealth of data I uncovered, each chapter could have become a PhD thesis in its own right. I have therefore been selective in my reporting but in other ways recognise my research has been limited and non-universal. My field-study evidence has been gathered from the performances from one theatre company and one geographical area, however, it offers a strong starting point for future research. Further scholarly studies using different methods, exploring a range of styles of performance or specific age groups may be useful to confirm more comprehensive and definitive findings. There are also undeveloped findings within this research requiring further investigation. For example, the initial

findings that girls seemed more comfortable with experiencing conflicting emotions than boys which may suggest they have more developed emotional literacy; and the more positive impact of performance in a school setting on lower-ability children and children from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Educational policy in England over the period of the coalition and subsequent Tory governments since 2010 has placed emphasis on the academic rather than the artistic or aesthetic. Curriculum policy has become more instrumental and it can be difficult for headteachers to argue for the continued place of the arts in children's experience. This may be particularly the case for schools in challenging circumstances with lower Ofsted ratings in Multi-Academy Trusts where the focus is not on the arts. My research provides evidence of the impact, both immediate and over time, of Theatre Alibi's performances to children. This may support Headteacher's and teachers in justifying booking Theatre Alibi to provide an experience that the children would not otherwise have access to.

The Durham Commission highlights the issue of social justice within the creativity in school's debate. Its recommendation that access to arts and culture promoting creativity should be enhanced by the introduction of a National Plan for Cultural Education with dedicated 'ring-fenced' funding, if realised, offers new opportunities for theatre companies and schools. Placing a strong emphasis on agency and time for reflection, creative thinking may be further promoted by teachers when they use the theatre performance in imaginative ways and allow children to explore the memory of the performance longitudinally, beyond the 'one-off' event.

My research has sought to articulate not only the value the children attribute to watching performance but also how this value changes over time. My research into the impact of Theatre Alibi's productions, *The Boy who Climbed Into The Moon*, *Apple John* and *Table Mates* suggest that theatre *is* good for children. It improves their well-being, engaging them in exploring difficult emotions and complex issues in a safe place, as well as providing an educational, cultural and creative experience which develops over time and contributes to their social, emotional and cultural development. At a time when arts opportunities are diminishing in schools (Rosen 2019, Durham

Commission 2019: 54) the joy, immense value and lasting impact of watching theatre at an early age needs to be recognised and celebrated.

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TM-TAFF-Wh – Whitchurch Primary School (2018).

Conferences

Assitej. (2019) *Assitej Artistic Gathering*, organised by Assitej International on 2-5 September. Kilden Teater, Kristiansand, Norway.

Big Brum. (2018) *Becoming Someone Different – Act 3* –organised by Big Brum and Birmingham City University on 28 June. Sheldon Community Centre.

Big Brum. (2019) *Engaging, Exploring, Expressing* – Making the case for Theatre in Education- organised by Big Brum and Birmingham City University on 14-15 June. Birmingham City University.

Durham Commission. (2019) *Durham Commission on Creativity and Education – Launch Event*- organised by the Durham Commission and the Arts Council on 10 October 2019. Westminster Hall, London.

Memory Studies Association. (2019) *Annual Memory Studies Association Conference* on 25 – 28 June. Complutense University, Madrid.

Punchdrunk Enrichment (2016) *Imagination, Engagement and Education* – symposium organised by Punchdrunk Enrichment on 9 November 2016, Shoreditch Town Hall.

White Rose College of Arts and Humanities (2019) *Across the Live/ Mediated Divide –Audience Research Conference*. (2019) on 17 – 18 September. Theatre, Film, Television, Media University of York. York.

Live Performances

Theatre Alibi (2016) *The Boy Who Climbed into the Moon*. [live performance] as part of primary school tour 12 September – 15 December.

Theatre Alibi (2017) *Apple John*. [live performance] as part of primary school tour 11 September – 15 December 2017.

Theatre Alibi (2018) *The Boy Who Climbed into the Moon*. [live performance] as part of primary school tour 21 March – 29 March.

Theatre Alibi (2018) *Table Mates*. [live performance] as part of primary school tour 17 September – 20 December