



TO DELIGHT AND TO PROFIT

*Are schools in the early childhood area being offered
a markedly different theatre experience since
December 1991, when the Australia Council Drama
Committee changed its funding guidelines?*

**Thesis for Honours BA In Educational
Theatre**

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1994

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PREFACE

The Roman critic Horace declared in Ars poetica that the aim of the dramatist should be 'to delight' and 'to profit'. This double emphasis on entertainment and instruction was central to neoclassic dramatic theory.

Ever since, there has been constant debate amongst theatre artists, critics and theoreticians about whether the greater emphasis should be on entertainment or instruction. In the twentieth century, playwrights such as Eugene Ionesco have argued for art for art's sake, while Bertolt Brecht strived for theatre that would stir the critical faculties of his audience in such a way that they would be forced to think about their lives.

This study examines this debate in the context of theatre performances for early childhood audiences in present day Australia. In December 1991 the Drama Committee of the Australia Council, the Federal Government's principal arts funding body, conducted a Policy/Program Review. Its resolutions were perceived by the youth performing arts industry as a victory for those who championed art for art's sake. By studying the quantity, types and standards of theatrical performances before and after the 1991 review, this study looks at whether this is indeed the case.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to assess whether schools in the early childhood area are being offered a markedly different theatre experience since the 1991 review, as well as evaluating the response of teachers of this group of children.

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October 1994

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CHAPTER I

1.1 The Problem

The 1991 Australia Council Drama Committee Policy Review stated that the “1970’s ‘social development’ model for TIE [Theatre in Education] is inadequate in today’s environment” ¹. The Drama Committee formed the opinion that

professional Young People’s Theatre needed to address two markets; that of the ‘buyers’ who book the performances, and that of the ‘consumers’, (the young audiences). Whilst the schools will always be looking for productions that are justifiable, addressing in some way the ‘personal development’ of their students, there was a strong belief that too much reliance on issue-based material can result in tedious and oversimplified theatre. ²

The Drama Committee’s opposition to both the “1970’s ‘social development’ TIE model” and to theatre practitioners having to justify theatre in educationalists’ terms led to the Committee taking on an advocacy role to “promote the importance of exposing students to the theatre, and to promote the value of the theatre experience itself” ³. The Drama Committee, in line with this direction, also encouraged professional young people’s theatre companies to perform more frequently in theatres rather than in schools, and opened up Young People’s Theatre funds to any theatre company, regardless of previous experience or commitment in this area.

1.2 Delimitation of this Study

As there is little, if any, theatre suitable for children up to the age of two the term “early childhood” is used in this thesis in reference to what Jean Piaget

¹ Australia Council Performing Arts Board, Drama Committee Policy/Program Review 9-12 December 1991: Notes and Resolutions. (Sydney: Australia Council, 1992) 9.

² Australia Council Performing Arts Board 8-9.

³ Australia Council Performing Arts Board 9.

defines as the second stage of early childhood - preoperational intelligence⁴. Usually this lasts from two to seven or eight years old. The delimitation of the thesis to this age group, whilst making the amount of data manageable, also avoids the considerable overlap of theatre aimed at adolescents, young adults and adults.

Of the three surveys conducted in this study the first, a survey of early childhood theatre from 1988 to 1993, is delimited to productions taking place in South Australia and advertised in the national youth performing arts magazine Lowdown. The second survey, which analyses the results of a questionnaire sent to primary teachers, is delimited to South Australian primary teachers only. The third survey, of early childhood theatre reviews for the years 1989 and 1993, is a national survey but delimited to reviews that appear in the magazine Lowdown.

1.3 The Origins of Theatre in Education

In order to develop effective methodologies for the analysis of the various theatre experiences being offered young people it is necessary to define clearly what is meant by the "1970's 'social development' TIE model". It is also imperative to define what constitutes "issue-based" theatre, and to trace the link made by the Australia Council between it and Theatre in Education. To do this we must look at the origins and growth of Theatre in Education.

The first use of the term "Theatre in Education" was as the title of a memorandum from the Belgrade Theatre Trust to the Coventry Education Authority in 1964. The author, Gordon Vallins, had modified the title of a memorandum titled "Theatre and Education" written by the Artistic Director of the Belgrade Theatre, Anthony Richardson. In the original memorandum Richardson had outlined a number of ways that theatre could relate more closely to schools. In modifying the title Vallins clearly wished to communicate to the Coventry Education Authority that he envisaged more than just a loose association:

⁴ Herbert Ginsburg and Sylvia Opper, Piaget's Theory of Intellectual Development: An Introduction. (Eaglewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1969) 26.

I called it *Theatre in Education* because it seemed to me that the two could not be separated and it was important to emphasise that the professional practitioners would be working within the education system. This is how TIE got its name. ⁵

Vallins was asked to establish a pilot programme and began work with the first TIE team on 1 September 1965. He was strongly influenced by the work of Joan Littlewood and Brian Way:

Joan Littlewood's productions had been a revelation... Their combination of music hall, ballad, irreverence, their openness and directness, was full of creative purpose. Beneath the theatricality the work was singularly alert to social change with its emphasis on the immediate and on seeing social problems in human terms. Brian Way's influence was of a different order... The important thing I learnt from Brian was that drama, used as an educational tool, could be central to the development of the individual. ⁶

These twin concepts, of the use of drama as an educational tool and theatre as an agent of social change, were reflected in the team's first programmes. "The Balloonman and the Runaway Balloons", for infants, and "The Secret of the Stone", for juniors, both encouraged full and active participation from the students. The secondary programme was "a deliberately didactic piece of theatre based on the 1879 Tay Bridge disaster". Echoing Littlewood's productions it was "presented in the style of documentary theatre with sound effects, folk songs, projected pictures, a giant map and a number of props" ⁷.

The success of the Coventry TIE team, combined with the economic boom of the late 1960s and early 1970s, prompted a rapid growth in the use of TIE throughout Britain. By the mid 1970s there were approximately twenty teams that concentrated exclusively on Theatre in Education work. Its rise coincided with the growth of the alternative theatre movement in Britain, and the openly didactic aims of TIE enhanced its attraction as a theatre form to many practitioners with a strong

⁵ Gordon Vallins, "The beginnings of TIE," Learning through theatre: Essays and casebooks on Theatre in Education, ed. Tony Jackson (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1980) 9.

⁶ Vallins 4-5.

⁷ Vallins 13.

social and political agenda. As one Australian visitor, Max Wearing, wrote in 1974, "Theatre-in-education in England has the public image of something new, avant garde, radical and exciting" ⁸.

With this growth came a change in emphasis with regard to the content of TIE. The early approach of the Coventry TIE team is summed up by David Pammenter, who joined the group in 1969:

Initially, this work was deeply rooted in the newly adopted educational theory and was to do with 'learning by doing'. It did not base itself in its content - that which was to be communicated or explained - but rather it focused itself on the methods by which communication takes place. Programme aims at that time were largely to do with creating a forum for the stimulation and development of the imagination of the child, the development of social behaviour and the extension of creative play. ⁹

Brecht's teaching plays of the late 1920s and early 1930s, or *Lehrstucke*, were seen by some as the forerunners of TIE. Many of TIE's new adherents saw it as the perfect vehicle for a Brechtian theatre that would stir the critical faculties of their audiences in such a way that they would be forced to question society and themselves. The Leeds Playhouse Theatre in Education team, one of the most highly regarded in Britain in the mid 1970s, is one such example. Indeed, as Wearing comments, as "one watches the Leeds team in action it is very easy to think of Brecht" ¹⁰.

In the same article the nominal leader of the Leeds TIE team, Roger Chapman, makes it very clear that content no longer exists merely as a means to stimulate thought, discussion and hence personal development in students - by this time it has assumed primary importance:

What we normally do is start with a topic we want to say something about. We

⁸ Max Wearing, "The Leeds Theatre in Education Team," Proposed Youth and Children's Theatre Association of Australia Newsletter No 2 (1974): 10.

⁹ David Pammenter, "Devising for TIE," Learning through theatre: Essays and casebooks on Theatre in Education, ed. Tony Jackson (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1980) 38.

¹⁰ Wearing 12.

research it - that's our first job. Then we all put forward what we feel about our research. Then we say, "What kind of a line can we take on this?"¹¹

The shift in emphasis to content affected a number of educational drama elements central to the original concept of Theatre in Education - the actor-teacher, teaching in role, active participation and small audiences. Vallins chose the title 'actor-teacher' because "I was certain that TIE members should be actors who could teach - and ideally had received some kind of teacher training - or teachers who could act"¹². Vallins envisaged the actor-teacher as 'teaching in role', using a high level of improvisation, creative play and personal interaction between performer and individual students. This degree of active participation virtually dictated a small audience of no more than two classes of students.

By 1976, however, things had changed drastically - as the Bolton TIE explains:

We've started to do other than participatory programmes, because there has been a drive by members of the company to use their skills in a much more presentational way. This is reflected nationally in all TIE teams - Coventry, the Cockpit; not sure why, because it's over the past five years. When we came here the method was using actors in role, with kids in role. In a sense what you were looking at (i.e. the subject) was secondary. Now it's turned on its head. You start with a real social issue and you're going to come to grips with that - not easy to do with participation. It lends itself much more easily to theatricalisation.¹³

The reference by the Australia Council to the "1970s 'social development' model" for Theatre in Education, and the perceived tendency of TIE to base its theatre on social issues, now becomes clear. By the mid 1970s in Britain, the theatre experience and Drama in Education methods used served the subject matter of TIE programmes in most, if not all, companies. This relationship is reflected in the definition of Theatre in Education by the British Department of

¹¹ Wearing 12.

¹² Vallins 12.

¹³ Christine Redington, Can Theatre Teach: An Historical and Evaluative Analysis of Theatre in Education, (Oxford: Pergamon, 1983) 115.

Education and Science in its 1976 report, describing it as “a team of actors using theatre skills in schools to provide a framework in which children can work with actors (both often playing a role) to explore a subject through the methods of educational drama”¹⁴.

1.4 TIE in Australia

Educational theatre had already begun in Australia long before the birth of the Coventry Theatre in Education model. Joan and Betty Rayner toured throughout Australia with their Greenleaf Theatre from 1948 to 1968, already having set up the Theatre of Youth in Sydney in the 1920s. Using a minimum of props and costumes, and relying heavily on an expansive acting style and mime, their aim was to “help widen the horizons and enrich the potential of children, and give them an awareness of the universality of man”¹⁵.

The Shakespeare in Jeans Company of the Young Elizabethan Players also toured throughout Australian schools in the 1950s, performing extracts from Shakespearean plays. The Arts Council of New South Wales was another organisation producing and touring productions during this time. A common link of these companies however was that their focus was not on exploring the issues of curriculum based texts but on promoting the importance of the theatre experience. It is possibly only their stated aims and the relevance of their texts to school curriculums that separates their work from Children’s Theatre - theatre designed primarily to entertain children.

The 1960s marked the beginning of an Australian theatrical movement that deliberately sought new forms and to rebel against the British theatrical models used in Australia. Led in Melbourne by La Mama and the Australian Performing Group, and in Sydney by Nimrod, many theatrical practitioners were subject to the

¹⁴ Department of Education and Science, Actors in Schools: Education Survey 22, (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1976) 5.

¹⁵ Dianne Mackenzie, “Theatre-in-Education,” NADIE 17.1 (1992) 43.

same sorts of influences as their counterparts in the British alternative theatre movement.

Theatre was seen by some, especially in Melbourne, as a means of changing society. One La Mama production, for example, protested Victoria's restrictive legislation prohibiting profanity and offensive language. Cast members were regularly arrested during performance by police. The audience would then follow the police back to the police station, chanting the same language for which the cast had been arrested.

The work of Bertolt Brecht was a source of inspiration to many theatre workers of a left wing political or ideological disposition. But having discarded one imported cultural model few were intent on superimposing another European straitjacket on Australian culture. The APG in particular worked to find new ways of creating theatre that would reflect their collective social concerns. Like their counterpart in Sydney, Nimrod Street Theatre at the Stables, they developed a brash, physical performing style. In plays such as The Feet of Daniel Mannix and A Toast to Melba they forged a rough, popular theatre that communicated these social concerns and challenged preconceived notions of Australian history.

It was into this environment that the various models of British Theatre in Education were imported. In many cases this importation was literal - Roger Chapman from the Leeds Playhouse TIE team became the first director of the South Australian Theatre Company's TIE team, Magpie. Another ex-Belgrade actor-teacher, David Young, worked in Western Australia and as Director of Salamanca in Tasmania. New South Wales's Sidetrack Theatre was founded by Don Mamouney after he returned from working in British classical and community theatre and South Australia's Troika too, was founded by Mary Fairbrother after a sojourn in Britain.

Some companies such as Troika, Magpie and Bouverie St Theatre in Melbourne began with many of the hallmarks of the Coventry model of TIE - small

audiences of no more than two classes, actor-teachers and extensive audience participation. Almost without exception though, this work had died out by the early 1980s, leading the Director of Salamanca Theatre, Barbara Manning, to comment in 1981 that “the Coventry style TIE is obsolete, it’s had its day”¹⁶. John O’Toole, another British TIE exponent and author living in Australia, takes this to mean “participatory TIE with small groups” and ponders whether its demise was caused “by financial considerations or theatrical philosophy”¹⁷. Certainly financial considerations were a factor, a point taken up in the next chapter.

One distinctive feature of Australian TIE in the 1980s was a move away from group devised plays. Possibly this came in part from the stinging criticisms contained in the 1982 Australia Council Occasional Paper on Young People’s Theatre, which levelled the charge at many TIE scripts of being “thin, dull and lacking in richness”, as well as “intellectually poor”¹⁸. Whatever the reason, the resultant boom in commissions provided work for many writers, such as Richard Tulloch, Anne Harvey, Jack Davis, Peta Murray, Dorothy Hewitt, John Romeril, Mary Morris and Bruce Keller.

Only some of these writers had a teaching background in educational drama and few showed interest in the early Coventry TIE model. By the mid 1980s few educational drama elements existed in the work of TIE companies. For new writers and directors the single defining feature of Theatre in Education was that it sought to educate its audience about an issue or concept, and hence seemed a logical extension to involvement in the Alternative Theatre movement of the 1970s

¹⁶ John O’Toole and Penny Bundy, “TIE in Australia,” Learning Through Theatre: New Perspectives on Theatre In Education, ed. Tony Jackson (London: Routledge, 1993) 136. Oddly enough, Salamanca was one of the few companies that still occasionally ventured into participatory theatre in the mid 1980s. One example was Save our Soil in 1985, a participatory play with a maximum audience of only 35.

¹⁷ O’Toole 136.

¹⁸ Australia Council Occasional Papers, Theatre Board: Support for Young People’s Theatre, (North Sydney: Australia Council, 1982) 55.

and Community Theatre movement of the 1980s. A predominant attitude of these newcomers was voiced by Magpie Director Angela Chaplin at the 1989 Youth and Performing Arts Conference when she declared that “we make theatre... because we want to change what is wrong in the world”¹⁹.

The emphasis on the issue as the starting point was magnified by the way companies commissioned plays. A synopsis would be prepared for submission to funding bodies and for early publicity releases to schools. Suitably vague, writers wrote plays to fit the title and advertising material. Typical descriptions were:

“A modern myth about the use and abuse of land and water resources.”

“A humorous play exploring aging, death and grieving.”

“The recycling and reutilisation of waste in our essentially ‘throw away’ society.”

“A look at risk-taking behaviour with an emphasis on drink driving.”

“Unionism and its relevance to today’s youth.”²⁰

Possibly more than anything else this method of working left both TIE and Youth Theatre companies open to ridicule, and the charge of tedious, oversimplified theatre:

The Ideological Delirium Youth Theatre Company is presenting its production of *Koalas Are Lovely*, written by the artistic director, funded by the Department of Wildlife and with a cast of enthusiastic youth performers with teaspoons taped to their noses. The show sets out, for 45 minutes, to explain the loveliness of koalas and the unloveliness of a world devoid of them.²¹

The irony of this is that it was a method of working that companies adopted to satisfy the requirements of funding bodies - including the Australia Council.

¹⁹ Angela Chaplin, “Memories of a Rainforest,” Lowdown 12.3 (1990): 30.

²⁰ Excerpts from the “What’s On” section of Lowdown, issues 11.1 and 12.3.

²¹ Francis Greenslade, “Form and Function: Percolating ideology in youth theatre,” Lowdown 13.4 (1991): 19.

1.5 Definitions

By the mid 1980s Young People's Theatre had become the generic term in Australia for a wide variety of theatrical performances for or by people under 25, including Youth Theatre, Theatre in Education, Children's Theatre and Theatre for Young People. Theatre in Education had become a general term referring to performances by specialist theatre companies that tended to occur in schools, much of which had little in common with the original aims of Gordon Vallins. The elasticity of its use caused confusion even among professional practitioners. In July 1984 a Young Peoples' Theatre Workers' Weekend was continually disrupted by bitter and divisive arguments about the definition and purpose of TIE and Theatre for Young People ²².

The move from educational drama to presentational methods in Australia rendered the Theatre in Education definition of the British Department of Education and Science inappropriate. John O'Toole's description of TIE work in his influential book, Theatre in Education, had now become obsolete ²³.

Even the Australia Council's 1982 definition of Theatre in Education bore little resemblance to some of the TIE work they were funding later in the decade:

A form of theatre developed during the 1960's in the United Kingdom. The primary function of TIE is to educate through entertainment. Adult actors are used, who often have teaching skills... Scripts are usually based on the curriculum or relevant social or historical issues... The audience is invited to participate both actively and passively, sometimes actually determining the outcome of a play by their involvement... ²⁴

²² Mackenzie 48.

²³ "... all take place in schools;
comprise a group of actors, working in role and costume, for and with children:
each play, like any other, centres around definable characters in a state of dramatic conflict;
all involve areas of theatricality and performance combined with areas where the members of the audience are directly and personally spoken to, even personally embroiled in the dramatic conflict;
the subject matter is clearly relevant to part of the curriculum in most English schools...;
each has a specifically educational aim."

John O'Toole, Theatre in Education: New objectives for theatre - new techniques in education, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976) 9.

²⁴ Australia Council Occasional Papers 1.

While “Children’s Theatre” would at first seem to be a useful term for young people’s theatre not conforming to TIE models, the term has never been popular in Australia. Whether this is because of its association with a younger age group or a feeling that it patronises young people, the antipathy of Australian performing arts practitioners to “Children’s Theatre” is unclear. Interestingly enough, the Australia Council uses it in its 1982 Occasional Paper to describe theatre performed by professional adult performers for children with the primary intention of entertainment. However, it links it to images of Robin Hood, Winnie the Pooh and British theatre, and subsequent references by the Council to Children’s Theatre later in the decade allude more to the Children’s Theatre movement of Europe and the United States.

By the early 1990s the term “Theatre for Young People” (or TYP) had begun to gain ascendancy as the generic term for all professional theatre performances aimed at young people. The term “Theatre in Education” had begun to be phased out, although this was fiercely resisted by some TIE companies. In late 1991 the severing of both State and Federal financial support for Sydney’s Toe Truck Theatre, one of the most prestigious TIE companies, convinced recalcitrant companies that persistence with issue-based TIE could imperil their continued existence. On June 4 1992 a national meeting of Artistic Directors of companies specialising in Theatre for Young People sounded the death knell for Theatre in Education with a well supported proposition - that the “name of the kind of work we are talking about is Theatre for Young People and the title Theatre in Education should be dropped” ²⁵.

The shorthand term “issue-based theatre” was increasingly used by the industry to refer to what the Australia Council describes “the 1970s ‘social development’ model for TIE”, reliant on “issue-based material”. Although the term “issue-based” would tend to indicate material based on a topic that is disputatious

²⁵ Stephen Champion, “Last Year’s TIE,” Lowdown 14.4 (1992): 15.

and warranting social concern, its use is more general and inexact. One opponent of issue-based theatre gave an indication of the industry definition in a paper delivered at the 1989 Youth and Performing Arts Conference, when declaring that theatre “can no longer simply be an instrument for learning about a particular idea or issue”²⁶. The subordination of theatre to an educational purpose was the main thrust of opposition to issue-based theatre, and consequently it mattered little to opponents whether the educational intent was to teach about an issue, concept or idea.

In order to remain consistent with the existing terminology of the Australian youth performing arts industry, the term “issue-based theatre” will be used in this thesis to refer to theatre designed primarily to provide learning experiences, focussing attention on particular concepts, ideas or issues.

1.6 Structure of this Thesis

As stated previously, the purpose of this thesis is to examine whether schools in the early childhood area are being offered a markedly different theatre experience since the changes in funding guidelines resulting from the 1991 Australia Council Drama Committee Policy/Program Review, and to assess the reactions of teachers in the early childhood area to the theatre experiences offered. This chapter has concentrated on the background of Theatre in Education and Theatre for Young People, and appropriate definitions for key terms.

Chapter 2 will review previous research in this area, including that of the Australia Council, and follow the recent debate resulting in these changes. Chapter 3 details the methodologies used in this thesis. Chapter 4 analyses the results of the first methodology, a survey of theatre available for early childhood audiences in South Australia from 1988 to 1993. The primary intent of this methodology is to determine what, if any, changes occurred in artistic content of the theatre offered in that time.

²⁶ Steven Gratton, “TIE. New Times. New Forms.” Lowdown 11.3 (1989): 43.

Chapter 5 analyses the results of a questionnaire sent to 200 South Australian primary teachers. This questionnaire sought information on attitudes to the function of theatre performances in schools, attitudes to issue-based theatre, opinions regarding the artistic standards of companies performing and possible comparisons between 1994 and the period before the 1991 changes.

The objective of the methodology analysed in chapter 6 is to provide more data concerning possible changes in artistic standards in the time before and after funding changes. Theatre reviews from Lowdown, the national youth performing arts magazine, are surveyed for the years 1989 and 1993 in order to compare the reactions of theatre reviewers to the performances offered in the early childhood area.

Chapter 7 summarises the conclusions reached in answering the major objectives of research and examines their implications.

CHAPTER II

2.1 Previous Research

One of the most extraordinary things about the rise of Theatre in Education in Australia and Britain is the lack of ongoing research evaluating its effectiveness. The meagre research that does exist may be summarised by the title of Christine Redington's historical and evaluative analysis of Theatre in Education - "Can Theatre Teach?". That is, the emphasis of past research has been on evaluating the educational effectiveness of Theatre in Education. In seeking to "promote the value of the theatre experience" and to "re-affirm the need for risk, innovation and excellence in production" ²⁷ the Australia Council shifted the emphasis to evaluating the artistic effectiveness of Theatre in Education.

The British Department of Education and Science admits the bias towards educational effectiveness in the introduction to its 1976 educational survey, Actors in Schools:

This survey was undertaken because it was felt that the work of actors in schools needed to be identified and observed from an educational standpoint at a time when many questions are being asked about it... The schools are thus the focal point of this survey and everything has been observed from the schools' point of view. ²⁸

Nevertheless, the report would seem to support the Australia Council Drama Committee's belief that "too much reliance on issue-based material can result in tedious and oversimplified theatre" ²⁹ . While conceding that "some companies are very properly concerned not only with the relationships of young

²⁷ Australia Council Performing Arts Board 9.

²⁸ Department of Education and Science v.

²⁹ Australia Council Performing Arts Board 9.

people with one another, but also with their place and role in society”, the survey found that

there have been several [TIE programmes] which have over-simplified and over-stated critical and negative attitudes towards particular institutions and abuses. There is a tendency to see things in black and white, in terms of symbols and attitudes... which in the most extreme cases can best be described as ‘agitprop’ in style and intention. ³⁰

In its conclusions the survey found that the “best work observed lay in the personal and social fields rather than in the aesthetic and intellectual ones” ³¹ . Many teams were found to lack a “writer of quality”, had little opportunity for research and would have benefited from the services of a designer. It concluded that these artistic deficiencies were not caused by the inherent limitations of the genre attempted however, but by the limited financial resources of TIE teams.

Like this survey, Christine Redington’s book Can Theatre Teach? clearly states its emphasis - the “purpose of this book is to analyse the effectiveness of TIE’s work in schools, and to explore how it uses theatre to teach” ³² . Funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Scottish Arts Council, Redington travelled around Britain in 1976 observing the work of many Theatre in Education teams.

The Scottish Arts Council’s Bursary for 1978-79 enabled her to write up her findings and conduct a research project on a Greenwich TIE programme, “Race Against Time”. This later period coincided with renewed cuts to funding in the area of British Theatre in Education, and her book is at times an impassioned plea for its continued existence. Her justification is based almost exclusively on educational grounds:

Theatre in Education... is in great danger of disappearing altogether... TIE makes a unique contribution to education. Teams are able to introduce themes and methods into a school which a teacher would find it hard to do as

³⁰ Department of Education and Science 17-18.

³¹ Department of Education and Science 52.

³² Redington 1.

an individual. In its ability to motivate pupils to learn, and concentrate, and produce stimulus on many different levels, TIE offers something that the education system appears to destroy.³³

Redington applauds the decision of some companies to implement the recommendations of the Department of Education and Science in employing specialist designers and musicians, but does not acknowledge any artistic deficiencies in companies without these specialists. She does acknowledge that some companies had been guilty of proselytising in the early 1970s but feels that by the end of the decade "it's been toned down a little"³⁴ and TIE has attained a new maturity.

Redington describes a climate of considerable antagonism between some of the regional theatre companies and their TIE teams. TIE company members felt that they were treated as second class citizens by the main house actors -Redington argues that TIE and mainstream are different but equal, then quotes a number of attacks by TIE practitioners on mainstream theatre:

Theatre has failed as a forum... I am not here criticising the entertainment value of theatre except in that it seldom entertains young people, rather I am questioning its purpose and looking at its effect. It is in the main, irrelevant.³⁵

Redington's view of theatre is essentially Brechtian and hence her research project gives little weight to 'the value of a theatre experience in itself'. Rather, she perceives theatre more as sugar coating for the pill. Theatrical symbols and images are useful as a visual 'shorthand', "preventing TIE programmes becoming heavy sermons, or agit-prop pieces. They convey the message without the soap-box"³⁶.

Of the 13 questions in Redington's questionnaire, only one pertained to

³³ Redington 211.

³⁴ Redington 117.

³⁵ Redington 126.

³⁶ Redington 203.

the artistic standards of the play "Race Against Time". Responses from both the performers and students criticised the songs, the length of scenes and the programme's appropriateness for young people. Curiously enough, Redington barely comments on this in her analysis.

South Australia was particularly active in research pertaining to Theatre in Education in the years 1974-76. The Drama Sub-Committee of the S.A. Secondary English Curriculum Committee conducted a survey in early 1974 to ascertain the opinions of teachers regarding theatre performances in secondary schools. The report was compiled by C Lloyd-Wright, Research Officer for the South Australian Institute of Technology, and completed in May 1974.

The most popular type of production with teachers was found to be Theatre in Education programmes, followed by performances of plays. The least popular type of production was found to be edited versions of classic plays.

Lloyd-Wright notes that the "high percentage response, the thought and interest shown in the completion of the questionnaire, and the answers themselves, all indicate that drama in schools is a vital issue". The vehemence of country respondents convinced her that "there is an immense hunger for live drama in country schools" and these and other teachers sought to have "the inner workings of a dramatic production... opened up for them" ³⁷. It is interesting to note these similarities between the findings of a survey taken twenty years ago and those conducted for this study - a point which will receive comment later.

Two important studies of Theatre in Education in the 1970s stemmed from the Advanced Diploma Studies in Drama at the Torrens College of Advanced Education in 1976. Robyn Callan, in "Theatre '62 T.I.E. Team: Its Conception, Change and Maturation", documented the evolution of the Theatre '62 T.I.E. team from its beginning in 1975 to the end of 1976. As a member of this team, her work provides a fascinating insight into the issues and influences affecting this and other

³⁷ C. Lloyd-Wright, Theatre Companies and Secondary Schools: The Requirements and Opinions of Teachers (Adelaide: S.A.I.T., 1974) 2.

TIE teams.

Callan writes at length about two major influences on South Australian Theatre in Education, Albert Hunt and Roger Chapman. Albert Hunt, from the Bradford Theatre Group, had developed a production for the Popular Theatre Troupe which was included in the 1976 Adelaide Festival of the Arts. This production, about the effect of Christian evangelism on Aboriginal culture, was highly political. Callan feels that it 'preached' to the audience, although this was not its intent. Nonetheless, apart from very specific educational and community theatre ideas Callan asserts that one important influence of Hunt on TIE teams in Australia was in "creating T.I.E. programmes that are politically biased with strong conviction towards one particular belief" ³⁸.

Roger Chapman, in this context, is considered by Callan to have a moderate approach centred on personal awareness and development. Chapman had been invited to Australia to direct the "Feast of Fun" for the same festival and was shortly to return as the founding director of the Magpie TIE team.

With these two influences affecting her team's work, the conflict for Callan is not between form (theatrical presentation) and content, but between two types of content oriented theatre. Callan quotes the example of one of the Leeds programmes, based on "a dispute over grazing rights on a piece of common land in the Middle Ages" ³⁹. Whereas Hunt would have looked more at the total social system, Callan prefers Chapman's approach of concentrating on the individual people of the age. At no stage is the theatrical viability of the topic in question.

The 1975-6 repertoire of the Theatre '62 team reflects this bias towards content or issue-based theatre, with programmes on marriage, migrants, women's role in society, image-making and prejudice.

³⁸ Robyn Callan, "Theatre '62: Its Conception, Change and Maturation," Torrens College of Advanced Education, 1976, 52.

³⁹ Callan 57.

Whereas Callan concentrates on TIE for secondary schools, Christine Tingley's "Theatre in Education" focuses on the primary area ⁴⁰. Stimulated by a visit to her year 4/5 class by the Troika TIE team in 1975, Tingley spent much of 1976 studying the team and the philosophy of the founder, Mary Fairbrother. Compared with the conflicting theories of TIE circulating in both Australia and England, the Troika approach of this time is remarkably coherent.

Tingley justifies the work of Troika in terms of the psychological development of this age group, and quotes developmental psychologists such as Bruner, Piaget, Sara Smilansky and Donald Winnicott to support this view. The dramatic activity of Troika's programmes is seen as a natural extension of the child's play, and the numerous pictures and first hand accounts of the programmes certainly support this argument.

The picture painted here is of dramatic participation rather than theatrical presentation. The active nature of children at this developmental stage is used by Troika, so they 'learn by doing'. At a later stage they will internalise these processes and be a mentally active (though physically passive) audience.

Troika's programmes reflected an emphasis on process rather than content with programmes such as "Beyond the Stump", "The Wanderer's Way" and characters such as Esmerelda the Gypsy and Bilbo the Clown. More a creature of education than the performing arts it, like a number of other TIE teams, was funded by a State Education Department. Troika folded in 1983 and was not replaced. The only TYP company in Australia principally funded by an education department at the time of writing is Kite Theatre in Queensland. As mentioned in the first chapter, the type of work done by Troika almost totally disappeared by the 1980s.

The great diversity of opinion regarding the direction and purpose of Theatre in Education was a point picked up in the South Australian report of a joint study of the Schools Commission and the Australia Council entitled Education and

⁴⁰ Christine Tingley, "Theatre in Education," Torrens College of Advanced Education, 1976.

the Arts, published in December 1977. The report is of only marginal interest with regard to this thesis. However, some comments are relevant - it notes for instance that there is an "increasing interest in the value of Theatre-in-Education from all quarters" ⁴¹ . The most obvious problem with regard to performances in schools is deemed to be the erratic standards of TIE companies, and the report remarks on the lack of incentive for "established playwrights to write scripts for children and young people" ⁴² .

2.2 The 1982 Australia Council Program Review

In 1982 the Australia Council produced a comprehensive and important Occasional Paper in its Program Review Series entitled Theatre Board: Support for Young People's Theatre. It was intended both as an aid to assessing the value of subsidised programs and also to act as a source of information:

In publishing this review, Council is, for the first time, making available to the government, the theatre profession, and the general public, a unique overview of the young people's theatre companies it has supported since 1974. It gives an historical account of why, and how, the Board has subsidised young people's theatre, and presents a general view of the companies' financial conditions, and the type of work they perform. The review also surveys the achievements and shortcomings of young people's theatre in Australia and... outlines strategies for assisting its development in the future. ⁴³

The history of Australia Council funding for TIE gives an insight into present attitudes. The 1969 Drama Committee laid the foundations with a recommendation that "a permanent regional company in each State should include among its services plans to make the best theatre available to young people" ⁴⁴ . This resulted in the allocation of five trial grants of \$20,000 in 1975 to the

⁴¹ South Australian Study Group, Education and the Arts: South Australian Report, (Canberra: Summit, 1977) ⁴².

⁴² South Australian Study Group ⁵².

⁴³ Australia Council Occasional Papers Preface.

⁴⁴ Australia Council Occasional Papers ¹⁹.

Melbourne Theatre Company, National Theatre Company (WA), Queensland Theatre Company, State Theatre Company (SA) and Tasmanian Theatre Company.

In the time between 1969 and 1975 though, the climate of young people's theatre had changed radically - a fact that the Council does not acknowledge in the paper. Theatre in Education had come to Australia, and companies like the Theatre '62 TIE team and Troika were commencing operations throughout the country, often assisted by educational authorities. Rather than become a stakeholder in these new companies, the Council continued with its six year old plans to establish high quality children's theatre under the wing of State theatre companies. Predictably, at their time of inception, these companies opted for what they perceived as the most exciting and innovative artistic direction - which in 1975 was Theatre in Education, not Children's Theatre.

While contributing to a massive growth in the area of Theatre in Education in the number of companies, this decision created a divided and under-resourced industry - educational authorities funded some companies totally while the Australia Council bore the brunt of funding for others. In its 1980 Youth Theatre policy ⁴⁵ the Theatre Board stated that it believed

that T.I.E., as an art form with a significant educational component, is the responsibility both of arts funding bodies and education departments, but that the majority of T.I.E. funding should come from education sources. The Board wishes to collaborate with education departments and State arts authorities to develop and support T.I.E. ⁴⁶

By this time \$538,000, or 84% of its total funding for Young People's Theatre was directed toward Theatre in Education. The Council accuses educational authorities in the paper of 'shirking their responsibilities' and 'buck-passing'. But the decision to start up TIE companies under the management of

⁴⁵ The Council uses the term "Youth Theatre" at this time as performance both for and by young people, rather than Young People's Theatre.

⁴⁶ Australia Council Occasional Papers 23.

State theatre companies with no experience in this area must account for some of the reticence from these educational authorities.

The 1982 Occasional Paper gives clear indications that the Theatre Board regrets the extent of its commitment to Theatre in Education. It blames a bias towards TIE within its advisory committee in the formative years of 1974-76 for the large proportion of funds devoted to TIE. It also gives approximate application statistics designed to show a bias in grants toward TIE and resolves to “change its funding pattern to give more emphasis to children’s theatre and youth theatre”⁴⁷.

The criticism of Theatre in Education in the above paper is at times scathing. It prefaces a section on quality with Christine Westwood’s statement that performances for young people “tend to be too shallow or too earnest in content, unadventurous in form, low in status, poorly executed and aesthetically unsatisfying”⁴⁸. Deficiencies, according to the paper, include scripts which may be ‘intellectually poor’, ‘thin, dull and lacking in richness’, a shortage of skilled directors and gifted actors, and sloppy technical standards. Poor communication, administrative problems and a shortage of appropriate venues are viewed as further exacerbating low standards. Given this state of affairs it is surprising that the Board regrets that many Australian children, including country children and minority groups, are being deprived of seeing these shows!

Most of these problems are ascribed to a lack of financial resources, but already educational influences are being regarded by the Theatre Board with distrust. The support of some education departments in the form of seconded teachers is seen to be imposing ‘limitations on the company’s artistic resources’. Barbara Manning, director of Salamanca Company, is quoted prominently:

My concern is that some theatre-in-education companies staffed by teachers and employed within the Department of Education are in fact very good drama in education companies presenting active participation drama to students. This is often very good indeed, but it is not necessarily good theatre in

⁴⁷ Australia Council Occasional Papers 10.

⁴⁸ Australia Council Occasional Papers 55.

education... Such companies may become servants of the education system rather than catalysts,... their freshness and originality may be lost. ⁴⁹

Content, as well as form, is attacked. The necessity of integrating with the curriculum of schools is regarded as having had some 'disastrous effects' on the quality of some TIE. In arguing this, the paper uses language similar to the 'buyers' and 'consumers' terminology of the 1991 Drama Committee Policy/Program Review:

Theatre companies may have their own convictions and interests; their young audiences may have others; and the educators in charge of the audience may have still other requirements. Thus a company may be in the position of trying to harmonise three very different sets of requirements. ⁵⁰

One curious aspect of the 1982 Australia Council Occasional Paper is its contradictory nature - at some times praising the very things it later criticises. In the background notes to the paper, an 'impressive testimonial' by the 1976 Industries Assistance Commission is quoted. In it the Commission refers to the important role of performing arts in education, contributing to the personal development and general social awareness of children. Yet whereas the Commission recommends incorporation of the basic elements of the performing arts into the school curriculum, the thrust of the paper seems to be in exactly the opposite direction, leaving the reader to wonder why the Commission was quoted in the first place.

Theatre in Education is acknowledged in the background notes as being in the forefront of reflecting ethnic diversity and producing plays by Australians, about Australian issues. Children's Theatre is used in contrast here in a disparaging way. Yet in the main body of the paper Theatre in Education is pilloried and Children's Theatre targeted as a new growth area for funding.

The criticisms of Theatre in Education do not seem to correspond with the summaries of the quality assessments contained in the appendix to the paper

⁴⁹ Australia Council Occasional Papers 36.

⁵⁰ Australia Council Occasional Papers 61.

to federal funding in a number of areas. In a climate where the Australia Council was accused of elitism, and propping up esoteric art like opera at the expense of contemporary art such as rock and roll, the youth arts fared well. Leo McLeay was influenced strongly by the 1976 Industries Assistance Commission report and its strong endorsement of youth arts.

Even so, TIE companies had to cut back in commissioning new work and in the size of their casts. For companies like Sydney's Toe Truck Theatre this meant "going back to TIE basics and cutting back on the high profile theatre" ⁵¹ . Pressure was put on TIE companies to charge for their work, leading David Young of Salamanca Theatre to defend free TIE as a part of the curriculum, and hence a part of free schooling. Ironically, this push to make TIE companies more 'self-supporting' pushed them toward higher charges and larger audiences, thus making it harder to create an experience contributing to the 'personal development' and 'social awareness' of students. The larger audiences dictated a more presentational style which made the Coventry style TIE impracticable, and social development was hindered by ticket charges that discouraged the attendance of many socially disadvantaged students. Once again, the Australia Council seemed to be steaming in the opposite direction to the Industries Assistance Commission and McLeay reports in the area of youth arts.

With content the only outlet for educative aims there was an inevitable overload of message in some companies. In the November 1986 issue of Lowdown John O'Toole accused some TIE companies of 'Moralisis' - "of trite moral epithets, packaged in primary colours and bogus jollity, with grown-ups pretending to be childlike and doing silly things..." ⁵² . While O'Toole speaks of a specific problem with regard to Queensland TIE, and remained a strong supporter of TIE in

⁵¹ John Emery, "What Price Survival?" Lowdown 9.5 (1987): 17.

⁵² John O'Toole, "Moralisis - a disease indigenous to Banana Republics," Lowdown 8.5 (1986): 25.

1992⁵³, this article is quoted later by opponents of TIE and issue-based theatre.

Reports on overseas developments were published in Lowdown, usually by people on travel sponsored by the Australia Council. The Young People's Project Officer with the Australia Council in 1984, Mary Travers, grew exasperated when reporting on the debate about a David Holman play at the U.K. TIE Conference - "the necessity to justify theatre in educational terms is tiresome and repetitive [sic]"⁵⁴. Anthony Howes, later in the decade, commented on the actions of TIE practitioners in his report on the 1989 Sheffield International Festival for Children. After observing that these people "were loud in questioning the absence of children's theatre which dealt directly with issues", he wrote that this "made me uneasy because I could sense a fear from some of these people that the Festival was pointing away from social propaganda towards art"⁵⁵.

By 1989 a feeling of weary acceptance to change had emerged amongst TIE directors:

I'd rather do a good yarn than an issue-based piece... I think TIE needs to move towards family theatre - in the style of what's known as Children's Theatre, with its magic, its use of theatrical space and developed skills - if it is to survive."⁵⁶

Steven Gration's proposal at the 1989 Youth and Performing Arts Conference for Theatre in Education to develop into Theatre for Schools and then Theatre for Young People, reported in Lowdown in June 1989⁵⁷, gained quick acceptance. Two issues later Ian Chance in "Reconsolidation Achieved" referred

⁵³ see John O'Toole and Penny Bundy, "TIE in Australia," Learning Through Theatre: New Perspectives on Theatre in Education, ed. Tony Jackson (London: Routledge, 1993) 133-149.

⁵⁴ Ann Hinchcliffe, "Over There," Lowdown 6.5 (1984): 27.

⁵⁵ Anthony Howes, "Plain Good Theatre," Lowdown 11.5 (1989): 29.

⁵⁶ John Emery, "Is TIE Winding Down," Lowdown 11.3 (1989): 18.

⁵⁷ Steven Gration, "TIE. New Times. New Forms." Lowdown 11.3 (1989): 43.

to the “established ex-TIE, now ‘theatre for schools’ companies”⁵⁸ .

By the June issue of 1991 it had become Theatre for Young People⁵⁹ . Brian Joyce made a desperate and passionate plea for TIE’s continued existence in December 1991⁶⁰ , but his disjointed and rambling article appears squalid in comparison with Francis Greenslade’s devastating attack on all issue-based theatre two issues earlier⁶¹ .

Joyce’s state of mind is a poignant analogy to the state of TIE in late 1991. He admits to working in TIE all of his life and still enjoying it. He describes the frustrations of the vagaries of funding and of dealing with schools. Most of all he complains of having to defend his chosen art form for 10 years of the charge that ‘Theatre in Education is Dead’. The tone of the article is weary and desperate, and he admits to being drunk at the time of writing.

Within a few weeks of his writing the article, the 1991 Performing Arts Board Drama Committee Policy/Program Review made the death of issue-based TIE a fact.

⁵⁸ Ian Chance, “Reconsolidation Achieved,” Lowdown 11.5 (1989): 15.

⁵⁹ Leigh Elliott, “Dollars and Sense: Sex, Power and Politics at YAPA `91,” Lowdown 13.3 (1991): 21.

⁶⁰ Brian Joyce, “TIE Me Up,” Lowdown 13.6 (1991): 18-21.

⁶¹ Greenslade 19-22.

CHAPTER III

3.1 The Australia Council Drama Committee 1991 Policy/Program Review

Curiously, the relevant section of the review is entitled “Theatre in Education”, and not “Theatre for Young People”. It reads:

During past grant assessment meetings, Drama Committee members have questioned whether ‘theatre in education’ in Australia has lost the creative force for which it was rightly acclaimed throughout the 1980s. If so, what is the ‘state of the art’ and how can it best be addressed by the Performing Arts Board?

Through debate, an opinion was formed that professional Young People’s Theatre needed to address two markets: that of the ‘buyers’ who book the performances, and that of the ‘consumers’, (the young audiences). Whilst the schools will always be looking for productions that are justifiable, addressing in some way the ‘personal development’ of their students, there was a strong belief that too much reliance on issue-based material can result in tedious and oversimplified theatre.

The Drama Committee recognised that in-school performances can work very well, but there can also be serious theatrical limitations, particularly in design. Encouragement should be given for development of theatre for young people outside the boundaries of the school, if so desired.

Ultimately, the 1970s ‘social development’ model for TIE is inadequate in today’s environment. Performances in schools should be guided by the same push for imagination, risk and innovation as other subsidised theatre practice in Australia. ⁶²

The resolutions of the Drama Committee that follow include promoting “the importance of exposing students to the theatre” and “the value of the theatre experience in itself”. It wishes to “re-affirm the need for risk, innovation and excellence in production” and to encourage “existing professional young people’s theatre companies to perform more frequently in theatres” as well as a greater diversity of method, content, quality and artists. It then encourages “all companies to develop work for young people,... to compete for YPT funds to produce such work” and to seek “opportunities for co-productions between existing young

⁶² Australia Council Performing Arts Board 8-9.

peoples theatre companies and other theatre companies” 63 .

3.2 Methodology of this investigation

A number of smaller questions have to be answered in order to assess whether schools in the early childhood area are being offered a markedly different experience since the 1991 Review, as well as evaluating the response of teachers in this area.

Is less issue-based theatre being offered to schools since the review?

Has the artistic standard of the performances on offer improved since the review?

Can any link be found between issue-based theatre and poor artistic standards?

Are more companies performing in theatres rather than in schools since the review?

What is the opinion of teachers to any changes?

Apart from these questions, an opinion of the Committee that forms a basis for some of their decisions also needs to be tested. Do the ‘buyers’ look primarily for shows that address the personal or social development of their students, or is the theatre experience ‘in itself’ paramount?

This study seeks answers to these questions through three methodologies - a survey of listings of theatrical productions in the national youth performing arts magazine Lowdown, a questionnaire to teachers and a survey of Lowdown theatrical reviews both before and after the Drama Committee Review.

3.3 The Lowdown Survey

Almost since its inception, Lowdown has featured a “What’s On” column. For a nominal annual fee young people’s theatre companies throughout Australia are given space by the magazine to list their present and upcoming productions.

⁶³ Australia Council Performing Arts Board 9.

All entries have the same format, listing the company's name, address, telephone number, the title of the production, age suitability, a short synopsis, the length of the season and, in most cases, the venue and ticket price.

As funding bodies and many schools subscribe to the magazine, most companies regard inclusion in the column as essential. Australia Council funded young people's theatre companies are listed regularly, as well as many independent commercial companies, companies funded by State or educational bodies, and individuals. While 'one off' performances and artists represented by some booking agencies and commercial managements do not list in "What's On", in combination with its reviews, articles and advertisements Lowdown remains the most comprehensive guide to performances offered to young people in any publication in Australia ⁶⁴.

For this study a database was compiled of listings for South Australia in "What's On" from 1988 to 1993 - from four years before to two years after the Drama Committee Review. Supplementary entries have also been included where performances have not been listed but are either reviewed or advertised in Lowdown. The data is then analysed to determine any changes in the type of theatre offered, particularly in regard to the amount of issue-based theatre and 'in-theatre' productions.

Included are all theatrical performances aimed at an early childhood market, excluding dance and music listings. Although most will be professional, cooperative and amateur ventures are also included as well as youth theatre companies producing work for this age group.

The fields selected for entry into the Lowdown database are:

- 1) Name of play
- 2) Name of company

⁶⁴ There may be some productions on offer for the Come Out or Adelaide Fringe Festivals that may not have been mentioned in the magazine and hence not listed in this survey.

- 3) Season
- 4) Issue-Based?
- 5) Australia Council?
- 6) Review
- 7) Notes
- 8) Age group
- 9) In-theatre?

The third field, 'Season', refers to the year in which this production was first presented in South Australia. If the same production is presented in a subsequent year this will not be recorded in the database. While this may do some statistical disservice to long-running productions, information on extended seasons and tours is not always available and any attempt to include this information would result in gross inaccuracy.

The fourth field, 'Issue-Based?', requires a yes/no answer based primarily on the synopsis presented by the company. The criterion for evaluation is whether the synopsis describes theatre designed primarily to provide learning experiences, focussing attention on particular concepts, ideas or issues. Some examples of descriptions of issue-based theatre are:

A puppet play about working with others.

An audience participation show based on a conservation theme.

An adventure show exploring the concepts big and little.

A bi-lingual production that considers the fate of endangered species.

Material that is not issue-based may describe the story or the theatrical experience in advertising material, as in:

Chaos ensues as Clancy, stricken with chicken pox, tries to quell the demands of some very dominating farm animals.

Gravity is defied, puppets manipulate puppets and the eye is tricked by the masters of theatrical illusion.

Where the synopsis does not give enough information to make this judgement further information was sought from a number of sources. This has included contacting the company involved, searching for reviews and articles or speaking with youth arts practitioners about the production in question.

'Australia Council?' asks the question whether the company was funded by the Australia Council either on an annual grant or project basis. 'Review' requires a yes/no answer and refers to whether it has been possible to locate a review of the production. If so, details of the issue and page number are entered in 'Notes' along with any other information about the production.

The eighth field, 'Age group', delineates the age group at which the production is targeted. Any production that is intended for three to eight year olds is included. The survey may therefore include, for example, a production for 7-14 years or a family show for all ages.

The final field, 'In-Theatre?', pertains to whether the initial season was designed to be performed in a theatre or as a touring show to schools. Although some in-theatre productions were later adapted to tour, they are classified as 'in-theatre' if they were designed for maximum effect in a theatre and had a substantial initial season there. Likewise, touring school productions that occasionally performed in a theatre are still classified as 'in-school' if all available information showed that the intention of the design and direction was to produce a flexible touring production for schools. Where insufficient information is available to make this determination they are classified as 'Unknown'.

Analysis of the data is then made to test for correlation between the resolutions of the Drama Committee and any changes in early childhood performances occurring after the Policy/Program Review took place. If the Drama Committee resolutions have been effective in their intent, analysis should show less issue-based productions and more performances in theatres from companies funded by the Australia Council in the years 1992 and 1993 than in the years 1988

to 1991. It also tests the assertion of the Drama Committee that there was too much reliance on issue-based material before December 1991, when the review took place.

3.4 Questionnaire to Teachers

The second methodology entails analysing the results of a questionnaire sent to 200 teachers ⁶⁵. As previously mentioned, this questionnaire sought information on attitudes to the function of theatre performances in schools, attitudes to issue-based theatre, opinions regarding the artistic standards of companies performing and possible comparisons between 1994 and the period before the 1991 changes.

Questionnaires were sent to primary and junior primary schools in metropolitan Adelaide and regional South Australia. In order to maximise the chances of the questionnaire reaching the appropriate person, letters were sent to a contact teacher or addressed to the "Arts Coordinator".

The list of contact teachers was compiled with the assistance of Robyn Goldsworthy, the Education Officer of Carclew Youth Arts Centre. These were derived from a database of applications for the Artists in Schools programme and Foundation SA's primary Schools Sponsorship programme. The list of teachers includes both State and independent schools from both city and country South Australia.

This was supplemented by a list of arts coordinators obtained through work with both Patch and Boulevard Theatres in Adelaide. Finally, a random sample of schools not already contacted were sent the questionnaire addressed to the arts coordinator.

The questionnaire consists of seven statements, each requiring a multiple choice response. The first statement tests the assertion of the Drama Committee that "schools will always be looking for productions that are justifiable,

⁶⁵ see Appendix for a copy of the questionnaire as sent out to schools.

addressing in some way the 'personal development' of their students". It asks teachers to rank in importance their reasons for booking theatre performances. Three options are given - to provide experiences that aid in the personal development of students, to provide students with an entertaining , high quality theatre experience or to educate students about a particular issue. A fourth option is left blank, to be filled out by the teacher with any option they wished and ranked accordingly.

The stated assumption of the Drama Committee is that teachers would regard the first option in Question 1 as the most important - that is, teachers book performances that provide experiences that aid in the personal development of their students. If their belief is correct, then this option would tend to rank highest.

The second, third, sixth and seventh statements seek responses to do with the attitude of teachers to issue-based theatre. The second statement asks for an opinion on whether 'there should be more issue-based theatre available for schools'. The sixth and seventh statements seek validation of the Drama Committee's belief that 'too much reliance on issue-based material can result in tedious and oversimplified theatre'. If respondents agree to the sixth statement, that they had found some performances to be tedious and/or oversimplified, the seventh statement seeks clarification on their view of the relationship of issue-based theatre to tedious and/or oversimplified performances.

A perceptual judgement is required by the third statement, relating to whether respondents perceived that there was more issue-based theatre available in 1994 than 4 years before. As there is a degree of unreliability with regard to any question that asks respondents to recall events that had occurred four years before the time of questioning, three out of six of the responses invite teachers to make no judgement if uncertain.

The purpose of this third statement is to attempt to corroborate the findings of the Lowdown survey regarding whether there has been a decrease in

the amount of issue-based theatre since the Drama Committee Review. If a strong response here conflicts with the findings of the Lowdown survey, it may well point to a change within the industry - such as a greater tendency by teachers to use performers from booking agencies operating in the Eastern states who do not list in Lowdown.

The fourth statement required a response indicating the level of satisfaction the respondent had with the artistic standards of the majority of professional theatre companies that had performed in their school. The fifth statement asked for a response to the statement, 'I believe the artistic standards of the majority of professional theatre companies performing in my school have improved in the past 4 years'. The responses to these statements are indicators of the reaction of teachers to any changes in the artistic standards of performances offered in the four years prior to 1994.

Analysis of the responses is then made to test for correlation between the intent of the Drama Committee resolutions and the opinions of teachers in regard to the theatre experiences offered to early childhood audiences.

3.5 Survey of theatrical reviews

The third survey attempts to provide more data on possible changes in artistic standards in early childhood performances in Australia before and after the Drama Committee resolutions of December 1991. The questionnaire described above provides the opinions of teachers, but as the Australian Council has shifted the criteria for funding Theatre for Young People from educational effectiveness to artistic effectiveness, it is perhaps equally appropriate to seek the opinion of the youth performing arts industry itself on the question of artistic effectiveness. The theatrical reviews of the pages of Lowdown provide one means of doing this.

Reviews for theatrical performances in the early childhood area for the years 1989 and 1993 are surveyed. The intent of this survey is to gauge an overall

picture of the perceived artistic standards of the work from the point of view of industry reviewers in these years. Analysis of these reviews, in conjunction with the analysis of the opinions of teachers, may shed some light on whether schools in the early childhood area are being offered theatre experiences with higher artistic standards than in the years before the Drama Committee resolutions.

In order to provide a more reliable statistical picture, early childhood productions from all states and territories have been included. Although the two earlier surveys are limited to South Australia there are two significant reasons for this change. Firstly, a survey of South Australian reviews would have provided insufficient data to reach even the most tentative conclusions. Secondly, events such as an artistic 'flop' or the 'settling in' period of a new artistic director in a South Australian company would cause a statistical bias out of all proportion to their national importance.

A database was compiled for this survey with the following fields:

- 1) Title
- 2) Company
- 3) Season
- 4) Australia Council?
- 5) Issue-Based?
- 6) Rating
- 7) Notes
- 8) State
- 9) Age Group.

The first five fields are similar to the fields in the Lowdown survey database. They refer to the title of the production, the name of the production company, the year in which it was reviewed, whether the company was funded by the Australia Council and whether the production was issue-based.

The sixth field is an artistic assessment of the production according to the

review on a scale from one to five. The highest rating, one, was given to reviews which were extremely positive about the artistic standards of the production, using such terms as 'delightful', 'exciting', 'wonderful' and 'a resounding success'. A rating of two was given to reviews which were positive about the artistic standards of the production, using such terms as 'satisfying' and 'inventive'. A rating of three was given to reviews which were neutral about the artistic standards of a production, giving both positive and negative comments without a commitment to either direction. A rating of four was given to reviews which were negative about the artistic standards of the production, using such terms as 'doesn't quite make it', 'doesn't live up to its promise', 'suffers from...' and 'something was missing'. The lowest rating of five was given to any review which was extremely negative about the artistic standards of a production, using such terms as 'interminable', 'tedious', 'oversimplified' and 'woeful'.

The field 'Notes' include the issue in which the review appeared and any other pertinent information. The final two fields refer to the state or territory in which the review performance occurred and the age group for which it was intended.

Analysis of the results of the survey is then made to test for correlation between the artistic standards in the period before and after the 1991 Australia Council Drama Committee Policy/Program Review.

CHAPTER IV

4.1 The Findings of the Lowdown Survey

The Lowdown survey resulted in a database with 93 entries. Figure 1 charts the total performances for South Australian early childhood audiences from 1988 to 1993, according to this database.

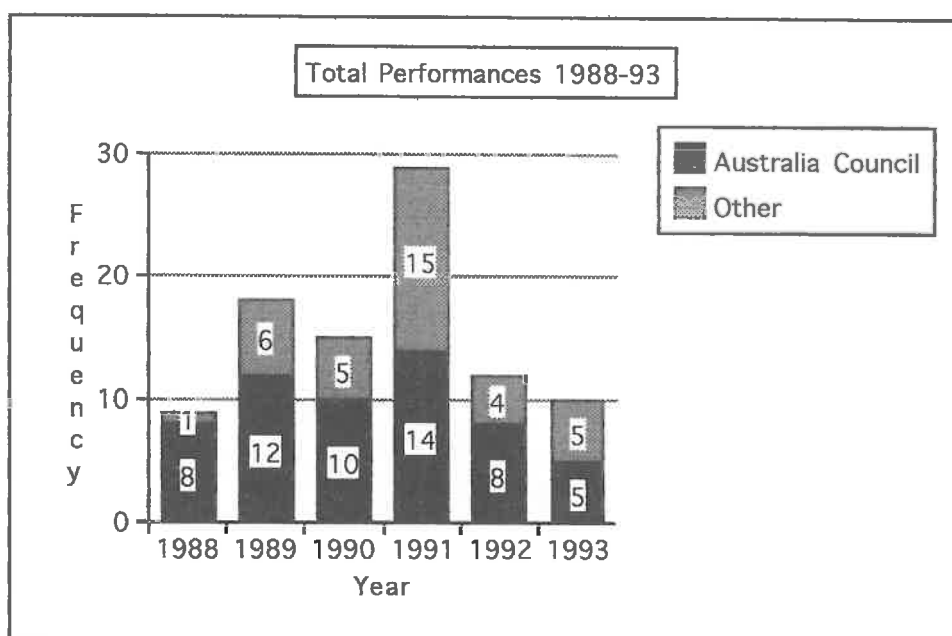


FIGURE 1

A number of modifying factors have to be taken into account in order to interpret this information correctly, the most significant being the 'Come Out' Youth Arts Festival. This festival occurs every two years, and three festivals have occurred in the six years of the survey, in the years 1989, 1991 and 1993. Since Come Out is regarded by the youth performing arts industry as a national showcase for youth performing arts, these years can be expected to have considerably more performances on offer than in the years of 1988, 1990 and 1992. This is balanced to a certain extent by the youth arts component of the Adelaide Festival and Fringe which occur in these years, and a scaling down of

activity before and after Come Out by some companies.

Nevertheless, the Come Out Festival years of 1989 and 1991 show a greater level of activity than 1988, 1990 and 1992. The highest level of activity is clearly 1991, where the survey records 29 productions on offer for the early childhood market. After December 1991, the month in which the Drama Policy/Program Review took place, there is a noticeable drop in the level of activity. This is understandable in 1992, a year in which the Come Out Festival does not take place. However the level of activity continues to drop in 1993 - a fact which is alarming considering the Come Out Festival featured an 'under 10' program. Even taking into account a number of early childhood productions brought to South Australia by Come Out, 1993 offered less to this age group than any year since 1988.

Significant in this figure is a mass exodus of youth theatres from early childhood performance. In 1991 companies such as the Bowden Brompton Youth Circus, Unley Youth Theatre, Backstares and the Riverland Youth Theatre all offered productions suitable for this age group. In 1993 Cirkidz was the only South Australian youth theatre company that advertised a production in Lowdown as being suitable for early childhood audiences.

Two of these companies, Backstares and Riverland Youth Theatre, were undergoing financial and management problems which may have affected proposed productions. In the case of Unley Youth Theatre the artistic direction of the company seemed weighted more toward representing 16-25 year olds in performances that excluded younger children. A synopsis for a 1991 Unley production reads, "Joan lacks self confidence - but there are trees to save, petitions to sign and time is running out!"⁶⁶ . In 1993 the mood is grimmer, there is a tendency toward issue-based work and the product is targeted more to a particular age group - "A provocative play about young people, sexuality, homophobia and

⁶⁶ "What's On," Lowdown 13.4.

violence”⁶⁷.

It is not clear whether the artistic direction in Youth Theatres has changed because of the 1990/91 Australia Council Youth Theatre Policy, which was modified in the December 1991 Policy/Program Review. Although the change affects this study, it is not within its scope to pursue the possibility of a causal relationship.

The sharp drop in activity after December 1991 could be at least partially explained by a number of possibilities. One such possibility is that the high number of early childhood productions in 1991 swamped the market, and companies whose income had suffered withdrew from this area in following years. No anecdotal evidence exists to support this theory however, although a comparison of the projected box office figures of companies attending the 1991 Come Out Festival with the actual attendance figures could prove or disprove its accuracy.

Another possibility certainly has some basis in fact - that productions in the last few years have tended toward a longer 'shelf life'. Rather than planning a four to six week season, some companies are extending the seasons of shows and restaging successes from past years. Patch Theatre is a case in point - in 1993 it extended the season of Pigs Might Fly to 11 weeks, touring city and country with a 1992 production, Once Upon a Ruby Red. It also restaged a production from the mid 1980s, The Ugly Duckling, for its fourth term production. The attendance for these three productions was 21,626 people, over 60% of the total attendance figures for Patch for 1993.

Whatever the reason, Figure 1 clearly shows that while independent and commercial activity remained fairly stable in the years 1989, 1990, 1992 and 1993, new productions suitable for early childhood which were funded by the Australia Council declined after December 1991. In 1992 activity sank 43% to 1988 levels, while in 1993 the drop from 8 to 5 Australia Council productions not previously

⁶⁷ "What's On," Lowdown 15.1.

seen in South Australia marked another decline of 37.5%.

4.2 The Lowdown Survey and Issue-Based Theatre

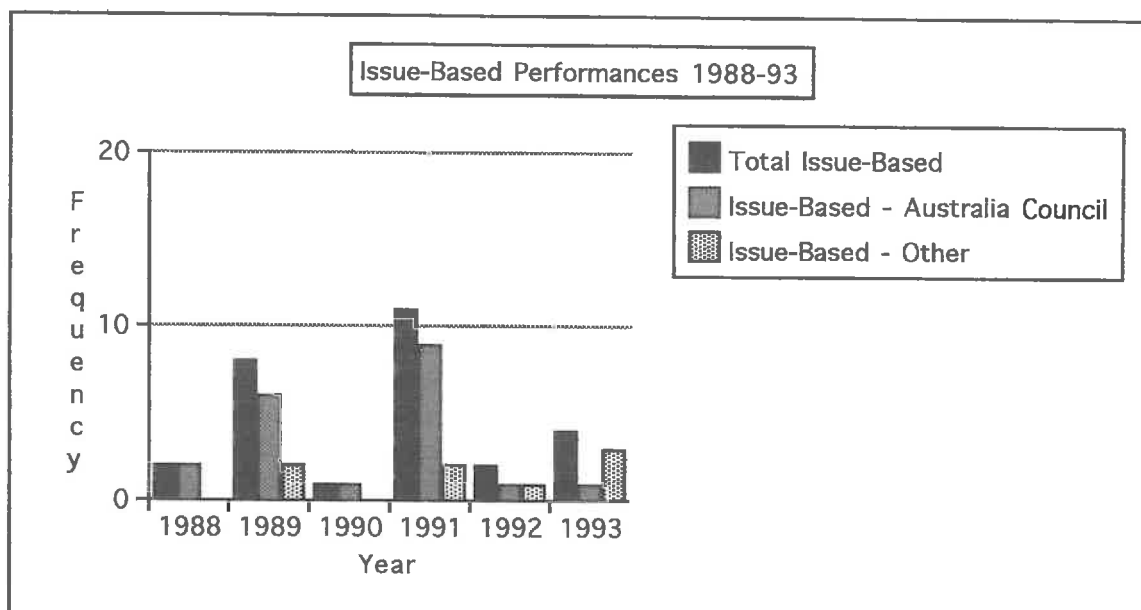


Figure 2

The above figure shows the total number of issue-based performances in black, along with the breakdown of Australia Council funded and non-Australia Council funded issue-based theatre next to the total. It clearly shows a decline in issue-based theatre from the end of 1991 to the end of 1993. Interestingly enough, the results show a far greater incidence of issue-based theatre in the Come Out years of 1989, 1991 and to a lesser extent 1993. In the two years following December 1991 issue-based theatre funded by the Australia Council has almost been phased out completely.

By 1993 there are some tentative signs that issue-based theatre is being taken on by the independent and/or commercial sector. Although the sample is too small to substantiate this finding, there were three productions from this sector in 1993, the most in any year of the survey. One new independent company specialising in issue-based theatre for early childhood audiences, Boulevard Theatre, played to over 20,000 children in 1993, making it one of the most popular

TYP companies in South Australia. That a new company could gain such a strong market share in such a short time, and without State and Federal subsidies totalling hundreds of thousands of dollars, is in itself an argument for the popularity of issue-based theatre in schools.

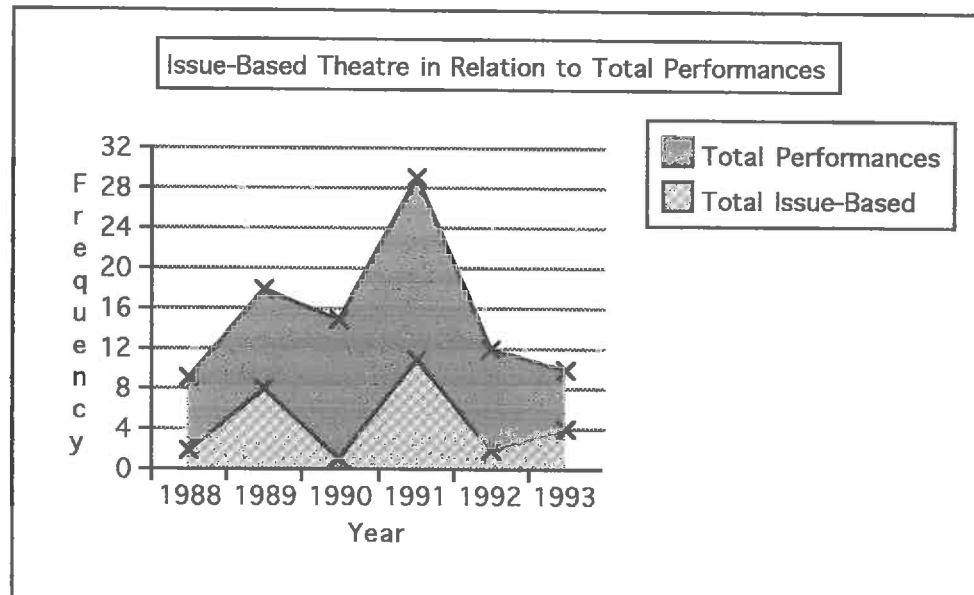


Figure 3

Another example of the popularity of issue-based theatre is illustrated in Figure 3. While issue-based theatre certainly fell in quantitative terms from December 1991 onwards, it retained its market share in a time of reduced offerings.

In 1988 and 1990, years in which *Come Out* did not take place, issue-based theatre comprised 22% and 6% of total performances. The 1992 proportion of 16% still falls in this range. Issue-based theatre in the *Come Out* years of 1989 and 1991 comprised 44% and 38% of total performances. Once again the 1993 proportion of 40% falls between the two previous figures.

Overall, the composition of early childhood offerings with regard to issue-based theatre in the years 1988 to 1993 appears to have stayed relatively stable in proportional terms. The distinguishing features are a sharp drop in the quantity of productions not previously seen in South Australia and a movement of

the Australia Council away from issue-based theatre, leaving the independent and/or commercial sector to fill the gap.

4.3 The Lowdown Survey and In-Theatre Performances

The pattern in regard to in-theatre presentations is complicated by two factors. There are a substantial number of productions that have not been able to be placed as essentially 'in-theatre' or 'in-school' under the criteria listed in Chapter Three. Another problem is the incidence of 'one off' performances by youth theatres funded by the Australia Council in theatres. Some of these productions had an extremely short season and were only marginally geared to early childhood audiences. While they fall within the criteria set down for inclusion in the Lowdown survey, the inclusion of some performances, especially in 1990 and 1991, tends to give an unrealistic picture of Australia Council involvement with in-theatre performances in those years.

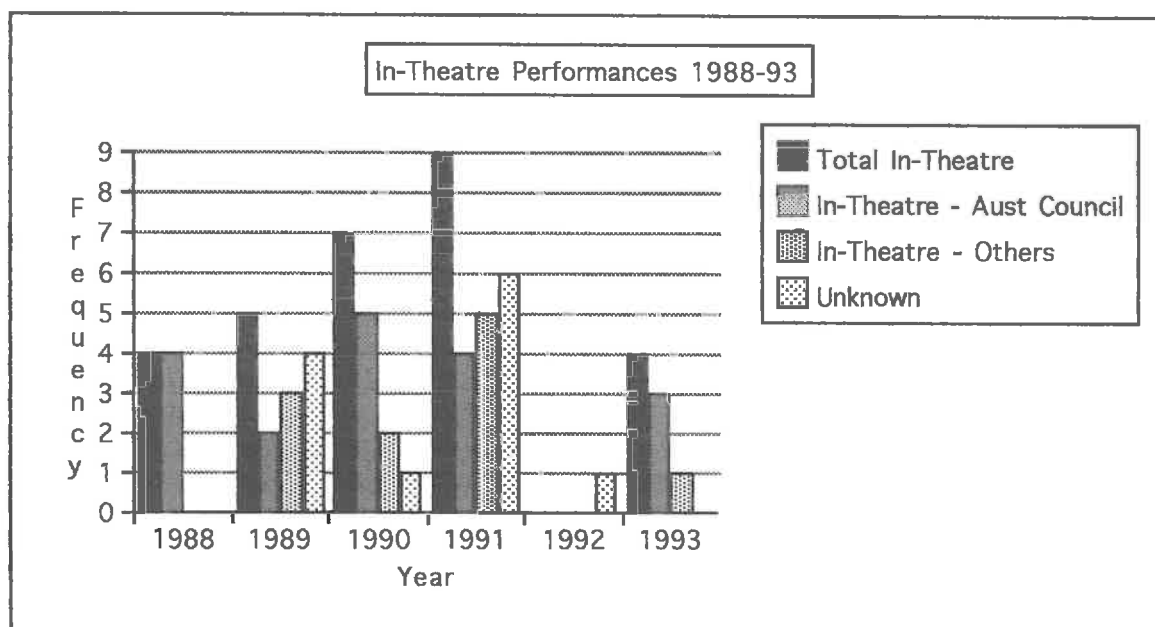


Figure 4

We can see in Figure 4 that Australia Council funded early childhood performances were the only in-theatre productions new to South Australia listed in Lowdown in 1988. This is perhaps not surprising as 8 out of 9 productions listed

this year were funded by the Australia Council. The years 1989 to 1991 show a growth in independent or commercial in-theatre productions, while Australia Council funded in-theatre productions remain fairly static. In 1991 for the first time there are more in-theatre productions from independent or commercial companies than from those companies funded by the Australia Council.

Once again, December 1991 marks a radical change in this area, with no new in-theatre productions for the early childhood market occurring in 1992. In-theatre productions comprise 40% of the market in 1993, but by this time Australia Council funded companies have gained ascendancy once more over the independent and commercial sector.

The collapse of the Alphabet Children's Theatre in 1992 is significant here. This commercial company was based at the Odeon Theatre in Norwood and specialised in holiday shows for children in the theatre there. With productions such as Pippi Longstocking and Snow White and Seven Dwarfs, this company was successful in drawing audiences in its three years of existence from 1989 to 1991.

The reason for its demise is not documented. Anecdotal evidence from the manager of the Odeon Theatre, Bob Jesser, points toward an inability within the company to keep up with government regulation of their business. Management problems are obviously magnified in a theatre company with a small infrastructure and erratic cash flow - hence the State and Federal subsidies to Patch and Magpie Theatres of from \$200,000 to \$400,000. There is no information available as to whether the wealth of product on offer in 1991 affected box office receipts.

4.4 Analysis of Results

The trends in this survey indicate that Australia Council funded productions for the early childhood market are less likely to be issue-based and more likely to take place in a theatre since December 1991. While it is likely that the Australia Council Drama Committee would applaud this action, it is unclear

whether a corresponding sharp drop in the number of performances on offer for the first time to South Australian young children was part of their plan. It is also unclear whether a drop in commercial or independent productions occurring in theatres since 1991 is associated with the drive by the Drama Committee to encourage the companies that the Australia Council funds to perform in theatres.

CHAPTER V

5.1 The Questionnaire - General Comments from Teachers

One hundred and twelve responses were received from the two hundred questionnaires sent to primary teachers throughout South Australia. The high response rate of 56% corresponds to the 1974 South Australian Institute of Technology survey mentioned in Chapter Two. The conclusion of Lloyd-Wright, the compiler of that report, that theatrical performance for schools 'is a vital issue' for teachers, seems to be echoed in this study.

Many respondents comment in detail of their concerns with regard to theatrical performances for schools. The greatest concern, as with the 1974 S.A.I.T. survey, is the availability and cost of theatre in country South Australia - eleven respondents complain of difficulties in this area. Nine other respondents mention the problem of cost, including one respondent who asserts that it is parents, not teachers, who look to justify performances in terms of the personal development of their children:

It's sometimes easier to convince parents that its going to be a valuable learning experience if they can hear/see beforehand that the performance is going to cover some concept / issue / idea. I think this is regrettable, but its an attitude that's found in most school communities. ⁶⁸

Another concern of six respondents is that performances "provide opportunities for students to talk to actors, discuss planning and design and preparation of props and sets, i.e. to take a look behind the scenes" ⁶⁹ . Other respondents speak of seeking productions that support the curriculum and reflect the multicultural diversity of modern Australia. Two responses strongly support

⁶⁸ Questionnaire 99.

⁶⁹ Questionnaire 8.

audience involvement in performance.

The responses are generally supportive of the companies and performers that perform for their students. Occasional problems encountered include inappropriate behaviour of performers, 'a lack of polish and technique' and productions that are inappropriate for the age group to which they perform. A number of teachers speak of the care they take in choosing performances, contacting other schools who have seen the production, reading reviews and viewing preview performances. A degree of resentment surfaces in five responses regarding telephone marketing by TYP companies, especially "eastern state school theatre companies who contact me wanting to work here. I prefer to patronise S.A. companies to give work to local actors" ⁷⁰ .

The comments of respondents with regard to issue-based theatre are fairly evenly divided. While some feel that "in-school theatre ought to have an issue... in order for the children to see its relevance as part of the curriculum" ⁷¹ , one respondent echoes the Drama Committee in complaining that "much of the issue-based theatre which we have seen has been inferior in quality" ⁷² . Others have a more balanced view:

I have to have seen some issue-based stuff or had a direct eyewitness report from someone whose artistic taste I trust before I'll book issue-based theatre. The risk is greater I suspect of tedium but the rewards of good issue-based theatre are huge! ⁷³

5.2 Results of the Questionnaire

The responses to Statement 1 tend to contradict the belief of the Drama Committee that schools look to book performances that are justifiable in terms of

⁷⁰ Questionnaire 27.

⁷¹ Questionnaire 1.

⁷² Questionnaire 17.

⁷³ Questionnaire 103.

the personal development of their students. While 29 teachers feel that the personal development of their students is the most important consideration, more than twice that number opt for the theatre experience.

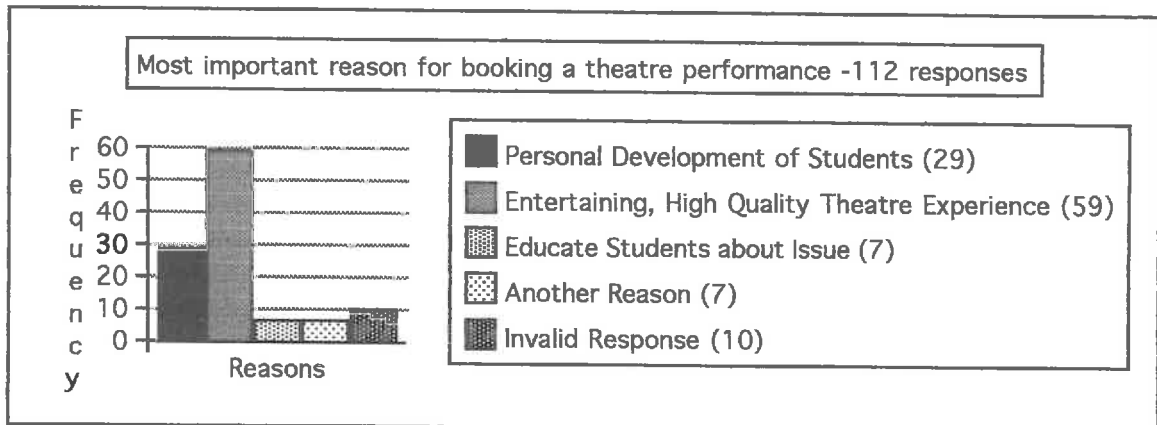


Figure 5

Seven teachers select 'Another Reason' as their first choice. Their primary reasons for booking a theatre performance are to take a look 'behind the scenes' of theatre, for no other reason than entertainment, to encourage language development, a willingness of the company to tour to country areas, to enhance the curriculum with a different approach, a combination of the three other options and on the ground that the production is culturally inclusive and socially just. Ten responses are invalid because they either do not give a response to that statement or tick a number of options without ranking the most important.

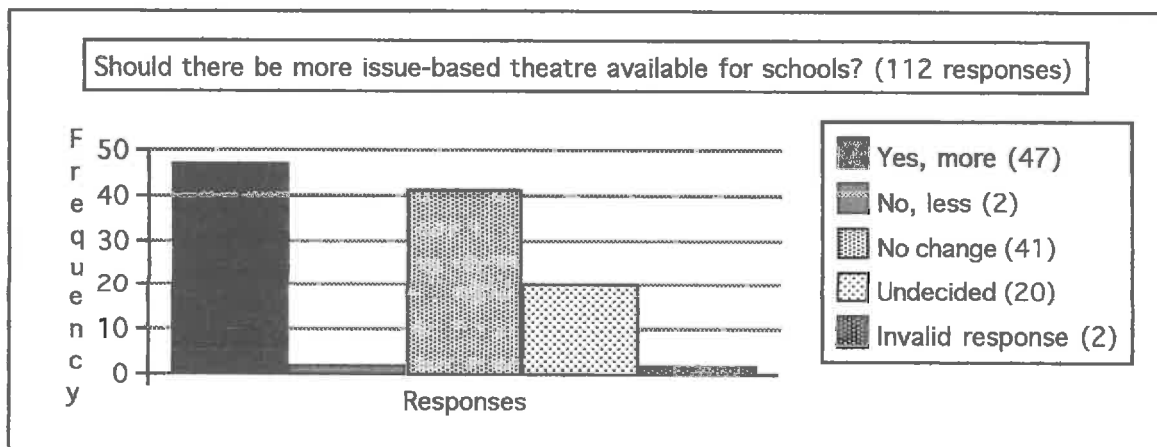


Figure 6

The responses to the statement, "I think there should be more issue-based theatre available for schools" indicate that most teachers feel there should be more issue-based theatre, although it should be noted 41 responses indicate that they are happy with the status quo and almost 20% of respondents are undecided. The responses clearly indicate however that the vast majority of teachers see a place for issue-based theatre for schools, with only 2 responses out of 112 insisting there should be less issue-based theatre.

Figure 7 charts the responses to the statement, "I feel that there is more issue-based theatre available for schools now than four years ago". Of the teachers that make no decision, 19 feel that they are not in a position to make a judgement, 7 cannot recall and 5 are undecided. There is 1 invalid response. Only 5 teachers feel that there has been no change and 3 teachers feel that there is less issue-based theatre available for schools. A total of 72 respondents, an overwhelming 64% of responses, feel that there is more issue-based theatre available for schools than 4 years ago.

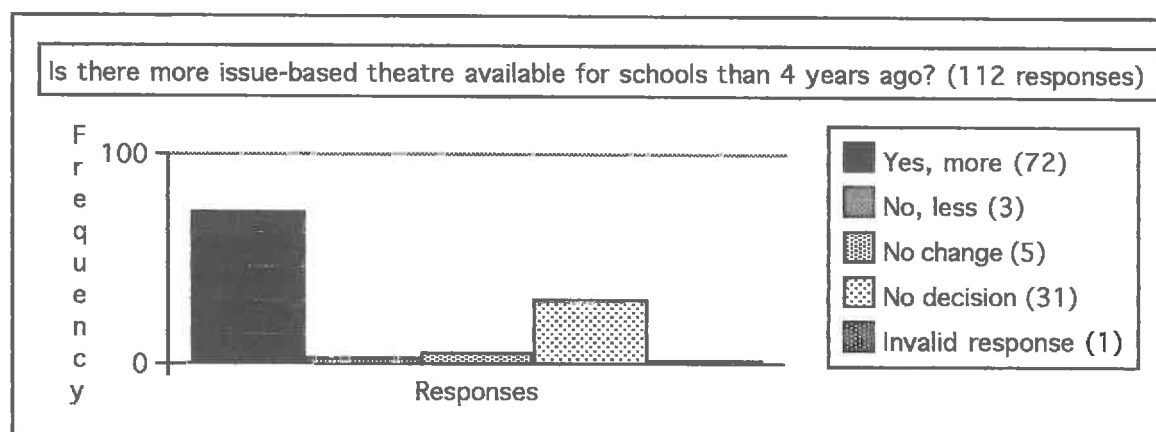


Figure 7

If teachers have accurately cast their minds back to the year 1990 then this corresponds to the Lowdown survey, which found that only 1 issue-based production was listed for early childhood audiences in 1990, as opposed to 4 in 1994. However, the years 1989 and 1991 featured 8 and 11 issue-based

productions for early childhood audiences - far more than in 1994. If teachers have included in their recollections either of these years then this result does not correspond with the results of the Lowdown survey.

The possibility exists that teachers in 1994 have access to a wider range of performances than those offered in Lowdown. This is borne out by the 1992/3 "Buy S.A." campaign run by South Australian TYP companies such as Patch, Magpie and Carouselle theatre companies. The intent of this campaign was to convince teachers to book South Australian companies as opposed to performances from eastern states booking agencies. Further proof can be found in the survey, with 5 respondents declaring their support for South Australian product, some attacking the telephone marketing strategies of the eastern states booking agencies. A further 2 respondents mention that they have booked through interstate agencies.

Figure 8 charts the responses to the statement, "I am satisfied/dissatisfied with the artistic standards of the majority of professional theatre companies that perform in my school". The results clearly endorse the artistic standards of the professional theatre companies performing in schools for South Australian early childhood audiences in 1994. 96% of teachers express satisfaction with the artistic standards of the majority of professional theatre companies that have performed in their school. Of this figure, 28.5% are extremely satisfied with the artistic standards of these companies.

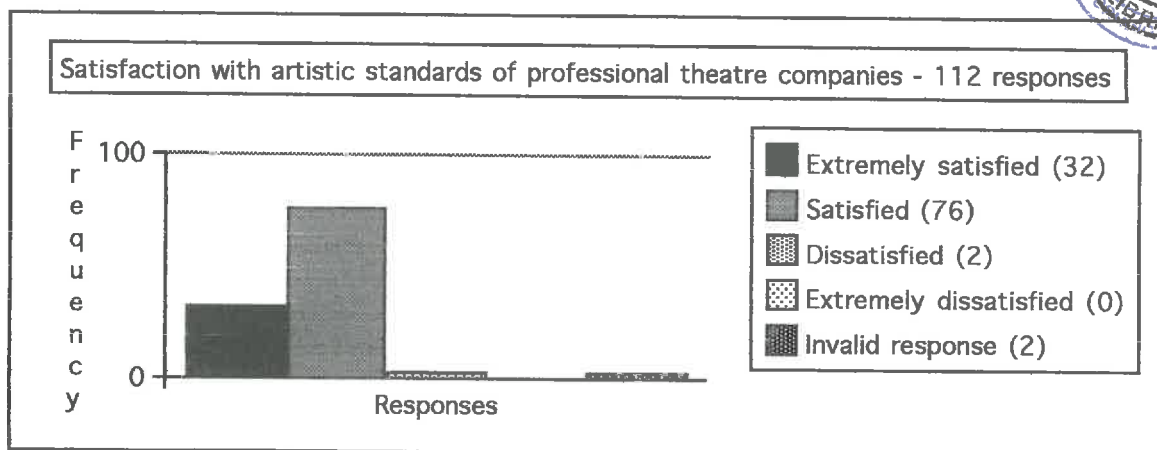


Figure 8

The responses to the statement, "I believe the artistic standards of the majority of professional theatre companies performing in my school have improved in the past 4 years", are charted in Figure 9. It indicates that 42% of teachers who have taken part in the survey feel that artistic standards have improved in the 4 years prior to 1994. While not quite as emphatic a result as in the responses to statements 3 and 4, it is interesting to note that not a single teacher feels that artistic standards have declined in that period.

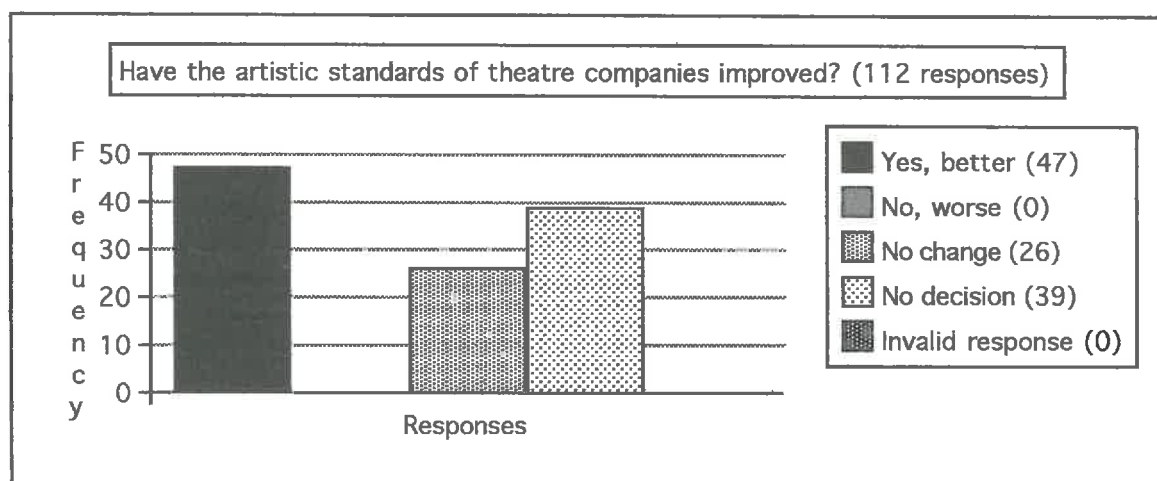


Figure 9

A significant number of teachers, 23% of responses, believe that there has been no change in artistic standards. The second highest ranking option is to make no decision. This comprises 28 teachers who felt that they are not in a

position to make a judgement, 1 who cannot recall and 10 who remain undecided.

Figure 10 charts the responses to the statement, "I have found some of the performances on offer to schools by professional theatre companies to be tedious and/or oversimplified". Sixty one percent of the teachers in the survey assert that they have never found performances on offer by professional theatre companies to be tedious and/or oversimplified, as opposed to 33% of respondents who had encountered tedious and/or oversimplified theatre.

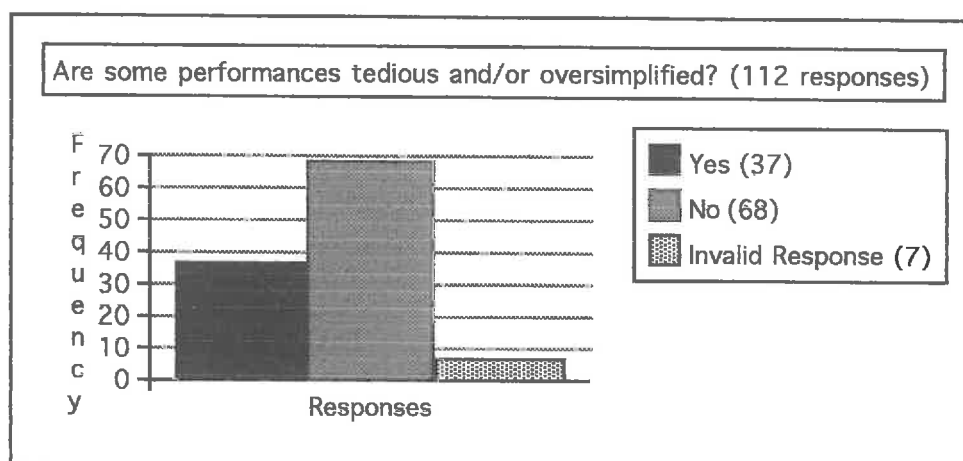


Figure 10

The final section required any teacher who had answered 'Yes' to the previous statement to circle one of 4 options concerning the relationship between issue-based theatre and tedious or oversimplified theatre.

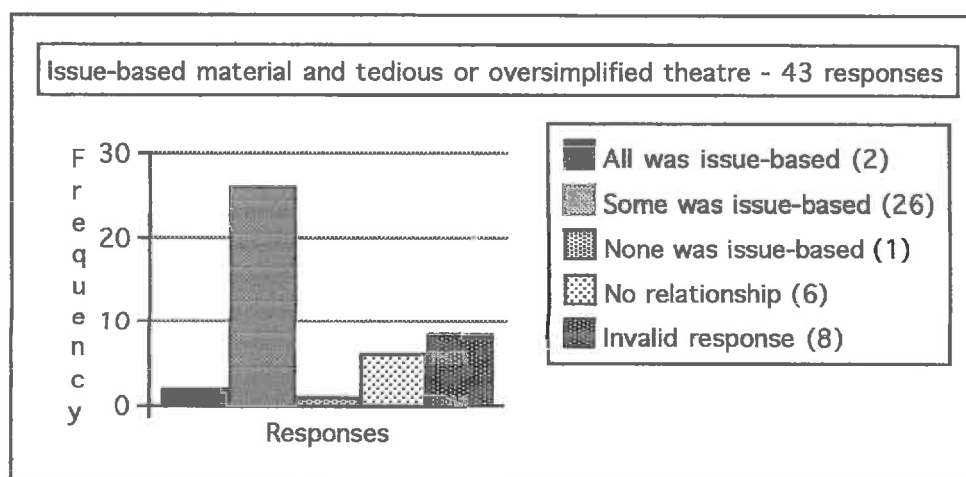


Figure 11

Twenty six of the teachers, or 60% of the respondents to this section, consider that some of the tedious or oversimplified theatre they have seen was issue-based. Two respondents consider all of the tedious or oversimplified theatre was issue-based and only one considers that none was issue-based. Six respondents could see no relationship and there were eight invalid responses.

5.3 Analysis of Results

Analysis of the responses to Statement 1 finds little correlation between the belief of the Australia Council Drama Committee regarding the reasons teachers book theatre performances and the reasons given by the teachers themselves. Although teachers indicate in the responses to Statements 2 and 3 that they see a place for issue-based theatre, and indeed desire more issue-based material, their primary reason for booking a theatre performance is similar to that which the Drama Committee advocates in its review - for the value of the theatre experience in itself.

The 'serious theatrical limitations' of performing in schools mentioned by the Drama Committee appear not to have been noticed by teachers, who almost unanimously express satisfaction with the artistic standards of the majority of professional theatre companies that perform in their schools. Teachers feel that these artistic standards have improved in the last four years. However, it is not clear whether this improvement in artistic standards is due to a better product from Australia Council funded companies or a greater reliance on work from commercial eastern states agencies not funded by the Australia Council.

No correlation is evident between the 'strong belief [of the Drama Committee] that too much reliance on issue-based material can result in tedious and oversimplified theatre' and the views of teachers. Although teachers feel that they are exposed to more issue-based theatre in 1994 than 4 years prior, 60% of teachers in the survey have not found performances on offer to schools by

professional theatre companies to be tedious or oversimplified. Analysis of the responses of the 33% of teachers who had found some theatre on offer to be tedious or oversimplified is inconclusive in regard to the relationship between issue-based material and tedious or oversimplified theatre. Tedium and oversimplification are not viewed by teachers as being a particular danger of one type of theatre more than another.

CHAPTER VI

6.1 Results of the Survey of Theatrical Reviews

The survey of theatrical reviews for the years 1989 and 1993 resulted in a database of 40 entries. This figure comprises 19 early childhood productions in 1989 and 21 early childhood productions in 1993. Certain similarities arise in the samples for the two years - in both 1989 and 1993 five issue-based early childhood productions are reviewed. The proportion of Australia Council funded productions is similar too, with 12 productions reviewed in 1989 and 11 reviewed in 1993. Figure 12 charts the ratings for artistic effectiveness in 1989.

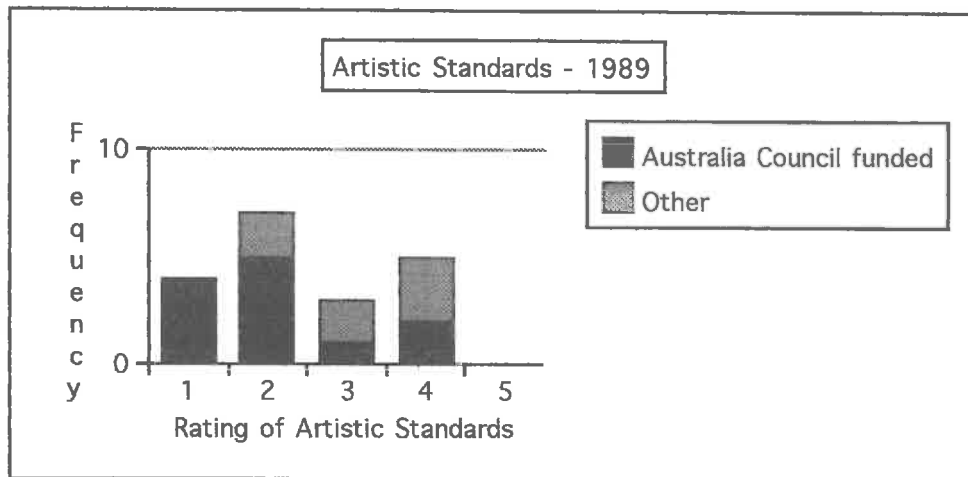


Figure 12

The mean rating of artistic standards for all productions in 1989 is 2.47. Bearing in mind that the lower the figure the higher the rating, Australia Council funded productions fared better with a mean rating of 2.08. It funded all of the productions that rated 1, and 5 out of the 7 productions that rated 2. Issue-based productions consistently rated highly in the area of artistic standards - all 5 issue-based productions in 1989 were rated 2, a higher mean rating than both Australia Council funded productions as a whole, and all early childhood productions for

1989. No review of an issue-based production described it as tedious or oversimplified, or used language that carried that implication.

The 1993 figures, occurring two years after the Australia Council Drama Committee Policy/Program Review, show considerable change in artistic standards, as charted in Figure 13.

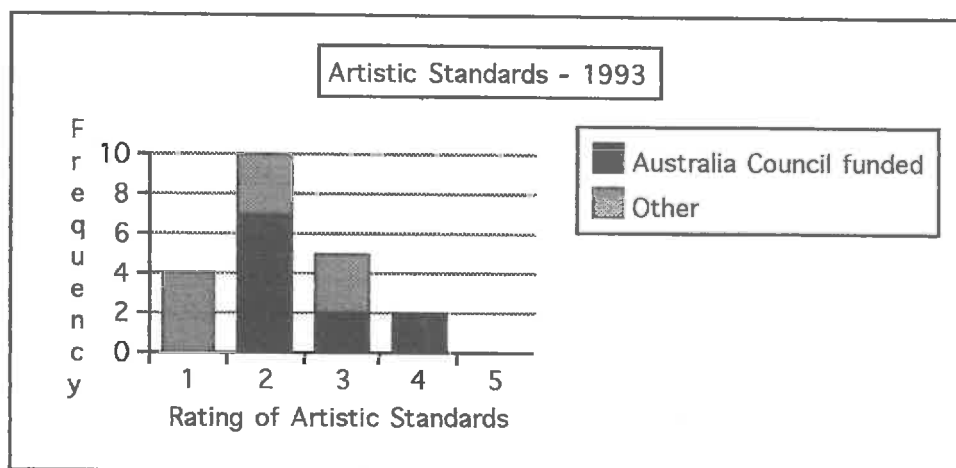


Figure 13

The mean rating of artistic standards for all early childhood productions in 1993 is 2.24, considerably better than the mean rating of 2.47 for all productions in 1989. However, while the mean rating of Australia Council funded productions is better than that for all productions in 1989, in 1993 the mean rating of Australia Council funded productions is 2.25 - almost exactly the same as for all productions. Whereas 4 Australia Council funded productions were rated 1 in 1989, none achieve that rating in 1993, and both of the two productions rated 4 were funded by the Australia Council.

The five issue-based productions reviewed in 1993 were rated 1, 1, 2, 3 and 2, giving issue-based productions a mean rating of 1.8, the highest rating of any category in either 1989 or 1993.

6.2 Analysis of Results

Analysis of the results of this survey finds a correlation between the improvement of artistic standards indicated by the survey and the view of teachers, expressed in Chapter 5, that there has been an improvement in the artistic standards of professional theatre companies performing in their schools in the past four years. The survey also indicates that issue-based theatre was regarded by reviewers to have had consistently higher standards than all productions, and Australia Council funded productions as a whole, in both 1989 and 1993.

Finally, the survey points to a drop in artistic standards of Australia Council funded productions in 1993 when compared to four years earlier. Issue-based productions, on the other hand, showed improvement.

CHAPTER VII

7.1 Conclusions

Two reviews that appear in the Adelaide Advertiser on Wednesday October 5 1994 illustrate both the confusion and the current direction of Theatre for Young People. Under the heading 'Children's Theatre', Samela Harris reviews The Littlest (History of) Theatre in the World, a production from Patch Theatre, and Dragon Dance from Carouselle Theatre.

The confusion of terminology is illustrated by a smaller heading directly above the Patch Theatre review, 'Youth Theatre'. Presumably either the sub-editor or journalist included this as they felt the term 'Children's Theatre' was inappropriate for a production aimed at teenagers. The Littlest (History of) Theatre in the World is not Youth Theatre as it is not performed by young people, but by professional actors employed by a TYP company. Neither is it Children's Theatre, as the description, "Fun way to learn about theatre", indicates an educational intent apart from entertainment. Yet it is not Theatre in Education or issue-based theatre in general, as there is no use of educational drama elements and its purpose is not primarily to provide a learning experience by focussing attention on particular concepts, ideas or issues.

As the phrase "Fun way to learn about theatre" suggests, its intent is to promote the value of the theatre experience - thus fulfilling one of the resolutions of the 1991 Australia Council Drama Committee Policy/Program Review. Excerpts from Oscar Wilde, Moliere, Shakespeare, Pinter, Beckett and Brecht are delivered "under the guise of flirtation from a young actress impressing her besotted teenage admirer". It is a style of educational theatre originally done in Australia by the Shakespeare in Jeans Company of the Young Elizabethan Players in the 1950s.

Long out of favour with funding bodies in the 1970s and 1980s, these edited versions of classic plays were the least popular choice of teachers in the South Australian Institute of Technology survey of 1974 conducted by Lloyd-Wright.

Dragon Dance from Carouselle also harks back to the early days of Young People's Theatre in Australia. It has the hallmarks of Children's Theatre - theatrical 'magic', a classical narrative and eye-catching visuals, all designed to thoroughly entertain its audience. It is "a gentle morality tale embellished with further tales all told by the vivid, hologram-scaled mega puppet dragon". Although its multicultural flavour is distinctly a product of the 1990s, the production certainly fulfils the aim of Joan and Betty Rayner from Greenleaf Theatre, which toured Australia from 1948 to 1968 - to "help widen the horizons and enrich the potential of children, and give them an awareness of the universality of man".

To suggest that these productions both hark back to the 1950s and 60s is not to denigrate them. Indeed, the review commends both the direction and performance of the two productions. But these examples of the work of TYP companies funded by the Australia Council three years after the Australia Council Drama Committee Policy/Program Review illustrate the current direction of Theatre for Young People. It is a circular direction, almost as though the Drama Committee of the Australia Council wishes to go back to 1969 again, when it sought to "destroy the illusion that theatre is part of 'education' " ⁷⁴ . Perhaps only then can it recapture a theatre for young people untainted by the issues and politics introduced into Australian theatre in the 1970s and 80s.

The purpose of this study has been to assess whether schools in the early childhood area are being offered a markedly different theatre experience since the 1991 review, as well as evaluating the response of teachers of this group of children. The answer to whether schools are being offered a markedly different

⁷⁴ Report of the Drama Committee to the Australian Council for the Arts, May 1969. Quotation taken from Australia Council Occasional Papers, Theatre Board: Support for Young People's Theatre (North Sydney: Australia Council, 1982) 19.

theatre experience is a qualified 'yes', according to the three surveys I have conducted.

Although there is less new theatre for early childhood audiences, both teachers and theatrical reviewers regard it is having higher artistic standards than in the period before the 1991 Policy/Program Review. Australia Council funded productions in South Australia tend to be fewer, non-issue-based, and more likely to be performed in a theatre since the review. There are indications within the Lowdown survey that as the Australia Council funded companies move in to the previously commercial area of in-theatre entertainment in the style of traditional Children's Theatre, independent and commercial activity has scaled down in this area and moved toward issue-based productions that tour to schools.

A major qualification to these findings is the overwhelming belief of teachers that there is more, not less, issue-based theatre available to schools in 1994 than four years previously. Combined with the comments about eastern states booking agencies in a number of teacher responses, and the 'Buy S.A.' campaign of South Australian TYP companies, this study brings to light the possibility that Australia Council funded companies may not be as influential in the provision of early childhood performances as they were in 1988. The aggressive telephone marketing techniques of these new booking agencies, their national perspective to touring schools, and their unwillingness to date to participate in the forums provided by Lowdown and the annual Youth and Theatre Arts Conferences⁷⁵ have contributed to significant changes in youth performing arts that have yet to be properly documented or evaluated.

If indeed in 1994 Australia Council funded companies account for a smaller percentage of all early childhood performances than in 1988 then the question needs to be asked - why has this happened? Certainly the attitude of the Australia Council to teachers and educational authorities has not been conducive

⁷⁵ Formerly Youth and Performing Arts Conferences.

to constructive relationships. A feeling of suspicion bordering on hostility toward teachers emanates from both the 1982 Occasional Paper and the 1991 Policy/Program Review, especially with the use of language that implies that the teachers, or 'buyers', somehow stand in the way of theatre companies interacting with their young audiences, or 'consumers'.

The Australia Council has refused throughout the 1980s to acknowledge that it has a role to play in education - its attitude has been that educational authorities are responsible for education and the Australia Council is responsible for art. This contrasts with a period in the 1970s where it worked closely with the Schools Commission and other educational authorities.

This study brings into question the quality of communication between the Australia Council and teachers. One assumption that the Drama Committee makes in its review is that "schools will always be looking for productions that are justifiable, addressing in some way the 'personal development' of their students". Responses from the teachers themselves indicate that rather than this being the case, their primary reason for booking a theatre performance is similar to that which the Drama Committee advocates in its review - for the value of the theatre experience in itself.

The view of the Drama Committee that 'too much reliance on issue-based material can result in tedious and oversimplified theatre' is an opinion not shared by the teachers or reviewers included in this study. The majority of teachers contacted had not encountered tedious or oversimplified theatre, and those that had did not associate issue-based work with these qualities more than any other type of theatre. Theatrical reviewers found issue-based theatre to have had consistently higher artistic standards than Australia Council funded productions as a whole in both 1989 and 1993, and the terms 'tedious', 'oversimplified', or language to that effect, were not encountered in the forty reviews studied in detail.

The view of teachers is that issue-based theatre is one of a number of

types of theatre that may provide memorable experiences for their students. The view of theatrical reviewers is that issue-based theatre has maintained high artistic standards, and resisted much of the didacticism that may have marred some Theatre in Education work in the 1970s. The view of the Drama Committee of the Australia Council appears to be that issue-based theatre is innately flawed artistically. The sharp drop in issue-based productions from funded companies since 1991 would tend to indicate that the Australia Council is firmly enforcing this view in the companies that it funds.

The view of many of the teachers and reviewers involved in this study is that theatre can both delight and profit its audiences. The Australia Council, through the 1991 Drama Committee Policy/Program Review and its actions before and after this review, appears to believe that the two are mutually exclusive, and the primary function of theatre is to delight. The one exception to this distaste for educational theatre is where theatre educates students about theatre.

This inward-looking approach harks back to another time when theatre artists dwelled in a kind of artistic 'greenhouse', sheltered from the issues galvanising their societies by the magical and delicately fantastical world of the theatre. In the 1970s and 1980s a generation of performers, directors and writers burst out and sought to use theatre to express the concerns of their society. Since the 1991 review the doors of the 'greenhouse' have been open once more - but the artists are going in, not out.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE TO TEACHERS

TO THE ARTS CO-ORDINATOR

As part of an Honours thesis I am researching the effect of changes in Australia Council funding guidelines on the type of theatre offered to schools in South Australia. I would appreciate your finding the time to fill in the following questionnaire. It has been designed to take only a few minutes to complete, and I enclose a stamped, self addressed envelope for its return.

Apart from question 1, the format of the questionnaire is multiple choice and most questions merely require you to circle the appropriate option. I have left some spaces for you to comment further if you wish, and feel free to include separate pieces of paper with further comment if you feel the space is insufficient.

One term may need clarification - **issue-based theatre**. My definition of this is theatre designed primarily to provide learning experiences, focussing attention on particular concepts or social issues. This may be expressed in advertising material in the following way:

“A puppet play about working with others.”

“An audience participation show based on a conservation theme.”

“An adventure show exploring the concepts big and little.”

“A bi-lingual production that considers the fate of endangered species.”

Material that is not **issue-based** may describe the story or the theatrical experience in advertising material, as in:

“Chaos ensues as Clancy, stricken with chicken pox, tries to quell the demands of some very dominating farm animals.”

“Gravity is defied, puppets manipulate puppets and the eye is tricked by the masters of theatrical illusion.”

Many thanks for your time and consideration,

Tony Mack.

Rank the appropriate options from 1 to 4 in order of their importance to you (1 being the most important)

1) I look to book theatre performances that:

- Will provide experiences that aid in the personal development of my students.
- Provide my students with an entertaining, high quality theatre experience.
- Educate students about a particular issue.
- Another reason. (Please state).....

.....

.....

2) I think there should be more issue-based theatre available for schools. (Circle your response)

- (A) Yes, there should be more.
- (B) No, there should be less.
- (C) No, there should be no change.
- (D) Undecided.

3) I feel there is more issue-based theatre available for schools now than 4 years ago. (Circle your response)

- (A) Yes, there is more.
- (B) No, there is less.
- (C) No, there has been no change.
- (D) I am not in a position to make a judgement.
- (E) I can't recall.
- (F) I am undecided.

4) I am satisfied/dissatisfied with the artistic standards of the majority of professional theatre companies that perform in my school. (Circle your response)

- (A) Extremely satisfied.
- (B) Satisfied.
- (C) Dissatisfied.
- (D) Extremely dissatisfied.

