

The Children's Voice project is run by sixteen theatre organisations in Asia together with the Swedish Centre of the ITI and is co-financed by Sida, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. It is a regional project where cooperation locally within countries, and regionally between countries, is boosted through exchanges and networking.

The project is operating between 2004 and 2009, initially embracing work with professional theatre groups in India and Bangladesh. In 2007 the project area was broadened to also include China, Vietnam and Laos.

This anthology deals mainly with experiences from India and Bangladesh during the earlier part of the project, reflecting experiences from a variety of perspectives on professional theatre for children, theatre training with children, theatre in schools and in teacher's training.

The voices of children represent the basis of the work with emphasis on children's thoughts and views. Work focuses on development of an artistic theatre for children and youth, the ability of children and youth to work with creative forms of expression via drama at school and active efforts to reach vulnerable groups in society.

Theatre for development  
Edited by Christina Nygren

# Theatre for development

Experiences  
from an international theatre project in Asia  
“Children's Voice”



Svensk Teaterunion – Swedish Centre of the ITI

ISBN: 978 91 977790 2 9

Edited by Christina Nygren

Svensk Teaterunion – Swedish Centre of the ITI

Theatre for development

Theatre for development  
Experiences from an international theatre project in Asia  
“Children’s Voice”

Edited by Christina Nygren  
Svensk Teaterunion – Swedish Centre of the ITI

## Contents

This book has been financed by  
the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.  
Sida does not necessarily share the views expressed in this material.  
Responsibility for its contents rests entirely with the author.

Published by:  
Svensk Teaterunion/The Swedish Centre of the ITI  
(International Theatre Institute)  
Kaplanbacken 2  
SE-112 24 Stockholm, Sweden  
Tel: +46 8 462 25 30  
Fax: +46 8 462 25 35  
info@teaterunionen.se  
www.teaterunionen.se

© Svensk Teaterunion/The Swedish Centre of the ITI and  
Contributors

Graphic design: Göta Glemme, *G-form*  
Cover Photo shows children taking part in a school theatre performance with Rupantar in Khulna, Bangladesh 2005. Photo: Rupantar.  
Photo on page 8 shows celebrations during a children's summer camp in Mysore. Photo: Rangayana.

Translation into English and editing of language: Peter Hogan.  
Except articles on pages 28–32 and pages 101–107 which were translated by Anne-Charlotte Hanes Harvey and excerpted directly from an earlier publication.

Printed by: Kristianstads Boktryckeri AB, Kristianstad, 2009.  
Printed on FSC-certified environmentally friendly paper



ISBN: 978 91 977790 2 9

<b>Introduction</b> <i>Christina Nygren</i>	9
<b>THE CHILD IN FOCUS</b>	
<b>Children – in the backyard of cultural policy</b> <i>Ann Mari Engel</i>	23
<b>The century of the toddler</b> <i>Margareta Sörenson</i>	28
<b>Does a child need art?</b> Fragments of personal experiences shared at an advocacy seminar in Dhaka, Bangladesh <i>Lisa Hugosson</i>	33
<b>Youngsters in the centre – children acting for children</b> <i>Cia Frode</i>	41
<b>Voices from children, parents, teachers and authorities in Bangladesh and India</b>	46
<b>Why support children's theatre? – Investing in the future</b> <i>Emma Jansson</i>	59
<b>THEATRE IN SCHOOL</b>	
<b>Children's Voice in Asia – let children be heard throughout the world.</b> A teacher's perspective <i>Anders Linderoth</i>	69

Education for culture of peace <i>Swapan Guha</i>	75	“My journey with the Children’s Voice project changed my perception of theatre as a whole” <i>Sohini Sengupta</i>	146
Theatre sensitisation for teachers (TST) – spreading awareness of dramatic art to those who teach <i>H.S. Umesh</i>	82	“This conceptual clarity and willingness is our pride, our gain...” Reflections from three actresses in Khulna, Bangladesh, on their five year’s work with Children’s Voice <i>Tuku Biswas, Namita Mallick, Akhtarunnessa Nisha</i>	151
Opening new worlds – a guide to visiting theatres with school children. Excerpts from a manual for teachers and other adults at school <i>Karin Helander</i>	91	All God’s ‘chillun’ need wings – in search of children’s theatre. Nandikar’s history and vision told by Rudraprasad Sengupta <i>Rudraprasad Sengupta and Syamal Bhattacharyya</i>	160
<b>METHODS OF TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE</b>			
The “Tittut method” <i>Margareta Sörenson</i>	101	Children’s theatre as a tool for development <i>Karin Markensten</i>	172
Where stage and audience meet. Keys to theatre – with drama as method <i>Jeanette Roos</i>	108	<b>APPENDIX</b>	
YESSS! – On children, art and profitability <i>Bernt Höglund</i>	117	Collaborators in the Children’s Voice project	181
How to bring children’s voices to the fore through drama in education and theatre. Diary from a workshop in Bangladesh. <i>Åsa Ekberg Kentros and Nina Kjällquist</i>	122	Swedish professionals involved in the Children’s Voice project 2004–2009	185
A dramatic workshop on writing theatre for children in South India <i>Lena Fridell and Zac O’Yeah</i>	129	Literature and further reading	186
<b>GAINS AND BENEFITS AT PRESENT AND FOR THE FUTURE</b>			
Theatre for underprivileged children – a perspective from Bangladesh <i>Liaquat Ali Lucky</i>	137		



## *Introduction*

*Christina Nygren*

This book is about theatre for children and with children. All writers have experience of theatre and of working with children in various ways and contexts. And they have all, in different aspects, taken part in the international project Children's Voice, which is what this book is about.

Children's Voice is run by sixteen theatre organisations in Asia together with the Swedish Centre of ITI (International Theatre Institute). The project is co-financed by Sida, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

The articles reflect experiences from the project from a variety of perspectives, but also convey a perspective of theatre for and with children that all the contributors have with them from their professional activities in the field of theatre for children.

### *The Children's Voice Project*

The project "Children's Voice" is characterised by an awareness that children are our future. All individuals that have taken part in the project work have frequently returned to this understanding. One way of truly reaching the target of creating a better future, is to engage the capacity and creativity of children at an early stage, and increasingly add further strength to their self-confidence and belief in the future by listening to their voices.

Since the start in 2004 the Children's Voice project has been operating in India and Bangladesh in a project originally designed and planned to run over a period of five years. Main project partners in India have been Nandikar in Kolkata and Rangakishora/Rangayana in Mysore. In Bangladesh, Rakhil in Dhaka and Rupantar in Khulna have been the main partners.

In 2007 the project expanded to China, Vietnam and Laos with a project plan limited to three years. Project partners in China

include Shanxi Drama Vocational College and Shanxi Modern Drama Theatre in Taiyuan, and the Children's Art Troupe/Kunming National Song and Dance Ensemble in Kunming. Further associated collaborators in Beijing, the Chinese Theatre Association, also serves as coordinator for China, and the Central Academy of Drama. In Vietnam the project collaborators are Vietnam Youth Theatre in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City Drama Theatre and Small stage Drama Theatre in Ho Chi Minh City. In Laos three theatre groups, Kabong Lao, Tuk Kata and Lakon Vao are collaborating in Children's Voice together with Vulnerable Lao Youth Development Association (VYDA), that also acts as coordinator for Laos.

The project involves long-term joint work, originally with the four theatre organisations in India and Bangladesh, plus shorter term collaboration and selective measures with Swedish professionals involved in children's theatre. A focus on democracy and popular participation, children's rights, gender equality and environment issues as well as working from the perspective of under-privileged people have been present, and specific activities for this have been regularly launched. Collaboration with schools has increased during the project period and strong efforts have been made to develop school theatre education.



Photo: Ragnanar

*School theatre performance at Hetalbuniya school in Khulna 2005.*

This publication deals mainly with the terminated project in India and Bangladesh.

### **Stakeholders involved in the project**

Originally four main groups of stakeholders in relation to the project were emphasised by the theatre organisations in India and Bangladesh, who are owners of the project.

**CHILDREN** – for recognising democracy, gender and social equality, supporting cheerful creativity, helping to realise their rights, finding their centre, finding their uniqueness and persona stressing mutuality and togetherness

**COMMUNITY** – to build a healthy society, improve community living, better environment for children, removal of bias.

**EDUCATORS** – in order to ensure children's rights, cheerful teaching and better communication, working for a peaceful environment, mental satisfaction, development of a better relationship between student and school system.

**THEATRE COMMUNITY** – to help capacity enhancement, find new directions of work, improve financial situation, opportunity to witness good theatre productions, achievement of an improved status of children's theatre.

### **Theatre and dance as a useful platform for communication**

Theatre and dance combined with music and poetry are strongly established in South Asia, as well as in South East Asia, and constitute a significant platform for social, spiritual and political communication. However, the performances are generally aimed at adults.

The rights, wishes and needs of children are very much neglected. In the few cases where a performance is aimed at children, the tendency is to emphasise a dogmatic view of them as "small adults" rather than conveying their right to self-esteem, creativity and equality.

With the big potential existing in the traditional high esteem of theatre and dance in the region – but where children were not regarded as a specific target group – ITI and the project partners have seen great opportunities for developing good theatre activities for children and young people. In the project work theatre is seen as an artistic tool to work for democracy, human/children's rights, gender equality, and environment protection. Different social issues have been dealt with as much as the aim to produce professional theatre with a good artistic quality for children.



Photo: Rakhal

*The play "Lalu" performed by Rakhal repertory in Dhaka, 2007.*

### **Importance of professionalism in theatre for children**

Such work puts emphasis on professional artistic theatre for children and youth in addition to another important objective - to carry out drama training for and with children and youth to strengthen not only their creativity but also their self-confidence. Considerable development and impact of the project work in the project area has been seen.

Generally speaking, as in all other kinds of work with high impact and good results, the professionalism of people involved in theatre for children is of essential importance. When theatre workers with professional training combined with experience and a well developed methodology perform for and interact with children, the children react with concentration and engage themselves in the contents of the performance.

Another important aspect of the need for professionalism in children's theatre is the wish for sustainability. Trained professionals are seriously devoted to their work in theatre and regard their activities as a profession, means of living and income, and they are likely to continue this work in the future.

### **Reaching out widely to under-privileged children**

In addition to professional public performances extensive work is being done in schools. The theatre organisations have regarded their

main task to reach out to under-privileged children and young people in the countryside and children in less developed districts of the big cities.

The perspective of the poor has increasingly achieved greater importance as well as the promotion of children's rights. Street children, children in communities of untouchables, religious and ethnic minority groups, deaf children, blind children, children in children's homes, "regularly returning nomadic groups", children in prostitution areas, children with parents in jail and children in snake charmer communities are among those who have been specific target groups. The number of under-privileged children reached has increased throughout the project period. At the end of the project period almost 70% of the project efforts were directed at under-privileged children and young people.

### **Increased interest and a greater public demand**

All the Asian project partners report that there is a significant higher public demand for their theatre activities for and with children compared to times before the project started. More schools want to collaborate with the theatre organisations. More performances as well as drama workshops where the children themselves can be trained are asked for. Further demands for school collaboration are now asked for as well as more professional performances. The demand created for theatre activities for and with children as well as performances in the actual project areas is now much bigger than what resources have been able to fulfil. As a consequence of the increased interest and deepened and greater demand activities were far more widespread and went beyond performances and drama workshops.

The theatre organisations have produced a considerable amount of publications on theatre and drama for and with children. Recordings from performances and workshops have been produced and seminars and advocacy actions has been carried out. This also resulted in a stronger interest for the project in the media. This way of working has strengthened the role for professional children's theatre activities in all project areas.

The theatre organisations in Bangladesh and in Indian West Bengal have little by little started to exchange professional experiences. Even if national border difficulties sometimes have made it impossible for them to meet, their common language, Bengali, has encouraged them to strive for more collaboration.

On the other hand, and here due to the language barriers, there





*Joint workshop with Rakhal and Rupantar in Dhaka 2008.*

have been difficulties for the two Indian partners in establishing strong collaboration. (The languages in the Indian states strongly differ). The two project partners in North and South India have started collaboration with other theatre groups within their language areas. By this, many areas in the countryside that were never before reached by any activities for or with children were benefited. Considering the vastness of the country and the prevailing language barriers a considerable amount of children were included in the project work.

In Bangladesh, where Bengali is the national language, the two project partners have started close collaboration. Together they have been able to reach almost all parts of Bangladesh with performances, workshops and school activities for children and teachers. In Bengal (Bangladesh and Indian West Bengal) it has not only meant collaboration and exchange between the project groups and their professional theatre workers, but also visits and workshops with joint activities for children, teachers and theatre amateurs.

### **Some project results**

During the period 2004–2008 initially four performing theatre organisations in South Asia participated in the project, i.e. Nandikar and Rangakishora/Rangayana in India and Rupantar and Rakhal

in Bangladesh. Since 2007 these organisations have had extensive collaboration with an additional 10 local semi-professional theatre groups.

Since 2007 the extended project work in South East Asia has been carried out by 12 collaborating organisations in China, Vietnam and Laos, a collaboration that will continue until the end of 2009. In South Asia and South East Asia together approximately 4,000 theatre performances have been presented. They have all in all reached about 2,000,000 children. Close to 55% of these children were girls and young women. Some 3,500 teachers in total have been trained in drama activities. About 40,000 children have participated in short and long-term training and workshops and almost 500 schools have been involved in close collaboration with the theatre organisations in the project. New dramas for children and youth have been written on themes dealing with actual society issues such as gender equality, environment issues, trafficking and children's rights in general with the specific aim of reaching children in poor areas. But artistic quality has always remained in focus. Good theatre can engage its audience, whatever issue is dealt with!

### **Children's Voice has made an impact on authorities**

A considerable impact has been seen in some areas of the project work. The Government of Karnataka, India, has appointed 72 new positions of drama teachers in elementary schools from the beginning of 2008. The government of India has introduced theatre on its school curriculum for the Central School Board and a relevant syllabus is currently being worked out by a committee where one of the project partners is represented. The state government of West Bengal has initiated a pilot project with theatre in five schools, involving ten trainers from a project partner of Children's Voice.

In some of the project areas in Bangladesh, government officials at policy maker level today consider the project as a model for quality education and for better establishment of children's rights. Sida has decided to prolong the project activities in Bangladesh by one extra year (to 2009). Discussions are currently underway with governmental authorities about possibilities for introduction of drama training in the primary school curriculum as well as drama training for teachers.

To summarise, the project outcome in all working areas in India and Bangladesh has involved various layers of society. And children are the beneficiaries.

– School teachers, school management committees, parents and



Photo: Rupantar

Procession by collaborators of Rupantar in Khulna to observe World Environment Day 2008.

others concerned have shown the project activities an increased trust. Professional theatre for children has been more accepted.

- Local governments have turned more positive towards children’s rights and to theatre and drama in education.

- A stronger sustainability has been achieved for professional theatre directed at children in the project areas. Also government officials at policy making level and donor agencies do often recognise professional children’s theatre to be supportive in the ongoing work for children’s rights.

### Voices from the audience

In connection with performances each theatre organisation has carried out audience research with surveys among children, parents and teachers. This has been done either with questionnaires submitted after the performance, or with regular discussions with a representative number of children and young people from the audience with the purpose of giving them the chance to freely express themselves.

A typical answer from adults (teachers, parents, headmasters, etc) was that they could see a clear difference in the children’s behaviour after they had participated for a longer period in drama training. According to them, the children had improved their self-confidence,



Photo: Rangayana

Children creating their own performance during a summer camp at Rangayana, Mysore, 2008.

were more able to express their own opinions and they dared to speak out in different, not always easy, situations. One very frequent answer was also that the children had got better marks at school after having participated actively in drama training.

Teachers and headmasters who had participated in the drama training were surprised that they more easily could get better contact with their students. They also often used drama as an education tool after participation in the training – and with good results.

The interviewed children, in their turn, generally answered that they wanted to take part in drama activities because these made them feel free. Another answer by children living in the big cities specifically, was that they were not allowed to play outside their homes. And the often tough school system forced them to do their homework after school. Therefore they often had difficulties in making friends. But at the drama workshops they were able to play, many of them had found good new friends in the workshops. Most of the children interviewed often said with emphasis that they felt themselves to be respected as individuals by the drama trainers and that the trainers listened to their opinions.

### Project planning with an adequate method – LFA

The Children’sVoice project has used LFA (Logical Framework Ap-

proach) as a method to plan the project and to follow up the results. This is a method that is often used in international development cooperation. Annual planning of the project has been carried out as formulated by the LFA and analysis, assessments, monitoring and evaluations of project results in relation to project aims have been performed annually. This work has been conducted by an external LFA moderator and used in all phases of the project work, from the initial preparations started in 2002 to final evaluation of concluded project work in India and Bangladesh at the end of 2008.

Project objectives have been modified as the project has proceeded. The activities of joint partners were planned according to the LFA model with the assistance of the external LFA moderator in regular annual regional meetings, held on the basis of a rolling timetable in the project countries.

Fundamentally the LFA model is based not on what is hoped to be done but rather on what is to be achieved in reality, and how these results could affect the target group. This way of working has resulted in strong local ownership. The Asian partners in the Children's Voice project have designed the project themselves with this method and have followed up their results and compared them to what had been planned for.

When project work is to contribute to sustainable development,

Group work during an LFA workshop (below) and LFA moderator Mats Eriksson (right), Kolkata 2006.



Photo: Rupaumar

then the basic requirement is that affected parties themselves have control over design and implementation of projects – this is something that has been given emphasis throughout the Children's Voice project.

### *About this book*

The aim of this book is to spread information in countries where the project has been carried out, along with a wish to describe the great advantage of using theatre and drama as a tool for sustainable development for children.

During 2004–2008 the Children's Voice project not only involved the work of over 100 professional theatre workers but also a large number of semi-professionals in India and Bangladesh. It has also involved strong efforts by over 70 Swedish professionals within the field of children's theatre. These Swedish professionals have collaborated in workshops where theatre experiences have been shared between Swedish professionals and Asian partners, as well as in different seminars. This book presents examples of experiences from these meetings.

The contents primarily refer to project work carried out in India and Bangladesh. The project was completed in these two countries at the end of 2008.

The character of the different articles varies widely, from diary notes on the one hand to method descriptions on the other, from papers presented at seminars to personal descriptions of how the project has affected further artistic expressions in theatre, and by this the better capacity to reach children. Space is also provided for children, teachers and social and political authorities to themselves give their opinions.

The articles vary in form and content to the same degree that the project work has been characterised by diversity. Some of them are highly personal, while others reflect an informative or analytical approach. However, the recurring theme running through all the articles puts children at the centre.

The book is not designed to be read from cover to cover in the same order in which articles are presented. For this reason some information is repeated and parts of the contents sometimes overlap each other. Greater benefit might be had by picking and choosing among the four themes into which the articles have been sorted: *The child in focus; Theatre in school; Methods for training and performance; and Gains and benefits at present and for the future.*

An appendix provides details for further contact with project leadership and funding organisations as well as the professional theatre workers who have taken part in the project. The appendix also provides a list of literature for further reading and references to websites in appropriate fields of activity.

## THE CHILD IN FOCUS

Project descriptions and annual reports for both the India and Bangladesh project and the project for China, Vietnam and Laos are available at the Svensk Teaterunion/Swedish ITI.

The LFA method is described in publications available from Sida. For further information contact Svensk Teaterunion/Swedish ITI or Sida per telephone or via the postal addresses provided in the appendix.

Christina Nygren holds a PhD and is an associate professor in Theatre studies, and senior researcher in Oriental languages at Stockholm University. In addition to this she is an elected Vice president for the International Federation for Theatre Research/La Fédération Internationale pour la Recherche Théâtrale. She has specialised in Asian theatre, dance and popular culture for the past 30 years, with studies and several broad-ranging research projects in e.g. China, Japan, India and Bangladesh and has spent 17 years in Asia in relation to these. She has published several books along with a large number of articles on performing arts and festival culture in Asia.

Since 2002 Christina has worked for Svensk Teaterunion – the Swedish Centre of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) and is project manager and Swedish coordinator for the Children's Voice project in India, Bangladesh, China, Vietnam and Laos.

## *Children – in the backyard of cultural policy*

*Ann Mari Engel*

*States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.*

*States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.*

*Article 31, UN convention on the rights of the child.*

November 20, 1989 is a red-letter day. It was on this day that the United Nations countries adopted the UN convention on the rights of the child. This means that all children have equal right to have their needs fulfilled wherever on earth they might be. As soon as anything is done where a child is involved, then the best solution for individual children must be taken into consideration. The convention has been signed by practically all nations on earth. The majority of countries are however far from fulfilling the rights as stated, such as the right of children to schooling and healthcare and the efforts of each country to 'undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources' with regard to the social, economic and cultural rights of children.

The cultural rights of children are rarely focused on in cultural policy. In many places children's culture is part of the entertainment industry instead of being a fundamental part of cultural efforts. Children and youth are primarily considered to be uncritical consumers and are seen as unable to partake of complicated contents or an artistically advanced form.



*Children playing during a summer camp at Rangayana, Mysore.*

### *The Swedish Experience*

The rights of children in Sweden were relatively early laid down by law, prohibiting for example physical punishment. Yet the cultural rights of children and youth have never been self-evident. The amount of resources put into culture for children has never been equal to resources put into adults, nor does culture for children and youth have as much prestige.

As with many Western countries the national cultural policy in Sweden started with royal support to a limited number of national institutions in the capital city. Gradually during the nineteenth century the major culture institutions went over to becoming a national responsibility financed by parliament. However, they were chiefly aimed at the educated upper classes in major towns and cities. With the growth of social movements culture and education spread to other groups, and with industrialisation the developing working class created its own cultural institutions. Like many other countries in the 20th century, Sweden saw the growth of national, regional and local cultural policies where an integrated responsibility is taken for contribution to financing of culture to a greater or lesser extent. Alongside national institutions there is regional and local financing of theatres, museums, libraries and other cultural institutions. In a lot of countries support to the independent sector consisting for example of theatre groups, amateur activities and adult education also exists.

Support to culture is motivated in many different ways: promotion of cultural heritage, strengthening of a sense of nation, contribution to democracy and freedom of speech and provision of space for creativity.

The development and rights of children and youth less frequently motivate national cultural efforts.

In Sweden, an artistic and vigorous literature for children established itself already in the 1950s, with books by the now globally famous Astrid Lindgren. A lively discussion was initiated on what children ought to read and whether or not children's culture should be educative.

Theatre for children and youth in Sweden was limited for a long time to pedagogical plays at school and the Christmas entertainment spectacles of the major institutions. However, at the same time as the arrival of the new literature children's theatre for schools developed and during several years schools built up considerable interest in quality children's theatre. The last decades of the 20th century in Sweden saw development of a children's theatre that took children seriously. Performances were created in close contact with children who were sought out where they were: in schools, nurseries, after school clubs, youth clubs and in residential areas. Performances were often played outside the theatre houses. The classroom became the arena where theatre groups could directly meet their audience.

Many established playwrights and directors have dedicated themselves to children's theatre and through this contributed to creation of artistically high class, quality theatre for children that form-wise is frequently more challenging than adult theatre. Theatre for children and youth has come in many shapes and sizes with the objective of being both educative, entertaining and artistic.

The creativeness of children themselves has also been given more space in the last part of the last century. Virtually all municipalities in Sweden have publicly financed culture schools where the children themselves can act, dance and learn music, after regular school. In the regular school, drama and theatre can also play an important part in learning. It is said that of a hundred languages only one is frequently used in schools. In current research on learning, the aesthetic subjects receive increasingly greater importance as regards this aspect. Still these are not established in all schools and are not included in all education plans.

Approximately one quarter of all professional theatre provided in Sweden during the year is directed towards children and youth. The

larger part of this is based on new Swedish original plays. Virtually all state-subsidised theatres have performances for children and youth as part of their work. Yet it cannot be claimed that children's theatre has found a truly full-grown place in cultural life. It continues to have fewer resources, lower prestige and less attention than dramatic art for adults. There are, though, many important theatres and artists contributing to Swedish stage art for children. Many of them reach far beyond the national borders of the country.

### *The stepchild of cultural policy*

Hence it has indeed been a privilege to collaborate internationally on theatre for children and youth within the Children's Voice project. Swedish ITI has seen this joint project as a unique possibility to build lasting bridges between Swedish children's theatre and theatres on the other side of the world. We hope to contribute to add strength to the status of children's theatre in society, everywhere.

Children's theatre is frequently found in the backyard of cultural policy and treated like a stepchild. Focus in the major speeches of policy-makers or the goal of businesses in this field is not children's culture. If the countries of the world took the UN children's convention seriously, children's culture would instead be highlighted as the most important part of a country's cultural programme. In most parts of the world children and youth represent the majority of the population.

In 1995 UNESCO's World Commission on Culture and Development presented its report *Our Creative Diversity* as a basis for cultural policy objectives. This report established culture's instructive, fundamental and creative role for development towards a better world. It was stated that in the future culture would need to play a greater role at a higher level – not the role of a tool for reaching the objectives of a society but as the basis for these objectives. The double role of culture is expressed. Culture has an important instrumental role in development processes in society, but simultaneously has a value in itself by providing a meaning to life.

UNESCO gives culture an important role for development:  
*In a world that has become familiar with "ethnic cleansing", religious fanaticism and social and racial prejudice, then the question of how to change hate to respect arises quite naturally. Politicians cannot make laws on respect, nor are they able to force people to behave respectfully. On the other hand they can make cultural freedom a basis of society. Legislators, courts*

*and authorities are able to realise the principles of equality, civil rights and cultural freedom.*

The report was followed in 1998 by "The Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies Development", Stockholm, Sweden. The conference took on *The Stockholm Action Plan*, a plan of action adopted by 140 countries that promised a new and stronger position for culture and cultural policy. It recommends the member states to realise its objectives, including to involve all sectors of societies – notably women, youth, children, the elderly, the disabled and minority groups – in cultural policy and cultural life, to promote creative activities and protect the interests of artists and creators, to promote cultural rights and to increase all forms of cultural exchange so as to foster mutual understanding and peace.

It is high time for the governments to materialise this plan.

Ann Mari Engel is secretary general of Svensk Teaterunion – the Swedish Centre of the International Theatre Institute (ITI). She is a member of the executive council of the ITI, secretary of the Nordic Theatre Union and producer of the Swedish Theatre Biennial. She holds a PhD from the Department of Theatre studies at Stockholm University and is a member of Stockholm City Council. Her publications include: *Teater i Folkets Park 1905 – 1980/Theatre in the people's parks. The workers' movement and popular theatre. A study in cultural policy* (Stockholm 1980).

## The century of the toddler

Margareta Sörenson

“A generation ago, children were supposed to be seen, not heard,” writes the respected Danish child pedagogue Jesper Juul. “That was then. The opposite is to let them be heard all the time, regardless of the quality of what they’re saying. The alternative? The alternative is to recognize them.” Recognize children as competent fellow-human beings, that is.

Jesper Juul has been in the vanguard defining and describing the changed view of children characterizing the last decades of the 20th century. In his books he discusses how a more egalitarian view of children and adults may be adopted. It does in no way mean – as some detractors claim – that “children rule the roost.” It means that children are seen as competent collaborators with adults, who in turn must accept full responsibility for the family project. “The family functions best as a place for mutual learning – not one-sided teaching,” as he puts it in *Livet i familjen – om det viktiga samspelet* (Life in the family).

Much has happened during the 20th century with regard to children’s place in society and their relationship to adults. Of course this does not mean that we now live in a paradise where all children are happy and equality of the sexes is an accomplished fact. The discrepancy between different parts of the world is also consider-



Sven Wagelin-Challis in *More music, Papa* 2003.



Photo: Dockteatern Titaur

Sara Bexell in *Dolly's daycare*, 2007.

able. In summing up *Livet i familjen* (Life in the family), Juul writes that “there are happy, healthy, warm and vibrant families everywhere on earth with the most different value systems as foundation and guide,” and that the parameters for “right” and “wrong” are very wide. “What we know with great certainty is that it is very important that the adults in the family embrace some values – that they have something they believe in, support, and see as important. If I were to do a cautious sorting/prioritizing, my top criterion would be that the values must never be allowed to become more important than the individual.”

Juul’s view of the child is valid for children of all ages. The child is an individual from birth through adolescence up to adulthood. Children who can speak and have the ability to express their wishes, their situation and their feelings have held a fairly prominent position in Western society for several decades. From the age of five and preschool or school age, children begin to master the keys to our culture: first spoken language and then, with time, written language. It is only from the 1980s and -90s that an interest in the youngest children – those four years and under – has been given more space in child culture, pedagogy, and of course the marketplace. Since middle class families with both parents working are important consumers and strive to keep up the markers appropriate for their life style, they constitute a receptive market for toddler fashion, baby carriage trends, an active urban life style and interior decoration.

Not until 1989, were the rights of the child formally affirmed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, based on the view of a human being as an individual from birth. Sweden ratified the convention already the following year and guaranteed the Convention’s rights by legislation, on several points exceeding the Convention in its support of the child. Most Swedish adults take for granted the rights listed in the Convention, including a child’s right to art and culture – a right probably generally embraced also in practise, not just in theory. But it is not easy to unequivocally state the ramifications of a UN Convention, nor how all of its articles are to be interpreted.



The UN Convention is a legal document without being law. “Legal” must be understood from a moral point of view. Some parts need to be made more precise, other parts are contradictory. It is not always possible to reconcile “respect the will of a child” with “look after the best interest of the child.” A child who absolutely refuses to go to school must somehow be made to understand that without education it is hard to get along in life.

Autonomy or paternalism, self-determination or being ruled by others – that is the eternal tug-of-war in the child’s world. Life itself is actually about being allowed to move at a reasonable pace from one stage to another. But what the Child Convention has contributed specifically is consideration for the child’s perspective which has begun to permeate Swedish society, for example, in the legal system where custody cases are increasingly seen from the child’s point of view.

There is in other words a political, social basis for the changed view of the youngest children. But there is also a medical basis. In the second half of the 20th century, brain research made great strides. Hugo Lagercrantz, Professor of Child Medicine at Karolinska Institutet<sup>1</sup> in Stockholm, has been especially interested in the development of the infant brain. He has written several lay texts about his research and argued against an overemphasis on genetic factors. “The brain,” he says, “is no ready-to-use computer only waiting to be programmed. Rather it is a jungle of nerve ganglia which are organized and reorganized under the influence of different stimuli of the senses.” In other words, the sensory stimuli to which an infant is exposed make a significant difference.

Pre-natal research and brain research have advanced what we supposedly know about a child during its first year. Increasingly younger prematurely born children can survive today, which has also made the survival age approach the upper age limit for an aborted fetus. “But,” says Lagercrantz, “it is not until the fetus has developed a certain consciousness that the ethical dilemma exists... A child born before week 28, i.e., more than 12 weeks prematurely, is difficult to awaken. Not until the 32nd week of gestation can it stay awake for any length of time without stimulation.”

And how do you know that there is consciousness? It can be measured in EEG-waves. Already two month-old babies have the ability to create a mental picture, that is “not only suck a pacifier but also think about it, in other words, there is a mental picture of the pacifier in the baby’s brain.” A two month-old baby participates

<sup>1</sup> Karolinska Institutet, KI, in Stockholm is Sweden’s largest center for medical training and research.



*Wanna-Be Wolf, 1999.*

fully in a social exchange, at least with its mother, and imitates facial expressions. It has also been demonstrated that new-borns recognize voices from their time in the uterus, and are very soon able to identify faces and voices in their environment.

Self-awareness has previously been seen as undeveloped in human beings until the age of two, but Lagercrantz is of the opinion that even new-borns are able to distinguish themselves from others, and at 4–7 months of age “the baby looks with greater interest at another child of the same age than at itself, if both are shown on video.”

Parents have always intuitively known much of what has now been proven scientifically, communicating with their babies from the age of a couple of months and up, through eye contact, cuddling and rocking, or cooing “conversation,” e.g., while changing diapers (so-called “proto conversation”). Through the ages adults have sung and rhymed for their little ones, to lull them to sleep or to teach them new things: a first encounter with music and literature.

Who, when looking into the eyes of a child only a few weeks old, has not had the feeling of seeing something primal and at the same time something absolutely new? Who has not sensed a kind of wisdom and wondered, where do those wise eyes come from?

It is easy for anyone holding a small child in his or her arms to be overwhelmed by sentimentality and parental pride. At the same time, veneration of life’s most tender new shoots and the feeling of community is a part of being human, however much cultural expressions may vary. But it is a fact that infants have now been given

more room in the public sphere of Western culture, whether we see it in the form of colorful highchairs at IKEA, theatre for babies and few-year olds, "pekböcker", (toy books) or a given place for babies and toddlers in today's coffee houses.

Around the turn of the 21st century one of Western culture's core ideas, the value of the individual, was further developed politically and socially, assigning the individual equal status regardless of age, gender and ethnic origin. Family life was adjusted accordingly. Medical research has opened up and facilitated new options and family models, furthering this development, though naturally with new questions and new problems in tow: What about parents who have "abdicated" their responsibility? "Curling parents" (=parents who serve their children by sweeping the ice clean for them)? Children stressed by activity overload? Disciplinary chaos in the schools? Commercial excesses? Common sense, balance, intuition must all be mobilized.

If you have ever seen curious and intensely concentrated toddlers in the theatre you cannot doubt that the very youngest are like the rest of us. That also small children can distinguish between fiction and reality, and that an art experience opens the gates for deepened experience of all kinds, stimulation of the imagination, and discovery of new and different perspectives. At play, children test the frames of reality; in the theatre they can see them being stretched, reassessed, and realized.

Ellen Key,<sup>2</sup> Swedish champion of the new pedagogy and a new aesthetic, pronounced the 20th century "The Century of the Child." Perhaps the 21st century will eventually come to be known as "The Century of the Toddler."

Translation into English by Anne-Charlotte Hanes Harvey

<sup>2</sup> Ellen Key (1849-1926), author, pedagogue, and champion of women's rights. Her *Barnets århundrade* (The century of the child) (1900) argues for individualized instruction in school and "aesthetic schooling," i.e., a generous supply of art and culture in the environment of the developing child.

This text is an excerpt from *En stor liten teater/A great little theatre* by Margareta Sörenson, Stockholm 2008. Margareta Sörenson, who lives in Stockholm, is a long-time theatre and dance critic for the major Swedish daily *Expressen*. The author of several books on theatre, puppetry and on children and the arts, she is an internationally sought after lecturer and panelist. Margareta Sörenson held a workshop at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing 2008.

## *Does a child need art?*

*Fragments of personal experiences*

*shared at an advocacy seminar in Dhaka, Bangladesh*

*Lisa Hugosson*

### *A 'real family'*

Time and again I heard my mother saying "we're almost like a real family now!"

She never did manage to explain what being a 'real family' meant, but I grasped that we were different, that something important set us apart.

Our family housed a great secret, and revelation of this secret was linked to considerable danger.

Three rules applied at home: keep quiet – never tell anyone what is different about us; don't trust anybody else; and strong feelings are not permitted under any circumstances.

Prohibition against feelings! That must be one of the most destructive rules an individual could be forced to follow. You don't know who you are; where you end and someone else starts, whether the situations you find yourself in are right or wrong. Your inner compass is broken, and you wander endlessly off course.

If the adult world is absent, with no one around with whom to share your questions and thoughts, then sooner or later you start looking for answers yourself. And believe me the result can be very destructive and confusing indeed.

Observing, imitating, and making up stories similar to those told by my friends during the day became a full-time job for me, with the ambition of fitting into the norm of how a 'real family' should be.

### *The word 'theatre' was not part of my vocabulary*

Many years later, when I was about 20, I paid a visit to a theatre in the town where I lived.

The play I saw turned out to deal exactly with what I myself had experienced when growing up. It was truly incredible: the story of my life told in the local arts-grant theatre and performed by real actors. The sensation was so strong it left me gaping. Suddenly I was

not alone, no longer abnormal; what had been my past experience was also that of others. It had been given form and I felt I had been seen.

The actors on stage dared to show all the feelings that had been prohibited and repressed at home – sorrow, joy, loneliness, longing and love...not to mention the destructive, the demonic and the darkness; the hate and the anger. There was room for everything.

I left the theatre with a great sensation of calm.

Imagine if I had been introduced to the play at the age when I had needed it most.

### *My adult professional life*

I possess no powerful memories of strong adults from the time when I grew up, but in adult life I have been inspired and influenced by many such people. My professional life came to revolve around drama, mainly for young people at pre-school and in compulsory level education.

In schools you meet all children, irrespective of financial, social, cultural or ethnic background, and not least you meet those children who would never come near drama if obliged to rely on the ways and wants of their parents.

If you are an adult and have not found your way to the theatre, then the chance is considerable that you wouldn't bring your children there. In which case school is frequently the only way children can come into contact with theatre.

The most important link between children and theatre, the link that can convey curiosity and expectation, is the teacher or adult link. It is extremely important as an adult to always proceed on the basis of one's own pleasure and curiosity when looking at performances and in dialogues with children.

My own primary school teacher frequently comes to mind as a model for this. She loved poetry in all its forms; when the urge came she would break off whatever was on the go in her class to read poetry with her pupils.

In the discussion that followed on from this we were all on an equal level, both children and adult. There were no rights and wrongs. We were free to differ; major questions often have no answers, but together we were able to meet and reflect.

Drama can provide a space where children and adults meet one another.

### *Do children need art?*

On entering life we are hit by reality straight away. Real life does not wait until childhood is in the past.

We cannot release children from the reality that is theirs, especially when this reality is dark and filled with problems. But we as adults can be there and protect them in this reality.

What cannot be said in words needs articulating in other ways. Children are equipped to meet the tougher sides of life, with hope lying in their imagination and creativity. Aided by these, we give children the tools to deal with complications.

A symbolic language is needed to help provide interpretation, for example play, stories, symbols, myth, drawing, art, poetry, music and drama. The most vital aspect is not answers to big questions, but rather our ability to give form to the questions.

I have worked a lot in my job with children narrating their own stories, and among those that have affected me most are the Bede (a community frequently moving from place to place) children of Bangladesh telling stories from their own lives, and deaf actors in Africa relating their tales of being 'the poorest of the poor'. Their



Photo: Rakhal

*Rakhal in training with the Bede-children (left). The Bede community's temporary lodging near Turag river, Tongi.*



accounts have entered into me and taken hold, I have been profoundly touched by the power and level of engagement in their storytelling, while at the same time I have been reminded of my own childhood.

Had the possibility been shown to me when I was small, perhaps I too had been able to formulate and give form to the tale of my own life, and felt pride instead of using up so much energy in hiding this tale.

### *Significance of play*

Play is one of the symbolic languages.

Children create symbolic actions that formulate thoughts and feelings in play. It is through play that children work on, understand and learn to live with the more difficult aspects of life. Play is often born out of present-day events, but events from the past might also be woven into it, as well as future possibilities.

Play is a way of going over the past and preparing for the future.

Drama and play are very close to one another.

The presence and voice of children are usually very poorly represented in efforts related to theatre. Having a reference group linked to a specific production made up of children of the right age is almost always the norm, but longer term deeper artistic dialogue with children is less frequent. Often such meetings fail to materialise, with both time and tools lacking.

Sitting together with a group of nine-year-olds and starting a dialogue often results in impatience and irritation. On the other hand, if you start with play, illustration, dance, music or drama what frequently happens is that forms take shape that both engage and affect individual children who take up events from their own reality. These then form the basis for conversations on what the children are touched by and relate to thematically. The hopes and thoughts of children are not always in accord with those of adults.

It is important that the same person is involved in this type of meeting with children, that meetings are regular, and they take place at the same time each week.

Following play relating to the different roles of girls and boys dialogue continues.

“BOYS just want to play football. They are mean. They cause trouble, pick on you. Boys are stronger, they are better. Boys are lazy. Boys are always out and about. Boys are bosses.”

“GIRLS are better at washing up and cleaning, are nicer. Girls stay at home.”

“It makes no difference. We are all human beings.”

“All kids are usually nice at home, it’s at school they are at their worst.”

“Angels at home, trouble-makers at school.”

An adult asks, “why do we do nasty things?”, and a child answers, “It just happens, the devil flies into you!”

“You do something daft and that’s when the devil flies in.”

Common themes are those that relate to family, loneliness, gender roles, money and friends.

Among the children in Bangladesh important themes were:

- How to be able to play with the rich children, and vice versa; and how to play with the poor children without parents getting involved.
- The chances of going to school instead of working.
- Not having to live on the street.
- Not being hit.

### *Art as business or pleasure?*

The discourse in Sweden is often: how should we use art in educational contexts? Should we rely on the innate power of art and let it do its thing? Should we actors be actors and no more?

What happens if we work close to children? ... Does that turn us into teachers? ... Is our professional identity threatened? Should children look at professional performances or be allowed to create themselves?

In my travels around the world I have never come across such questions. The attitude rather is that if art can be used then use it.



Lisa Hugosson at the advocacy seminar in Dhaka together with Ola Hällgren from the Swedish Embassy (right).

Maybe culture cannot provide food on the table, but it can give us enough strength to live our lives and stop us from falling apart into bits. For me this power is the most important.

Why do people travel for miles on poor roads for unpaid rehearsals a few late evening hours? Talking evening after evening about which tales it is most important to tell. The themes that should be there, the characters and how these are to be interpreted.

Here are some quotes I have picked up in meetings on drama and theatre outside Sweden:

“Teach us!” “Teach us whatever will boost our lust for life!”

“The only thing that gets me through my studies is being able to work with these street children in the evenings.”

“Working with theatre has taught me COURAGE.”

“How would we be able to spread information and knowledge without theatre?”

“Puppet theatre is our primary weapon against HIV and AIDS.”

“The only time I feel alive is at the theatre.”

Theatre can be artistic, entertaining and pedagogic at one and the same time. A quote by Lennart Helsing captures this well: “All pedagogic art is bad art, all good art is pedagogic.”

### *Can anything and everything be performed for children?*

It is important that our adult fear of confronting specific existential questions does not get in the way of children having their questions on life being interpreted on stage. When theatre takes up major issues for discussion our problem is not with children, but there can be frequent and long talks aimed at instilling calm into adults.

Feeling emotions is not dangerous, and an encounter with theatre is rarely as frightening as the reality that children might face. Right from an early age children have their own experiences of big emotions such as love, sorrow, longing and anger.

Small children usually know straightaway what tone feelings have and how they feel in their bodies. It is often surprising what can emerge in talks with children after a performance.

Three eleven-year-old girls discussed with their teacher the contents of a recently seen performance. The teacher was concerned that the play was rather sad and sorrowful. One of the girls replied: “Sorrowful? That doesn’t matter, does it! My dad likes hunting, I’m used to sorrow.”

### *Adults have the last word*

Most things within professional culture for children are decided on by adults. They it is who write, direct, perform, make judgement on what is beneficial, make financial decisions and ultimately decide what children are to see. In the worst case they also influence what opinions children should have after a performance.

If an audience is really young, it can often be seen how the children look at a performance through their teacher. Before daring to rely on their own feelings they look for confirmation among adults.

Performances are sometimes presented as a school assignment with relevant questions to be answered and marked following the theatre visit.

It is not hard understanding the small boy absolutely not wanting to go to the theatre, and standing there crying his face in his hands. When his teacher coaxed and cajoled again and again to find out what was wrong he finally burst out: “I don’t want to draw dolphins afterwards!”

Or in a dialogue between us and children following a performance for mid-teens where a critic present said: “I didn’t like this performance at all. It was a misinterpretation of the writer’s intentions, the stage design was no good”, etc. A fourteen-year-old girl stood up and said: “I was in there watching the performance for more than an hour. I laughed, I cried, and felt lots and lots of emotions, and now you’re telling me that everything I experienced was WRONG!” She then left the room.

One thing that is always important to be aware of is: *the encounter with theatre is individual to all human beings. The experience children have is entirely their own, and this experience is inviolable.*

### *Matti*

Finnish brain researcher Matti Bergström aged 86 but still actively giving talks always warms to the subject of the importance of art in schools, the capacity of art to promote the ability to learn. Any artistic expression can be used in teaching since such expressions produce an emotional involvement.

Knowledge received via emotion, knowledge grounded in both thought and feeling, fastens and remains much longer.

Children are spontaneously chaotic, creative with the skills for all kinds of artistic activity. Not making use of this aptitude would be plain silly.

The brain is so constructed that unsureness is hard to endure. The brain needs to know. There is a continuous struggle between chaos and order.

Development of the human brain requires chaos and order. In the final count art and culture have their basis in chaos.

At the core of	chaos	is	play
At the core of	play	is	possibility
At the core of	possibility	is	creativity
At the core of	creativity	is	aesthetics
At the core of	aesthetics	is	culture

If children are to develop as cultural, human beings, then they need to have an outlet for the chaos in connection with play, imagination and stories. As with art and aesthetics these should be woven into the school curriculum and all learning.

Art, literature and drama serve as aids to people in forming their identity and broadening their understanding of themselves and the world about them. In confrontation through art with the thoughts and experiences of others, children are able to develop an understanding and empathy for others and for what is different. They can develop a strong 'SELF' and self-esteem important to living a good life.

Self-knowledge and knowledge of our inner being then determine how we use other knowledge.

Our inner compass does not simply twirl round at random, but is something to be relied on: our own personal instrument telling us where we and the world around us are in relation to one another.

*Without art and culture on a school curriculum schools will only educate half of each human being.*

The quote from Lennart Hellsing at page 38 comes from "Tankar om barnlitteraturen" (1963), Stockholm 1999.

Selection of Scientific Publications by R. A. Matias (Matti) Bergström is to be found on his webpage.

This text is excerpted from a speech made at an advocacy seminar in Dhaka 2008. Lisa Hugosson is an actor and director for the Riksteatern (The National Swedish Touring Theatre) since 1978. She has worked as artistic head of Tyst teater (Silent Theatre) 2000–2005 and Barn och Unga (Children and Youth) since 2004.

## *Youngsters in the centre – children acting for children*

*Cia Frode*

### *Origins*

In autumn 1942, children's theatre as an after school activity started at the city library at Medborgarhuset, Stockholm. The theatre, which in 1955 became municipal, was called Vår Teater – Our Theatre, and was brought to life by Elsa Olenius. Elsa was a children's librarian and was early in introducing storytelling in groups of children and other activities focused on increasing children's interest in reading. Charades, theatre games and pantomimes were frequent features of the storytelling groups. On a study visit to the USA, Elsa came in contact with Creative Dramatics and understood right away that this was something for her and her children's theatre. As time went by she developed her own methods which continue to this day to shine through in Vår Teater.

### *Present time*

Vår Teater in Stockholm with its fourteen theatre locations is unique in Sweden, perhaps even throughout the world. As the city expanded a new children's theatre was planned in each new part of the city that was built. The latest of the theatres opened in the autumn of 2008. Vår Teater has received many study visits from various parts of the world and has inspired people with its methods and its way of looking at children in themselves and children as creators. Since the organisation is run by the municipality the cost for children to attend is reasonable. This reasonable cost was a demand set by Elsa Olenius. Every child should be able to join Vår Teater no matter what the child's social status. Since Elsa was a librarian books as a tool and reading books made up a central part of the organisation. Most of the plays that the children enacted were based on books or fairy tales. Even today books and fairy tales are used, but most of the time the writers are children, with stories based on events from real life or pure fiction. A focal point of Vår Teater is the use of one's imagination.



Photo: Vår Teater

*Photos, above and to the right, from children's training by Cia Frode at Vår Teater in Stockholm.*

A unique thing about Vår Teater and its methods is to always have children and their wishes and needs as the centre of attention. The groups are constructed in such a way that the teacher always has time to meet the needs of each child. Every child should feel

unique and noticed. When the children are very young activities are formed to help them practise their motor skills, concentration and ability to work as part of a group. As time goes by work continues with different forms of improvisations, which finally result in a small show for family and friends. Children acting in front of other children is something very special to Vår Teater. After thirty years in the business I can still see that children feel something special when looking at other children acting.

Young children often choose 'safe' roles such as a tree, a flower or rock as their first improvisatory role. This enables the child to be in the story without much acting. This is good since it can feel a bit scary to act in front of an audience even if it's people the child already knows. As the group practises the children tend to become more confident and after a while even the trees, flowers and rocks start speaking. When the children become a bit older some of them still want to choose 'safe' roles and so they often choose animal roles. The children think that it feels safe being someone's cat or dog. Children develop at different speeds and it's important to let them grow at their own pace. Some parents say "well, this is the third time he plays the gangster", and one can answer "it's better he shoots someone in the theatre than in real life".

### *Theatre of the children*



Photo: Vår Teater

The theatre is a way to explore one's own identity and increase one's self-esteem in a safe and forgiving environment. This corresponds with the aims that inspired the guidelines set up by the municipality in 1955 and these are still valid today. Children's theatre should as an activity fulfil children's need to play and be a place for spontaneity and creativeness. At the same time it should develop, nurture and cultivate knowledge. It should also help children to develop their own tastes and stimulate their feelings for quality theatre and literature. Also it should foster tomorrow's theatre audience. Children's theatre can provide valuable additions to children's mental state and fulfil their need for adventure and excitement. All of this should be brought into play by teamwork.

The older children often stay within the theatre learning plays by manuscripts. Even if the older children often work with manuscripts the work here too starts with improvisation to give the groups a sense of solidarity. The goal is almost always to put on a show if the group doesn't decide to do something else. Another unique aspect of Elsa Olenius and Vår Teater and the methods in use is that they do well and truly result in an organisation for social interaction using drama and theatre as a tool.

### *A successful exchange*

In June of 2007 Anna Östlund and I had the opportunity to travel to Laos and give a workshop for a group of teachers, puppeteers and actors working with children and theatre. We did this to show a different way of working with groups of children than the way they were used to. We didn't speak the language but as with the children in the Vår Teater groups we got to feel how easy it was to make new friends through improvisation, games and other activities. What struck us was that they didn't really get the children involved in the process; instead the children were confined to being spectators. Topics were often moralising, which is relevant since it is important to teach children about right and wrong in a playful manner. Myself and Anna tried to show a different way of looking at the task. This wasn't easy. In Laos the concept of talking animals is not recognised, but before we left we were able to see a lot of stories with talking animals. The goal wasn't to get them to work in the same way we do but to use their own stories and experiences. All we did was to give them other ideas to incorporate.

In Sweden we often use movement as a way of releasing built up

energy and opening the senses. In Laos they were not as used to using movement as we do in Sweden. Together with the Swedish gym 'Friskis och Svettis' Anna has developed a series of movements for children called RÖRIS. We used this in Laos with the people attending the workshop and they thought this was great. The attendees tried all the exercises and the improvisations that we work with to teach their students later on. It is much simpler to teach what one has tried. During one afternoon we also introduced makeup since this wasn't something frequently used. We also tried to show how props could be created from things lying around. This aroused laughter and many questions.

On our last days in Laos the participants tried out the things they had learnt at a nearby school. They really used everything they had learnt during the week. Animals talked, relaxed and exciting exercises were mixed with teaching of Laotian morals. They even used RÖRIS to the children's delight. A very successful meeting between East and West.

Cia Frode has a background as a drama teacher at Vår Teater (Our Theatre), teaching in primary and secondary school. She is vice executive director of Stockholm City School of Arts where she also works as a producer and area director.

Cia Frode and Anna Östlund held a workshop in Laos 2007.



## *Voices from children, parents, teachers and authorities in Bangladesh and India*

*Stories and comments are collected and written down by project partners Rakhal and Rupantar in Bangladesh, and Nandikar and Rangakishora/Rangayana in India.*

“When I first joined the Sunday classes at Nandikar, I was a somewhat invisible student of an over-populated school where my absence made no difference, except to a few close friends. I don’t know when I had started looking forward to my Sundays. Somewhere during my first year, I was absent for two consecutive classes and my friends and teachers from Nandikar called me up to enquire. I was suddenly flooded with the understanding that some people knew that I existed and even registered that they did!

Theatre games, improvisations, concentration games must have had their impact, but I always feel, that it was the very approach – the fact that somebody cares, somebody believes, somebody keeps faith in me, even if I am not the best – that puffed me with confidence and allowed me to be myself. I am a happier, more confident and more spirited being today – like I was as a child.”

*Debleena Tripathi, 18 years, Kolkata, India*



“If I did not join theatre, I would have been a terrorist. I joined theatre when I was studying in class six. Though I was getting schooling, I was living in an environment which was not favourable for me or for any child to grow up to be a responsible person but theatre restricted my being inhuman. My ethics and personality were greatly influenced by theatre. Here I got the chance to mix with other children and I came to know what type of person I have to be, if I want to be accepted by all.”

*Shahjahan Shovan, active in theatre since age of 10, Tongi, Bangladesh.*



”I was a performer in my school theatre group. When I stepped into

10th grade, my parents restricted my going to theatre thinking that it will hamper my studying and finally affect my Secondary School Certificate result. But as I was wholeheartedly a theatre lover and took this as a challenge to my existence it hurt me so much when my parents restricted my going to theatre class and rehearsal. But being trained in theatre, I knew how to manage them. Considering my passion for acting my parents put one condition before me that I must do well in examination if I wanted to continue theatre. I promised them to obtain a good score in S.S.C. I worked hard and succeeded. I learnt about dedication from theatre and achieved what I wanted. My parents also kept their promise and helped me.”

*Tania, 15 years old, Uttara School, Bangladesh*



“I used to study in school and continued up to 10th grade. Due to financial problems I had to start working with my father in the paddy field to earn money for the continuation of my studies. We had to struggle to bear the financial expenses of our family. My father is a day labourer and earns only 100 taka (USD 1.5) per day. We cannot even afford three meals each day. In this situation I cannot ask my parents to buy me books for school. Still I tried hard to continue studying and at the same time earning money by working in



*Child's drawing, Rupantar, Khulna, Bangladesh.*

the paddy field, but I began to panic when after buying books my school authority changed the list and asked us to buy new ones.

I never thought I would be able to do anything else. Then once I heard about theatre activities by Rakhal coming to our village. I was curious and somehow managed to find time to join the workshops conducted by the group from Dhaka and also performed in a play in our own language. This made a big difference for me. Theatre made me think positive even in my difficult situation and now I am confident to do well in whatever situation I am. Thanks to the theatre activities I feel more confident to continue my studies and it has made me a positive thinker.”

*Sheuli Bara, 15 years old and a member of the Orao tribal community in Dinajpur, Bangladesh*



“I attended a theatre workshop which was organised by Rangayana, Dharwad. I always felt very shy. I hesitated to mingle with my classmates freely. I liked more to stay alone. When the teacher or somebody else asked me to speak, I was shaken. I joined the theatre workshop and performed a small role in a drama. Thereafter my stage fear is no more. Now I have many friends to meet and talk with.”

*Shwetha, 12 years, Dharwad, India*



“When I was a student in class eight my parents arranged for me to marry. I refused to get married at this early age as I understood very well the demerits of such early marriage for girls. Failing to convince my father and mother I approached the school teachers and the theatre team of the school. They went to meet my father and mother and had a very lengthy and fruitful discussion. I then assured my parents that when I reach a suitable age to marry I will oblige the request. The approach of my teachers, drama trainers and other students made my parents realise my fearful situation. Now I am going to school regularly like other girls of the area.”

*Julia Khanam, 14 years, Itna Girls High School, Bangladesh*



“My name is Yashoda living in a slum called Ekalavyanagar. I am studying in fourth grade. In our village there are 80 children, of

which 20–30 children attend school. The rest of the children work as child labourers. Some children beg, it is for the need of their bread. My parents work as building labourers. Three years ago Rangakishora, Children’s Theatre Repertory of Rangayana, conducted a theatre workshop in our village. Sixty children participated in the camp and learnt lots of things like theatre games, drawing, painting, clay model making, dancing, singing etc. At the end of the camp we performed a play under the direction of Yoganand Sir. Since then every year 30 children from our area participate in the theatre workshop. Now 60 children attend school.”

*Yashoda, 13 years, Ekalavyanagar, India*



“One day me and my friends in the theatre training group went to an area of 300–400 small huts. In that area heaps of garbage were thrown everywhere. The day was too hot. Not even a single tree found. We started planting the trees. Nearly 100 plants were planted. Now all those plants have grown up as small trees. Now you can see the trees with flowers and fruits. And everybody can hear the birds singing. I am ever thankful to Rangayana for giving me this opportunity.”

*Prithvi, 9 years, Mysore, India*



Photo: Rangayana

*Discussion on environment protection during a summer camp in Mysore, 2008.*

“One and one  
getting into trend  
Theatre is the blend  
Of my friend”

*Swaroop, Hospet, India*



### *The story about Nion*

#### *Nion's own story*

“I am Alif Anjum Nion, living in Mohishakhola Union, Norail, Bangladesh. When I was younger I was very shy and I always felt unable to express myself. In 2004 I joined the school theatre team with the initiative of Rupantar. Then I was a student of Class III in primary school. I am the only son of my parents and feel a lot of pressure from that.

After having participated in the theatre/drama workshop, within a very short time I developed confidence and I felt it easier to keep close relationships with friends and others. Through the theatre activities I became fully aware of children's rights and various social issues and I confidently shared my experiences, views and ideas with others including the teachers and parents.

After having passed my primary level education, I was admitted to Norail High School and I am now a student of Class VI. Along with my studies I planned to continue the theatre activities and after consultation with the headmaster we developed a theatre team in this school. I have managed this new team that organised a cultural performance on the occasion to celebrate the Independence Day of our beloved country and through several other activities we have become a successful group in the district.

Besides the school work I have continued my regular practice of drama and theatre with new groups always sharing with the elders about human rights issues including children's rights, and try to give fruitful suggestions. I feel like my leadership is being recognised at the school and local community level.”

#### *Comments by Nion's mother*

“At the time of his association with the drama/theatre he was a student of Class III. Except taking meals himself he was unable to

do anything; he could not even speak in a clear manner with his parents. Now he is able to do his own work and never feels shy to talk to others and provides leadership in all respects. He is learning singing in Shilpakala Academy. Everybody is astonished at his changes.”

#### *Comments by Nion's teachers*

“Nion developed himself in other fields besides his education. After gaining permission in high school in class VI he took the initiative to form a drama group in that school and he is guiding the team properly. It may be concluded that the children's theatre education programme has successfully developed Nion, and many other children can equally be developed like Nion provided support and opportunities are there and proper guidance and care is available from the school, teachers and parents.”

*Tarifa Khanom, Rowhsonara Rahman and Anjumanara Doly, teachers at Nion's previous school, Norail Town government primary school.*



### *The story about Manabi*

#### *Manabi's own story*

“I am Manabi Chattopadhyay. I live in Kolkata, India, and am associated with Nandikar's Children's Theatre Project since 2006. I have always heard people tell me that my intelligence is low. Lower than other children of my age. I am bad at mathematics. My exams scare me and I fare miserably in them. I had an operation done to my legs when I was really small and they pain constantly so I am bad at sports too. I have always been segregated at school. I have always felt really afraid and kept asking myself “Can I do it”? Then Doctor Aunt (psychologist) told my parents that I could take up acting as a therapy. That's how I joined Nandikar.

Here no one shuts me up, asks me to stand in the corner, here we play all day long and learn theatre. I remember once we were asked to jump from a stool. I felt so scared. Then Rimididi (one of the trainers) showed me how I could do it easily and not fall. She gave me strength.

Now I don't feel scared anymore. I always remember my favourite line from the play PAKHI (The Bird directed by Swatilekha Sengupta) “try again and again and again and then try again...”

Now I too try again. I can do most things by myself. I think I have improved in my studies too. I am sure that I can do almost anything!”

*Comments by Manabi's father*

“It was in May 2005 that Nandikar started the Children’s Theatre classes on a regular basis. Many little children came along and with them joined Manabi. A little girl of 13, a little different from the other children of her age. Manabi was 13, yet she had the mental age of a very small child. She was teased at school because she could not cope with her studies. To add to her worries Manabi also suffered from congenital hip-joint dislocation for which she had to be operated on. She had constant pain in her legs. So, for the mainstream, physically and mentally Manabi belonged to the backbenchers.

The psychologist had said that Manabi possessed a talent for acting and it was with this advice that she joined Nandikar’s Children’s Theatre classes. Now she loves her Sunday mornings! It’s theatre time! Her precious time! No one teases her here. No one asks her to sit apart. No one tells her that she cannot. The happy days, months and a year go by.

It is 2006. The Durga Pujas. One night while returning home, Manabi is molested by a man in the crowd. Her father does not notice what has happened and the man tries to flee unnoticed. It is Manabi who shouts “Father, catch him. He did something bad to me.” The man is caught and taken to the police station where Manabi files a report against him, unafraid. Manabi has finally grown up and now can fend for herself, protect herself.”

*Comments by Manabi's mother*

“The Children’s Theatre classes started in Nandikar from May 2005 and since that time Manabi has been a part of them. She has quite a few mental and physical ailments. Her mental age is younger than her biological age and at the age of four she was operated on for a congenital hip-joint dislocation. The people around her have always made her feel that she is way behind them and so Manabi had a feeling that she was a loser who could never do anything in life.

To add to her woes, Manabi suddenly started having convulsions in 2003. Many tests were performed and no reason was found for the convulsions. The psychologist had suggested theatre as a therapy, an activity that could help Manabi and so she joined Nandikar. Here she slowly started discovering herself, opening up. She has also acted in two plays! Everything was fine when suddenly she had

convulsions again in the December of 2007. After 4 years of constant medication the doctor had asked her to go off the medicines in October 2007 but she started to have the convulsions again. Manabi was rehearsing for the play ‘Satyi Rajputra’ which was going to be staged at Nandikar’s National Theatre Festival which is a big theatre event in India. She performed on the 25th of December but on the 31st she had her convulsions and had to be hospitalised. During her five days at the hospital, she kept saying “this will not do. I can’t stay here at the hospital. My play is on the 19th of January and I have to get well and do it.” When Rudraprasad Sengupta came along with Dr. Sitesh Dasgupta she kept urging the doctor: “Doctor, please tell them that I can surely perform on the 19th.” I was amazed, the girl who had always said “I cannot do it” performed with confidence on the 19th. Nandikar has taught her that she could do it!”



“I forbade my daughter to go to theatre class because I had a negative impression about theatre and the people related to it. I thought my child was going against religious norms and might get spoiled but my daughter was too much passionate about theatre and was attending theatre classes on the sly. Therefore, one day I decided to see her performance and then I realised how irrational I was. The theme of the play she performed in, the atmosphere, the people and my daughter’s performance nudged me and I admitted that she was not doing anything wrong or it does not teach anything against religion. There is no conflict as theatre speaks for bringing light to life.”

*Jashim Uddin, father of Rowshan Ara,  
joining School Theatre Program in Bangladesh.*

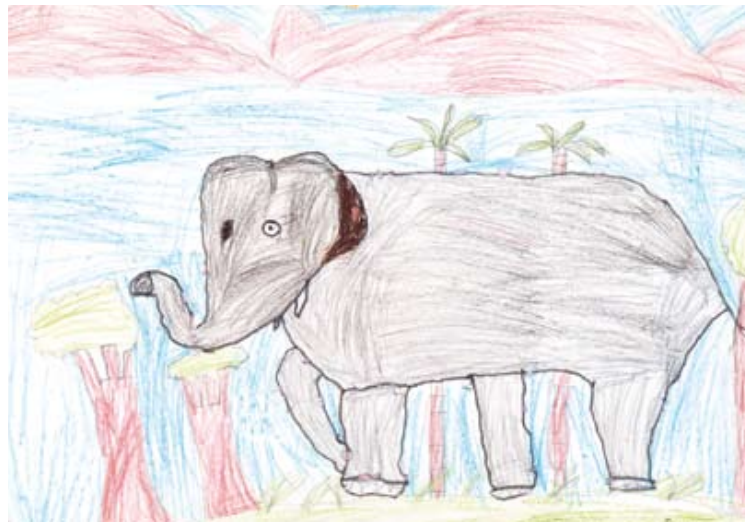


”How could I forget the first day of my participation in children’s theatre in my previous school. Before the workshop I was in a class teaching chemistry and I put one simple question to one of my students which he could not answer and as a traditional teacher I gave him a punishment. The next class was for theatre. In that class we asked the students to pray for some valuable things which they did not possess and make business with the item they got from this. Some asked for a car, a computer like this. That particular boy at once asked for a good-looking wife, and due to the guidelines

I could not punish a student in the theatre class, and we allowed the student his choice and asked him to justify his quality of life to enjoy with a wife. The student found it difficult to justify and we taught all the boys in the class how to defend. Thus I learnt how to tackle a classroom situation giving full respect to what a child speaks.

This theatre journey with the school children improved my class teaching for which I am being paid. Apart from that now I can handle any situation with confidence. My articulation is improved. During these long 20 years with children's theatre I have worked in more than 250 schools in different districts and with different socio-economic status. But the result is the same. The children are not happy. They are over-burdened with syllabus, cannot find pleasure in school. Thus joy of learning is meaningless to these children. Children are more adult in thinking in good sense and we should respect this. However, one funny thing that I would like to mention here is that in every school the students while improvising treat the teacher as a negative character. The reason may be hierarchy that they don't like.

I am lucky enough as I was offered the post of headmaster in Laban Hrad Vidyapith since 1997. The school is exceptional in the sense that here practice of theatre was compulsory from the very



*Child's drawing, Mysore, India.*

beginning. Here I am allowed to make some experimental theatre and I received unstinted cooperation from my colleagues as theatre in this school is now philosophically accepted by the school governor. My students are now capable of facing any situation without any fear. Their academic performances are also improving. Every year the alumni come during the festival time. We are now radiating like a family. My students are now highly proud of their school.

Theatre has a therapeutic value also, which I experienced during my journey. I still remember Avik who was a student of class V some years ago with a psychological crisis. He was suffering from insecurity and either his father or mother had to sit outside the school campus all day. We took the child in our theatre class and during a performance in Delhi we took the child along with his father. Avik enjoyed the process and the next year we informed Avik that we may take him but we will not allow his father during outside performance. Avik agreed and joined the theatre class and his feeling of insecurity receded and ultimately he was cured.

I am now on the verge of retirement. As the head of the institution I have to take some administrative decision which may make me unpopular but the theatre process with the children helps me to understand their problem and I am proud that to date I have not needed to resort to any punishment decision. Thus I am amply rewarded. Through Children's Voice I have grown eloquent."

*Syamal Kumar Bhattacharyya,*  
Headmaster of Laban Hrad Vidyapith, Kolkata, India



"There is no such type of educational system for students at the primary school level in Bangladesh that mobilises or encourages them to foster human dignity through education. As per survey report of Govt. of Bangladesh in the year 2005, there were a total of 80 397 primary schools. There are some limited expensive schools like Kindergarten where a favourable educational environment and other facilities are available to pupils. Cultural activity is one of the legitimate demands of children but from childhood students in Bangladesh are almost deprived of it. It is essential to make them aware alongside other educational qualifications of honesty, sincerity, loyalty and human rights activities.

Before I had no idea about theatre education at all. It was beyond my expectation that development in children's education, in-

crease in school attendance, as well as devotion to studies could be achieved through theatre.

The environment of theatre education for school children of Chapatala Registered Primary School created by Rupantar had a great impact. When Rupantar performed the drama 'Life Candle' with the children of Chapatala Government Primary School in 2004 I was there as part of the audience. Through this drama I recognised children's rights, human dignity and the duty of parents and teachers. I found that children who were unable to speak and express had developed to a great extent. The children performed fearlessly.

I was always uneasy and in tension about the development of the school and regularising the attendance of the boys in the school. The drama made me aware of facts and I took the initiative to invite the local elite, guardians, social workers, and members of the school management committee to get them to understand the benefit of theatre.

The development of child theatre groups at school level and performance by the children through theatre/drama to make people aware of human rights, especially children's rights are not the only objectives, but also the drama is intended to highlight the roles of the teachers, parents and others for the development of the children in a favourable environment in which they may grow into perfect citizens of the future to contribute to society and the nation."

*A. Gani,*

Headmaster of East Chapatala Primary School, Bagerhat, Bangladesh



"I was inspired through my observations of children's theatre performance by a school children's team at Norail. Actually I was so impressed that I decided to initiate a children's theatre team in the constituency. Charikhata Government Primary School of Maizpara was selected after discussions with the headmaster on his proposal. He also made a Union Parishad Budget of taka 10,000 to buy musical instruments for the school so that the children could be effectively developed in cultural activities. I have learnt that this is the first time in Bangladesh a Union Parishad has come forward with financial assistance for children's theatre development."

*Shamsur Rahman,* Chairman of Maizpara Union Parishad under Sadar Upazilla of Norail district, Bangladesh



### *How it should be!*

*Manifesto by the children about their school and theatre camp in Mysore, India, Summer 2007*

1. We don't want teachers to punish.
2. Environment of the school should be clean and tidy.
3. School must be a place to learn good habits.
4. Learning and playing should be equal in school.
5. We need spacious school buildings with big playgrounds.
6. Every school must have a compulsory Library.
7. Lessons should be taught in the form of stories.
8. School must teach all the art forms.
9. School should be surrounded by garden.
10. At least one pet should be in the home to play with.
11. Drama should teach the moral stories.
12. Folk and traditional songs and stories should be taught in the schools.
13. Children's camp must include yoga, drama, dance and music.
14. Teaching of musical instruments in school is required.
15. It is good to have more and more things to play with in schools.



Photo: Rangayana

*Children enjoying a summer camp at Rangayana, Mysore, 2008.*



*Feedback of the participants of the teacher's training workshops, India.*

“It improves the relationship between teacher and student.”

*Somsheker, Govt., Lower Primary School, Hunsur.*



“Theatre techniques are very helpful for communicating with the children.”

*K. N. Usha, Govt., Higher Primary Girls School, H.D. Kote.*



“This type of training must be given to all the teachers.”

*Syed Rizwan, Cluster Resource person, Melur.*



“This method is really effective in teaching.”

*Pankaja T., Gokul School, Mysore.*



“It is easy and effective method of teaching.”

*Shiva Kumar Kampalapura, Govt. School, Chamarajanagar.*



“It is literally joyful learning.”

*Bhagirathi, Block Resource person, Yelandur.*



“How to adopt this method in teaching science and mathematics?”

*M. Keshavamurthy, Govt. Primary School, Kundakere, Gundlupet.*



“Children will become more active, if we adopt this method.”

*K. Gorijan, Higher Primary School, Kundagal, Bhagalkote*

## *Why support children's theatre? – Investing in the future*

*Emma Jansson*

All children and youth in society, rich or poor, privileged or underprivileged, are the creators and bearers of culture of the future civilisation – they are the future adults. The opportunities they have of growing up as secure and solid humans is of greatest importance for each person as an individual and it is essential for the well being of society as a whole. There are of course many aspects to realising the vision of a world full of thriving children, one piece in the puzzle is children's theatre. Children's theatre includes theatre by professionals doing theatre for children as well as children active in theatre or drama activities themselves. The importance of children's theatre in a child's life and its importance to society will be further discussed in text that follows. There will be examples from some of the collaborators in the Children's Voice project in India, Bangladesh, China, Laos and Vietnam as well as from Sweden, which has also played a collaborating professional part in the project.

### *Professionalism in children's theatre*

Professional children's theatre and children doing drama and theatre themselves represent two different but equally important aspects of children's theatre. These two kinds do not compete with one other, but rather complement various elements in a child's experience of the art. As with all other types of work with high impact and good results, professionalism is of greatest importance. The professional children's theatre workers/artists with their knowledge, experience and well developed methodology can write and perform from the perspective of children in order to interact better with the children in the audience and create moments of learning and reflection in their communication. Experience in the project area proves that professional theatre creates concentration among children and involvement in the content presented on stage.



Photo: Nandikar

*The play "New boy Natabar" performed by Nandikar in Kolkata, 2006.*

Children active in theatre through drama training or performing themselves presents other qualities. It gives the children an arena in which to express themselves and a chance to take part in active learning. This aspect of children's theatre also demands professionalism from grownups, in the role as teachers and trainers of children doing theatre. Such a trainer or teacher may be a school teacher with a drama training background or a professional artist trained in pedagogical drama. Theatre and drama training can be a method for active learning in art, literature and other subjects. It is a tool for education and for strengthening children to function in a group, making them responsive to fellow friends and society, as well as making them reflective of their own situation and possibilities as individuals.

### *Theatre from the perspective of children*

In the context of theatre, as an audience or when active themselves, children gain the opportunity of reflecting and learning through art. This is not something that happens with just any theatre performance: but with professional children's theatre arts written for children from their perspective about issues relevant to the outlooks they have; or through professional drama workshops for chil-

dren when they gain the opportunity to act and express themselves within the framework of the trusting situation built up through the trainer or teacher with the help of pedagogical methods.

The methods of professional children's theatre and training have to be continually developed through exchange of knowledge among professionals nationally and internationally. Professionals within the Children's Voice project countries, including Sweden, have gained from learning from each other's methods. For example, there are several ways for professionals to write plays from the perspective of children. Swedish professionals have exchanged methods in project countries. One method now used by playwrights aims for children in school to speak out on their thoughts and ideas. In order to make the situation different the regular teachers do not take part, which makes the children more relaxed. This method of meeting and talking to children is used to find material to write plays from the perspective of children. Another example of pedagogical method comes from Laos where children, through major collaboration with schools in the Children's Voice project, have to a large degree had the chance to express their thoughts in plays written by themselves. They have been able to write about what they themselves feel to be important and later to perform these before parents and other children.

As an audience and as part of a group doing theatre, children gain the opportunity of being part of a context where they can listen, express themselves and win confidence. In the audience situation they have the chance of listening and relating within their own thoughts to what is said and done on stage – they are intellectually confronted and a learning situation appears through the idiom of the art. In some cases it is also possible for actors to communicate with children so that they are able to ask questions and express themselves in the venue after a performance. In the drama situation children are part of a situation where through play they can formulate their thoughts in action and in speech – active learning where they take part in the teaching situation. They learn to focus, to listen to each other, to train their empathy, and at the same time they are heard and recognised by adults. This can result in an increase in self confidence. Theatre is a great way for children to communicate – speak and listen. It is a way for children and youth to explain their situation and formulate the future. Through drama activities within the Children's Voice project children in remote areas gained the opportunity of having their voices heard. For example: In Vietnam, workshops were held to give children opportunities for making



scenery and acting to show their thoughts and learning how to deal with difficult situations by trying various ways of acting different solutions to a problem. The artists and teachers were able to observe the process and learn to understand the children. This exchange also indicated that the children developed courage, confidence and imagination. In theatre and drama, children can get the chance to feel important here and now, and that they can make a difference individually and in a group.

### *Children's theatre from the perspective of society*

#### **Children's theatre as a public forum for development**

Professional theatre and drama training for children as well as theatre in education represent major cultural and social capital to society. Art can provide a context to discussions significant to the development of society as a whole. Professional children's theatre has proved to be of public interest in areas of India, Bangladesh, China, Laos and Vietnam as witnessed by the large audiences and numbers of participants as well as the massive media coverage of the Children's Voice project performances and drama activities. Media articles have attracted attention to the voices of children and their rights in society. This is also a way of making adults aware of the situation of children. Children's full rights to express themselves through and to have access to the arts are clearly supported by the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

Trust and collaboration are prerequisites if the knowledge and ideas of individuals are to be able to bring about development of society. Society needs creative young people and adults who have learned to express themselves when growing up. When children have learned to listen to other people, to believe in their own ideas and to express them, they can start to trust others and to believe in themselves so that they dare to make a difference in society. This can be an important basis for development in various ways. Many examples from project countries show that underprivileged children, for example children in need of special support and children from different cultural groups can build trust and confidence through drama workshops. In India and Bangladesh collaborators have reported from workshops held with children and youth in need of special support. They use theatre methods to strengthen self-confidence in these children and they have noticed positive development. They have also worked with children who are suppressed and ignored because of their cultural heritage. The children are encour-



Photo: Rupantar

*Children performing in school in Khulna, Rupantar 2005.*

aged to practise their own culture and they are included in theatre activities. The purpose is to encourage children to be proud of who they are and to show that new generations in a society can gain benefits from acquaintance with the culture so that all children are included in having rights in society.

#### **Reaching out to the children**

What remains is the strategies for how all children in a society are to be reached by theatre and drama training. There is not one strategy but instead each country or community needs to find their own plan to follow. Of course all societies have different prerequisites; here examples of aspects that may be interesting to consider can be mentioned. Schools can be seen as the main venue for reaching out to individuals. Professional theatre possesses a great capability for reaching large numbers of children by performing in schools. Principals and teachers are therefore chief collaborators for making it possible to fit professional children's theatre in to children's schedules – to bring priority to theatre activity. Many children live in remote areas and the only way to reach these children is for the theatres to go to them. It can however also be of great value, when possible, for children to come to a theatre building with their school or with parents and have this unique experience as an audi-

ence in a theatre where the venue itself might be more suited to the purpose. A theatre, a home venue, can also be seen as important to continuity and for families to create a routine of going to theatre with their children – it is important that the audience knows their way and where to find information about theatre performances. Another important group of children is those who do not go to school, where these children perhaps more than others need theatre in order to be seen and to find the joy of life and a way forward. Examples of these include: children in economically underprivileged families who would not be able to afford to buy a ticket; children in hospitals; or homeless children. It is essential that a way is also found to reach these children. One way is through free outdoor performances in areas where the children and their families are living. Another way is collaboration between theatres and children's homes and hospitals so the children in these places are reached.

The inclusion of drama activities for children can be approached from several angles. One fundamental aspect is the recognition of theatre in education through including it in the school curriculum. This is part of the responsibility of policy makers; however it is also a matter of implementation in schools. The implementation of drama and theatre activities by professional theatre workers and drama teachers requires knowledge and education. Theatre professionals need to have pedagogical training and teachers need training in theatre as a method of teaching through art. Professionals must be invited to schools to perform and to train teachers and children. Here collaboration between professional drama pedagogues, theatre workers and teacher training is essential. If large numbers of teachers and school heads gain knowledge of theatre as an art form and drama and theatre as methods for teaching and learning, then future meetings between schools and professional theatre can be further strengthened and enriched in a sustainable way in meetings with one another.

### Supporting children's theatre

The support for theatres, educators and schools needs to be economic, but also needs to involve the further education of professional actors and teachers within their respective training. School leadership should also provide support to theatres and pedagogues in the form of time, including the space for children to watch theatre performances during school hours and providing them with the scope for active learning via theatre and drama in school. Once children are able to express their own ideas and thoughts and not

simply repeat what one or another adult has told them to say, then new ideas gradually develop that society as a whole is able to benefit from. When children are able to express themselves and realise their ideas the money and time that has gone into this can be seen as investment in cultural and social capital that is then looked after by the children – the future adults – themselves, thus contributing to their own development and that of society as a whole and adding to the well being of all.

In conclusion, future society needs well educated and expressive children who dare to realise their ideas in art and in social situations, individually as well as together with friends. Children's theatre can be one piece in the puzzle of this development. To reach this, professional children's theatre needs to be done from the perspective of children, and pedagogues need to approach children in a professional way with methods that children feel comfortable with in expressing their thoughts in words and through acting.

Emma Jansson holds a master's degree in education and two bachelor degrees – one in Social science and the other in Theatre studies from Stockholm University. She is working at Svensk Teaterunion – the Swedish Centre of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) as a project assistant for the Children's Voice project since 2007. Previous work experience includes working as a pedagogue, teaching in primary and secondary school, work at the Stockholm School of the Arts, project for student participation through drama in primary schools.

# THEATRE IN SCHOOL

*Children's Voice in Asia –  
let children be heard throughout the world*

*A teacher's perspective*

*Anders Linderoth*

*1. Aims and ideas*

Children and young people who get the chance to share in cultural activities such as theatre grow as human beings. They develop self-confidence. They gain a voice – a voice that is heard. They dare. This is true wherever in the world they are: in India, in Bangladesh, or in Sweden. And it applies whether they take part themselves or whether they are the audience of a professional theatrical performance.

Culture can be difficult to define, meaning different things in different countries, to different people and different generations. A historical glimpse backwards shows us that all human life and activities in society are characterised by culture; though such a definition would be hard to deal with in relation to Culture in School. The immediate solution is to limit oneself to a traditional interpretation covering literature, theatre, music, dance, pictorial art and film.

By many people and in many different contexts culture is seen as a leisure pursuit, which in schools thus becomes at best way down the list. In fact it could be said that culture in its various forms is the oxygen of life itself – both in and out of school. Culture is the foundation of society. A worthy cultural engagement from any individual in any form provides room for growth. The origins of the word 'culture' go back to the Latin meaning 'prepare', 'cultivate', 'form'. This suggests that culture is what provides people with growth and greater understanding of the various turns that life takes and the various forms.

Making it possible for young people to take part in culture in its different forms is like inviting them to a gigantic castle where behind each door, in each room, something new is hidden, something of surprise – something they were unaware they wanted to share in. Whatever culture on offer, it should give people the chance to take part in something they were unaware they would enjoy and be captivated by.

Thus in all its forms culture – such as theatre – can develop both individual and society. Knowledge and experience grow. Culture may be seen as exploring human existence and the current and future circumstances of society. It aids vitality and vigour. Culture can be both educational and normative. It should stand on its own feet, be free, and not the tool of outside interests.

Culture on offer to schools should be both broad and narrow. Whatever attracts the majority – a rock concert or a good film – should of course be part of a school’s cultural programme. And similarly the narrow – a classical music concert, an original theatre performance – should also be part of what’s on offer. It is impossible to know in advance what the ‘consequences’ will be for an individual.

In each class in every school three groups can always be found:

1. *Those who feel beforehand that seeing for example a theatre performance might be interesting. Perhaps they are affected by their parents.*
2. *Those who will never enjoy classical music or advanced theatre no matter what efforts are made.*
3. *Those in between – the ambivalent – who may be swayed one way or the other. You could say these are the ones who count each time. One or two might develop an interest for life.*



*Anders Linderoth (left) in discussion with Rudraprasad Sengupta (middle) and Ingrid Kyrö (right) during an advocacy seminar in Kolkata 2008.*

Who knows what impressions will stick, what will remain, what will always be unforgettable.

Cultural programmes, both in and outside school, can have three foundation stones:

- A. *Professional operations.*
- B. *The cultural capital of a school as developed in its aesthetic activities or via an external cultural school, or accessible in some other way.*
- C. *Amateur activities in an area – though nothing that replaces the professionals.*

It is not a question of getting young people to unhesitatingly take over a cultural inheritance, or taste or style from their seniors. They have their own voice. This needs to be listened to. Young people may possess a culture of their own, and this is positive, but it should also be possible to surprise them with works both from the past and the present. This can represent a challenge for young people.

## 2. Organisation and opportunities

If Culture in School is to have a firm and collected hold on the basis of the above outlined intentions then a permanent organisation needs to be in place as a guarantee that culture will play a self-evident and integrated part in total school activities.

Every school should have a head of culture with the task of ensuring a school keeps to its cultural programme. In Sweden such a post would involve an estimated 50 academic hours per school year in a small school or two neighbouring schools, with more in a larger school: perhaps 100 hours.

Further, a culture group should be established in each school to discuss, plan and make decisions on the cultural programme, the cultural features to be realised during the school year. Such a group should consist of a school leader, a representative selection of staff, and pupils. It should consist of max 10 individuals in any school. In a small school such a group would perhaps be 3-4 people. To me, this would apply just as well in India or Bangladesh as Sweden. It would of course in no way prevent specific teachers, classes and pupils from taking initiatives themselves.

The ideal would be for culture groups to have their own budget, their own funds, and thus aggregate responsibility for the cultural efforts in a school.

It may be suitable to the involvement of all teachers in Culture

in School to hold a day of culture at regular intervals of a few years. Such days could provide school cultural activities with background and context and thus broaden support for these activities. They could include study visits to various cultural institutions to provide insight, knowledge and enjoyment. At the same time they would also be a further chance for pupils of a school to show what they have been working with in relation to Culture in School: samples from full productions, concerts, exhibitions, dance, singing etc.

Culture Walks are another easily realisable feature. Pupils can read up and prepare themselves in order to be able to act as guides for their classmates or their teachers on days of culture.

A school's pupils might also benefit from a day of culture aimed at them in the form of an entire school day where they work on performances, exhibitions etc. They could also have the opportunity of visiting a theatre, music institution, museum, art exhibition, interesting film, or meet an author; or experience something else found within the sphere of culture. Also here it might be possible for culture workers such as actors, musicians, painters and other artists to visit a school and talk about their creativity, spreading knowledge, curiosity and inspiration. A theme day with everything revolving around one common subject, such as Asia or Europe, could provide the structure for a day of culture with films, talks, own studies and individual artistic efforts in the spirit of Asia, India or Bangladesh etc.

The image held of other countries' culture can of course be favoured in various ways within a school's framework. Internationalisation in India, Bangladesh and Sweden too is absolutely essential in the globalised world of today. One way of increasing the visibility of young people from other countries is to allow them talk about their old country, their leaving and arrival in their new country; similarities and differences. This would be voluntary, of course, in small groups with room to wander round. Pupils agreeing to such a talk would naturally do so of their own accord.

### *3. Culture clubs and societies at school*

Another way of promoting and showing the value of culture is to stimulate pupils at a school in organising and taking part in culture clubs in their own school. In my practically forty years of teaching nothing has led to the growth of self-esteem among children and youth like the amateur drama that I have organised and taken part in. Greater self-esteem was also passed on in relation to other studies and school activities. As shown scientifically, choral singing

has a similar effect. Singing does indeed give rise to – as we say in Sweden – noble feelings, and health to boot.

Such clubs and societies can also have their own activities, opening the way for expanding the culture on offer in a year, whether this be lunch-time concerts, or amateur drama, or exhibitions, or readings, or dance, and so on.

### *4. Culture programmes*

Every school, whether big or small, should have its own culture programme drawn up and suitably approved in the school itself. Pupils should have had the chance of taking part in decision-making. An approved culture programme does not need to be a rigid controlling document but should rather describe the spirit of Culture in School: flexibility and opportunism are important ingredients in the school year for the work of a head of culture and a culture group. There is no suggestion that an approved programme should be regularly encroached upon, but certain efforts may prove expensive, requiring restraint on other fronts. The realisation of a culture programme could also be reviewed in three-year periods. The more concretely the better.

### *5. Summary*

Culture in all its forms gives both individuals and society growing power. Culture is the fundament on which society is built. It provides self-confidence and awareness. What is cultivated – not least within drama activities involving young people – is social community. Theatre also reveals itself capable of being a meticulous work of precision. Culture in School fosters self-confidence and awareness that in turn give birth to a sense of security. This is why children actively engaged in culture at school, develop their own voice – own voice and own stronger identity. Through this the chances of performing better in other subjects are increased.

This assumes that the scope for working with Culture in School is greater and provided with the resources necessary to develop and gain ground. The flow needs to be plentiful and continuous.

Culture in School should be a self-evident and well integrated part of a school's ordinary activities.

Culture in School also helps establish such 'habits' as going to the theatre. The theatre threshold is reduced. Culture in School gives visibility to culture outside school.

The backing given to culture by society at the production stage – education, culture funding and grants – at national, regional and local authority level needs to be followed up by a robust arrangement phase. Schools are among the most important clients for the culture work carried out by and on offer from the professional sphere.

During troubled times, in periods of recession, in the course of history distinguished politicians have set aside time, energy and funds for culture. It gives us a belief in possibilities and the future. Pericles did this in fifth century BC Greece and the reputation of Athens' days of glory of the time is still with us to this day. India and Bangladesh must certainly have their own historic models to follow and golden ages to look back on and use as a basis in this current age.

Anders Linderöth has a background as a teacher of history, Swedish and philosophy, and has promoted culture in schools during his entire professional life. He has chaired various theatre associations and has been on the board of Riksteatern and Dansens Hus (House of Dance) in Stockholm. Other activities include work with Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education) on new syllabuses at upper secondary school level in Sweden.

Together with Ingrid Kyrö, Anders Linderöth has taken part in advocacy seminars in India (Mysore) and Bangladesh (Dhaka) 2006, as well as in Kolkata, India, 2008.

## *Education for culture of peace*

*Swapan Guha*

When education is part of culture and culture is reflected through education then peace is a logical consequence for any society. To me children should be at the centre as the main actors in the establishment of a culture of peace in schools, at home and in society as a whole and the primary objective of the school must not only be to emphasise traditional goals for the achievement of specific knowledge and skills, but also the development and practice of the social relations characterising this culture.

In fact, studies indicate that students learn best in a caring and cooperative environment. This requires that the education process involve not only students and teachers, but also the entire staff of the school, the parents and the surrounding community, in a common, shared effort. The principles and practices of peace and non-violence should be integrated into every aspect of curriculum and activities, including the organisational and decision-making structure of the educational institution itself such as SMC, PTA etc. These include cooperative learning, dialogue, intercultural understanding, mediation and conflict-resolution strategies.

Although recognising that today's world has been deeply scarred by violence resulting from the great disparities and structural inequalities that exist between the urban and rural, among the so-called brilliant and less brilliant, and that theatre in school education cannot resolve these issues entirely, we believe we can make a difference.

Mostly our wish is to see children reaching our own level of imagination and providing them with books, stories, lines, syllabus, and at times suggestions for passing examinations. Schools serve as the basis for developing children by exposing all human potential and helping them to grow in a balanced way, a way that can simultaneously build both body and soul.

Theatre can help children to have their sixth sense activated.

When our sixth sense is activated, we begin to perceive absolute elements progressively, going from the most blatant to the most subtle. In normal course, we are able to perceive them in the order of the Absolute Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether elements through our subtle senses of smell, taste, vision, touch and sound respectively. Perhaps we should also take extra care of children in keeping them normal through support in this regard.

Can we claim the success of “Theatre education for school children using Alternative Living Theatre forms towards development of psycho-social conditions and aesthetic performing arts” or “Children’s Voice” in raising awareness among the people, especially those people related to children and education at school level? A developmental environment among the children, parents, school management committees, and civil society as well as policy makers was created. Education departments were made aware of the need for theatre education and the relationship between theatre education and quality education and the comprehensive growth of children; establishing children’s rights that finally are able to ensure peace and social harmony.

Series of workshops, rehearsals, practice and thousands of performance and interactions have given us the confidence to say “Performance is power for developing children individually and socially.”

We believe that schools should not be islands but centres for civic



School theatre performance at Batiagata upazila, Rupantar, 2008.

life in the community. They should nurture – through their organisation and practices – citizens capable of democratic participation. This project and activities can keep isolation at bay, as well as our own segmental status with regard to the limitations that exist.

We have initiated work on school theatre programmes with five schools in 1996. By 2009 more than 100 schools were taking part. Over the period we realised that Children’s Voice also needed to work at minimising the gap between children who despite living together in the same society differed in that some attended school and some were outside the school system. Fifteen children’s theatre teams were developed by us and have been working with variously deprived children to show how theatre can serve to unfold children’s talent and potentials at any level.

A great opportunity has been provided for all partners of the project and stakeholders to realise how theatre functions to cultivate a culture of tolerance and social harmony among children, parents, SMC, teachers, community and policy makers when playing a part in education in an educative way with empathetic values. It may also create a new foundation of ethics among school children, encouraging them to take care of their fellows who cannot go to school for various reasons. In contrast, groups of ‘variously deprived children’ may through their performances and creativities achieve insight and understanding, with the hope of developing from any situation.



School theatre workshop at Soilmari School, Khulna, 2008.



At the same time we should keep in mind that the growth of children who attend school is also hindered when these children are limited to selected subjects while basic subjects such as music, physical education and arts & crafts are ignored.

Perhaps it is clear why and how children are deprived by traditional curriculums and practices; at the same time we can see how theatre works as a creative and practical process of performance that can help to achieve expected competencies among children and can rejuvenate society with regard to the so-called abilities or disabilities of all people.

In another sense life is unscripted and completely extemporary from beginning to end. Without getting to grips with culture in a broader sense no one can be a complete human being and no one can claim to be educated. It can be said quite moderately that all events leading to the breaking of peace have been brought on by people lacking cultural sensitivity and education with regard to the beauty of diversity.

Our imagination and hope is that once this model of utilising theatre in this way becomes more structured so that it can be replicated in other places or around the world what we may see is a revolutionary change in our society with a sustainable culture of practicing tolerance, peace and social harmony; something that is frequently expected but rarely achieved to any extent. Moreover,



*Potgan ("painted-schroll-song") used by Rupantar's professional team while performing on social issues, Khulna 2007.*

government and society as a whole is able to reveal a very positive cost benefit analysis from this kind of initiative.

If we attempt to look at some impacts of Children's Voice very traditionally, we can see success in the following areas: reductions in dropping out, quality education, regularity in schooling, enhancement of school hours, creative exposure, community involvement, criticism of policy makers from a child's perspective etc.

But I have much greater interest in sharing with you those "invisible" changes that can only be felt. For several thousand years of history or background here in this geographical location people have been unable to imagine beyond their present position.

Theatre helps children and their parents so "they can do something they never did before". I have seen in the eyes and emotional outbreaks of some people working for policy makers and leaders who really have realised the problems we are creating and having to face by ignoring the cultural development of children.

Another aspect – one that gives me great joy in pointing out – is the magic of theatre performance that sometimes has the power to change both individual and community together in a positive direction.

We might agree that four fields consisting of nature, family, society and institutions exist that are always present in developing, stopping or damaging the growth of children. Unfortunately, nature is losing lots of components, families are busy with survival strategies, children's needs are being ignored by society, with institutions/schools or media perhaps being the main source where children can learn and grow in a balanced way. Bearing this reality in mind, institutions or traditional schools should be treated as centres of schooling, with learning from nature, family and society at levels based on present reality. If not, we will be depriving children and violating their rights.

Perhaps the time is ripe to create an enabling environment in every school, utilising theatre and performance to prove the power of performance in achieving tolerant individuals and peaceful society as a whole. This project along with individuals has revealed the changing situation through practical demonstration and has well and truly embraced the idea of sustainable development using theatre and performance at different levels. I am confident this will be the official step from government, with a good number of tools, methodologies and experiences already at hand to support child development aiming at sustainable peace and progress.

Now I would like to draw your attention specifically to Bang-

ladesh where we found that of the eight basic subjects suggested at primary level for children only five are treated as regular with the remaining three of music, physical education and arts & crafts being largely ignored! Very few schools attempt to even partially hold these ignored subjects, but practical reality and limitations mean they are unable to explore benefits even at the minimum level; although we know very well how 'theatre in education' can encompass music, physical education and arts & crafts with the remaining subjects or topics as content. Theatre does not mean making pronouncements but rather involves perceiving and applying equally in real life what we would like to treat as a lifetime performance.

When year after year children are deprived of the subjects they are deserved of according to the school education system we once again create vicious circles of limitation that encourage society to ignore them permanently. Students fail to get the education, training and learning on real life issues, then go on to become teachers incapable of dealing with the subjects as mentioned above!

We need to come away from this vicious circle that damages the potential children have by taking steps in the direction where a group of trained theatre workers or facilitators with clear understanding of theatre in education become key players. These facilitators would train interested school teachers in combination with local cultural activists, including children's theatre activists, to proceed with future phases and maintain activities. And the glorious third step of the intervention would be for the issue to be dealt with at policy level with the objective of recruiting a minimum of one trained teacher on theatre in education for each school, which will enable us to break the vicious circle of damaging human potential among children.

In essence the 'Children's Voice' initiative provided us with the fruitful result that children developed a cultural literacy, yet we need to give thought to dynamic application of cultural practice in society. This calls for widespread cultivation of cultural education in institutions up to secondary level so that the diversity of cultural practice is restored and the nation benefits from development of a sustainable society with culture providing tolerance, harmony and peace.

Let us all be supportive and responsive in spreading the mission for 'education for a culture of peace' towards materialising the cherished dream of establishing a violence-free peaceful society, with no one else but the people of earth being able to play a role in creating such a culture of peace; so why delay when we have no other options?

Rupantar is a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) that started in 1992 with activities in the Khulna and Sundarban districts in southern Bangladesh. The organisation works with drama, song and music as resources in its endeavours and development activities, especially focusing on democracy, governance – both urban and rural – human rights including children's rights, empowerment of women, environment and disaster management, as well as theatre movement including children's theatre. The artistic work of the group partly involves resurrection of traditional forms of music and narrative drama and is partly based on contemporary improvisation theatre. The work of Rupantar is characterised by strong emphasis on contacts and cooperation at grass roots level. Its activities for children are primarily held jointly with schools, via theatre workers with special training to meet the needs of actors, children and teachers interacting.

Swapan Guha is the Chief Executive of Rupantar. He started his career as a theatre activist with Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation in 1978. Since 1995, he has been associated with Rupantar and continues to work with this group. He initiated the school theatre movement in Bangladesh in 1996 with the formation of child theatre groups with school children. This paved the way for Rupantar to start its collaboration with the "Children's Voice" project in 2004. The children's theatre activities have now been extended to around 100 schools in different areas of Bangladesh. His initiative successfully developed a professional theatre institute named Rupantar Institute of Folk Theatre (RIFT) with 120 theatre performers.

## *Theatre sensitisation for teachers (TST) – spreading awareness of dramatic art to those who teach*

*H. S. Umesha*

How to make 'Children's Voice' strong, effective and resonant? This is the issue which was with us from the beginning of the 'Children's Voice' project. To make the voice of children heard by everyone it was essential to know the barriers that existed and to develop strategies to eliminate them. Discussion on this issue ensued with the project planners finally identifying those who are deaf to the voice of children. They were the other major stakeholders of the project along with children. The search for them took us to parents and teachers. Hence, it was essential to convert these 'barriers' into an advantage for Children's Voice. Instead of being 'barriers' they should become the 'springboards' and 'banner-holders' of Children's Voice. This became one of the mottos of our work on the project.

Both parents and teachers nurture, control and direct the growth of children. They provide environment and experience for the future adults. But this attitude of considering children as 'future adults' and seeing this stage as a preparatory stage for adulthood is misleading and hinders the natural development of children as full potential human beings. Hence, we felt there to be a need to change this attitude of parents and teachers. In order to bring about this change, these stakeholders had to be brought within the fold of activities designed for Children's Voice. As a result two-fold activities – catering to the needs of the children as well as parents and teachers – were outlined. But in the given circumstances, i.e. period stipulated, funds available, infrastructure, human resources, etc, it was not possible to address the demands of both parents and teachers. Selecting one of the stakeholders was the next issue. We left out parents and opted for teachers.

Why teachers? The arguments in favour of teachers are many:

- *The community of teachers is more organised.*
- *Teachers have a professional attitude and expertise – this quality is important with regard to the background of the project, because project in-*

*attention was the creation of professional theatre for children. This would enhance the effectiveness of communication between theatre and teaching professionals.*

- *Prospect of strengthening teaching qualities of teachers.*
- *Approaching teachers is easy – getting support from the education department would strengthen Children's Voice.*
- *Possibility of using teachers as follow-up workers for Children's Voice.*
- *Teachers can serve to liaison between different stakeholders of the project.*

These and many more reasons stood behind us in choosing the teaching community as our co-workers in realising the objectives of Children's Voice. The above reasons were used for formulation of the objectives of teacher training. These objectives became the stepping stones for realising the aims of Children's Voice.

Major aims of Children's Voice are:

- *To bring children's theatre into the mainstream.*
- *Professionalisation of children's theatre.*
- *Development of a nodal centre for children's theatre activities.*

In order to realise these aims a plan of action was developed which included the following activities:

- *Performances.*
- *Publication of support materials.*
- *Advocacy seminars.*
- *Professional exchange.*



Photo: Rangyana

*Teacher's training workshop in Mysore 2006.*

Teacher training was the component considered the pivotal activity of our project. There was a need to think fresh and design teacher training to suit to our needs. After considering different influencing factors, an outline of the training was evolved. It was evolved around the objective of sensitising teachers towards theatre. Thus our model of 'Theatre sensitisation for teachers' i.e., TST was developed.

The following were considered as criteria for outlining a teacher training workshop:

- Residential workshop.
- Place of workshop – Rangayana, Mysore.
- Duration of the workshop – 5 days.
- Maximum 30 participants.
- Preference to government school teachers, rural teachers, primary school teachers.
- Activity approach.
- Content – theatre, communication and teaching.

Theatre input was given more weight in the plan of action drawn up for the workshop. Communication and teaching inputs were interwoven as an integral part of theatre sensitisation. This helped us to conceive 'educational theatre' in a different perspective.

The plan of action of the workshop was designed to include a minimum of theory input regarding e.g. the importance of theatre, children's rights and the inter-relationship of theatre and education. The focus was on having first-hand experience of theatre. This was realised by allowing the participants to view a professional performance of the Rangakishora children's theatre repertory of Rangayana. This would provide a beneficial opening to the workshop because it would initiate theatre interest among teachers. Theatre appreciation is the first step in drawing the attention of teachers towards the importance of the utility value of theatre. This would also help in developing a theatre-educated audience for children's theatre.

Viewing of the performance would be followed by two activities: workshop participants recording their responses, and deep discussion about the performance.

A response sheet was developed for this purpose. Here is one such response:

RANGAYANA, RANGAKISHORA

Response

**Play:** *Kudure Neeru Kudure*  
**Name:** *Shubhamani*  
**School:** *Mathru Mandali, Mysore*  
**Profession:** *Assistant teacher*

**Content analysis:**

*Theme is very simple. Children can perceive it. Different factors of environment - hill, stream, birds and animals gave pleasure to children. Environment friendly theme of the play supports the curricular needs of the children.*

**Subjects for discussion with children (in the background of the play):**

*The aim of the play; the role of two horses; the importance of individual differences; importance of each individual.*

**The role of this play as an educational activity:**

*It operates as a model for us to convert some of the lessons of our textbook into performance; shows a means to make children more participative and interactive.*

**Elements of production:**

**1) Acting**

*It was pleasing to children. The body movement and intonation was commendable.*

**Mark your grade:**

Very Good	Good ✓	Average
-----------	--------	---------

**2) Technical details (Set, Lighting, Make-up, Costume):**

*The set was simple, as also costumes. Creation of moon and other specifics of locale was pleasing*

**Mark your grade:**

Very Good	Good ✓	Average
-----------	--------	---------

**Total impression:**

Very Good	Good ✓	Average
-----------	--------	---------

**Suggestions for expanding the relationship between theatre and education:**

*Plays on present issues such as the hazards of plastic, illiteracy, environmental pollution etc are needed; should become a part of the school curriculum*

Signature

At the outset it can be noted that the response sheet is not technical. It is straightforward and simple, seeking first impressions from the novice. It was planned to use the same format for the children in an audience. This would provide an opportunity for a comparative study between the responses of teachers and their students based on the same simple criteria. Hence this format was used later on during the performances in different schools. Participants witness not only performance, but also the way in which children receive a play, since any performance is made to a mixed audience of teachers, workshop participants and children.

These novice responses were put to test in discussion. This was the next activity of the workshop. Those involved in discussion were participants, performers and resource persons. Resource persons were drawn from different fields, mainly from education and theatre sectors. The platform was free for the airing of views on anything relevant to the performance and play. Resource persons could provide expert opinions, while the performers could narrate the experience of creating art. Thus participants would have the opportunity to express their views from both the theoretical and practical perspective. Aesthetics of theatre and educational aspects of the performance were always underlined. This helped participants to know the threshold of theatre and teaching.

One such example could be drawn from the discussion of the play 'Polikitti' – the first attempt of this model. Some of the reactions of the participants:

- *Superbly performed play.*
- *Revival of an old text is appreciable.*
- *Attempt to make it contemporary is noteworthy.*
- *Severe attack on teaching is not based on the present reality.*
- *Criticism on education system forces fresh thinking about the system.*
- *Comments on education too strong for children to perceive.*
- *Dealing with present reality is more important than interpretation of old text.*
- *Less possibility of touring with a professionally well equipped performance.*
- *Studded with values to be learned by children.*

Such a brainstorming session could break the ice and make teachers come out with their opinions on different aspects of present reality. It would get them to think about the pressing issues in the light of the artistic expression of the play. This would also allow them to analyse the curriculum from a different and fresh perspective. This

would be the base for building the other structures of children's theatre and/or educational theatre.

Seeing and enjoying a performance is different from making a play; analysing and criticising a play is different from creating a performance. Teachers being creators and performers in their own way should know the art and science of making a play. This would help them in two ways:

- 1) *Teachers would be able to feel a rapport with a performance, so that the relevant aspects of a play can be linked to the teaching of specific curricular items to be taught. It also helps teachers to know how a performance can be used for pedagogic purposes. Teachers can develop the skill of dealing with the enquiries children have about a play they have seen.*
- 2) *In the absence of professional help, if a school demands that a teacher makes a play, then he/she should have the basic knowledge to do this.*

Even though our vision of sensitising teachers is very broad, the constraint of time played its part in scheming the next phase of the workshop. This phase was 'task analysis'. Task analysis of a performance is done by adopting a demonstration approach. For this a play is performed for the purpose of analysis, not for aesthetic appreciation. Participants are free to stop the play at any point, and that break is used for discussing an issue with the making of the play. This could be a thematic or technical issue. When 'Post office' was performed for this purpose, the performance was stopped at a point when a character appeared out of the globe-like structure. Post office is a play written by Rabindranath Tagore depicting the turmoil of a boy trapped in his room due to ill-health. His contact with the outside world and his dreams are realistically portrayed in the play. In this break, few of the participants raised the question of having a non-realistic set. Few of them were able to read new meaning into the set – symbolising time, eternity, world and so on. During the performance of 'Kudure Neeru Kudure', participants expressed possibilities for adding some details of environmental information to bring a new dimension to the play. This exercise kindled the creative potentialities of participating teachers. This became evident in the follow-up work done after the workshop.

This is an interesting phase. But this was discarded in the latter version of the model, due to its highly intellectualised and time-consuming nature. Moreover, a production in this phase loses its innate creative zeal and the pleasure of seeing a play is lost. This was the opinion of the participants. Hence this was given up after a few trials. Instead of a full performance, a playlet was introduced.

The workshop on TST finished with a further performance. This

performance goes without any discussion on it. The last production is left for teachers to brood over the theatre experience.

Follow-up work was conceived as an integral part of TST. Rangakishora performed its production in the schools from which the teachers were drawn for training. During such performances the artists interacted with the children seeking help from the TST trained school teachers. Their contribution in preparing the children for seeing the show was evident. They also helped in organising shows in their schools. It was evident that attempts at writing plays for their children had been made. Such attempts revolved around curricular themes, but undoubtedly enriched the repertoire of play scripts of the school.

The enthusiasm of TST trained teachers has helped Rangayana in successfully carrying out other Children's Voice activities. Some of the TST trained teachers volunteered to become theatre workers during the summer camps organised for children.

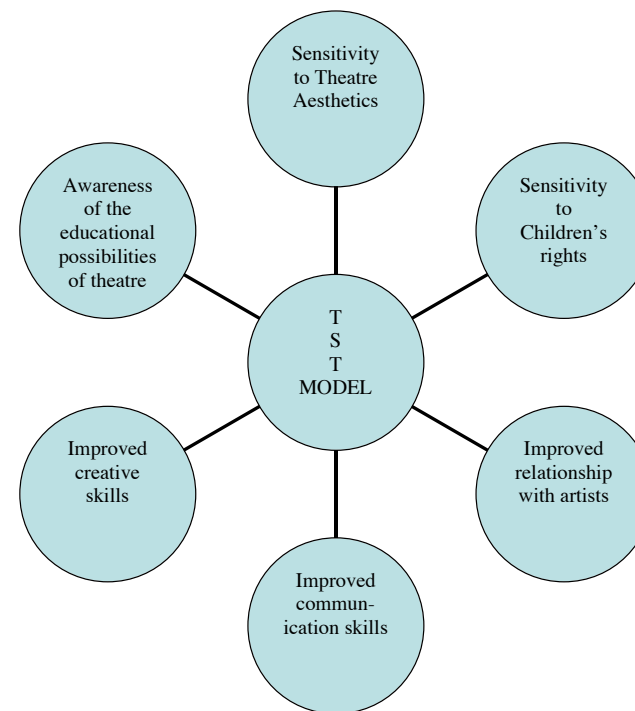
Pre-performance, treatment – performance and post-performance are the pivots of TST. Around these, many other activities can be built. The most important activities are theatre games, communication exercises, and exercises converting textbook lessons into playlets, improvisation on themes relevant to children. All these had a backdrop of one or two theory inputs such as the importance of theatre, the meaning, scope and interaction of children's theatre and educational theatre, the role of teachers, and the use of theatre techniques to improve the effectiveness of teaching.

*Summary Chart*

**SYNTAX**

Phase 1	Pre-performance	Play is presented Recording of the response Discussion
	Theoretical input	
Phase 2	Treatment – performance Practical input	Play is analysed Workouts
Phase 3	Post-performance	Follow-up activities

Instructional and stimulating effects:



Workshop statistics include 33 workshops conducted in different places – Mysore, Bangalore, Dharwad, Sirsi, Hospet, Puttur, Kumata, Chamarajanagara and also Tumari – a small village. One thousand teachers from 500 schools took the opportunity. Representatives from Tamilnadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, the adjoining states of Karnataka also benefited from TST. The Department of Education of Karnataka co-operated in deputing its teachers for TST training.

Swedish resource persons have shared their experiences along with their Indian counterparts – Chidamabararao Jambe, H.S. Umesha, Linagadevaru Halemane, N.S. Raghunath, Jayaram Tatachar and many others. A continued relationship has been developed between local resource persons and participants. Artists of Rangayana and Rangakishora took on the responsibility of performing during the workshop and hence giving the workshop a professional outlook. This could be seen in TST – trained teachers taking part in theatre activities organised by resource persons.

H.S.Umesha is a director and playwright, associated with Rangayana from its inception. At present he is a member of Ranagasamaje, the managing body of Rangayana. By profession he heads the Saradavilas teacher training institution in Mysore. He is one of the theatre practitioners working to bridge theatre and education and is the recipient of many awards both in the fields of education and theatre. He has published plays, as well as books on education.

Rangayana Nataka Karnataka Kalamandira is the “national stage” of the Karnataka state, situated in Mysore. The theatre is a state repertory theatre originally aiming at an adult audience. In 2004, as a consequence of the Children’s Voice project, Rangakishora (Rangayana’s Children’s Theatre Repertory, RCTR) started up, specialising in theatre productions and activities for children and youth such as regular theatre summer camps. A training activity for teachers is held at Rangayana where actors train teachers to stimulate new teaching methods in education, with this activity having a well-developed network of contacts with schools in the region.



Performance of “Anche Mane” (The Post Office written by Rabindranath Tagore) by Rangakishora/Rangayana, directed by Lars-Eric Brossner, Mysore 2004.

## Opening new worlds – a guide to visiting theatres with school children

Excerpts from a guide for teachers and other adults at school

Karin Helander

### VISITING THE THEATRE WITH CHILDREN IN THE 7 TO 13 AGE GROUP

Most children meet up with theatre via school or preschool. So the attitude of teachers and other adults towards theatre is highly important. School children link theatre early on with school and the demands of the adult world for intelligibility, cultivation and instructive knowledge. A child audience knows it “ought” to learn something from its visit, and sometimes receives school tasks in connection with the performance – something to avoid: it can block the chances open for an artistic experience.

#### The child audience

Drawing hasty conclusions on audience mood can sometimes be easy. We like to believe that quiet pupils are more interested than those reacting out loud. But this can be deceptive:

After a few performances the actors in a staging saw the quiet and collected sixth-graders as more interested than the livelier and rowdier seventh-graders – yet talks with the pupils revealed the opposite. The quietly seated audience had taken part less actively and less involved than those children in the audience who were seen as more unsettled and less concentrated (Brinch, 2004). Children at theatre express their feelings more physically than adults, and in ways we adults sometimes misjudge. Laughter might be related to nervousness, or the show touching on taboos or embarrassing things. Sometimes audience reaction might be directed at friends, teachers or the situation itself – not necessarily at the performance.

#### Strong feelings at the theatre

Adults like art – such as books, films, TV series, theatre – which is not always just fun and excitement but also at times sadness, anguish and emotional impact. So do children!

- *I think it was a good thing that the grandfather in the play died, so it's not fun all the time, and I think that sometimes it should be a bit sad, so you can maybe cry a bit.*
- *This play was good, because it was so serious and a bit sad.*
- *You feel sad and think it's so pretty at the same time.*

That's how it can sound, talking to a child audience. And even under a seemingly tough and aloof jargon you'll find a longing to be moved – many theatre talks have shown this down the years! Yes, there are shows which might be experienced as frightening – but we adults aren't always in the know as to what is distressing. Children's frames of reference are different; they lack adult guilt or nostalgia. Children base things on their own experiences, and most of what is on stage can be talked about and discussed. Talking about difficult matters can provide consolation. Children frequently create a happy ending when in need of one. Children look ahead, create new images, compose the future.

And rarely – if indeed ever – is theatre more frightening than children's own reality can at times be!



*Teater åt alla barn = Theatre for all children.*

## Addressing theatre realities

Markedly often children discuss what they feel is real or not real at the theatre. They frequently want to talk about things seeming “strange” in the sense of not realistic. They sometimes have long talks about “unreal” details: Why is he not wet after showering? But the most important things often “inner” credibility – the credibility of plot, roles and situations: I think it was a good thing that all of us in the audience watched, now we know about being alone. You do anything to get friends.

Theatre can be a place for recognition, identification, empathy and consolation. Shows exist which do not attempt to be “realistic” and instead use symbol, music, dance and image to convey feelings, moods and experiences.

## Talking about theatre language

The adult world frequently gives greater credence to verbal texts as the fundament of theatre than do children. Of course, a child audience can recognise highly subtle changes in texts, but body language, movement, music, costume and image are sometimes seen as the most interesting. Child audiences often appreciate craftsmanship relating to stage decoration, technology and effects – subjects children are keen to talk about afterwards

## “Did the children truly understand this?”

Sometimes directly after a performance you can hear adults ask children if they “understood” it – a thing we seldom ask one another after adult-level theatre, or if we have listened to music or seen a painting. We adults often find the term “understanding” difficult in relation to children's theatre visits – more difficult than what the children themselves find it. The adult world sees the term “understanding” in the light of understanding adult intentions. Small children have no difficulties with their understanding. Pre-school and lower-level school children use nothing but their own frames of reference, choose details, situations and parts in performances which interest them, and unite these into their own specific performance.

The term “understanding” in the sense “intelligibility” is often introduced with schools and schooling norms relating to questions and answers, right and wrong. But the theatre experience lacks a given set of answers! Children quickly learn that adults like to see understanding as a criterion for quality.

After a performance set up as an imaginative dreamplay, based on



loose associations and dreams without narrative action, a group of nine-year-olds made the following comments:

*It was really fun and sad, and you could understand a lot of it too.*

*What was good about it was being able to understand what the story was about.*

*It was really good, I thought. And it was easy to understand as well.*

Children know that adults are pleased if they hear children say they understand, and these children really wanted to suit the adult world. Later talks with them showed they experienced entirely different things and magic theatrical worlds on the basis of their own individual experiences. Theatre is not always easy to “understand” in the sense of getting clear answers to simple questions. It can present questions without giving answers. Theatre can encourage thought and discussion, be devastating, have an effect, lack cheer or be entertaining. Children interpret theatre on the basis of their own experiences, even when it is not figurative or comprehensible – just as when their world is not simple or comprehensible. Through meeting theatre and discussing it, children can think about their own reality. Theatre can broaden reality, open the imagination, provide room for the unexpected, the ambiguous, the surprising.

### Theatre and school work

Avoid making theatre visits school work, with “assignments” such as review essays etc. Make it more of an enjoyment – they can get just as much out of it! It is the norm in some classes to use diaries or logbooks to write about events that have occurred. This can be done – but don’t make demands on correct spelling and sentence structure.

The following discussion took place in an audience survey between an adult interviewer and seventh grade pupils (13–14 years):

Adult: *Do you usually talk about theatre performances afterwards?*

Håkan: *Yeah, that’s the worst thing.*

Adult: *The worst thing?*

Håkan: *Yeah, and then you have to write an essay on what it’s about, I mean... (makes facial expressions and gestures).*

Adult: *Not much fun then?*

Matilda: *No, you bet (rest of group agrees).*

Adult: *No...does that mean you have to learn everything?*

Matilda: *Yeah...*

Håkan (interrupts her): *Yeah, it feels like you have to slog all the time...*

*“Now he’s doing this, now he’s doing that... ok...”*

Adult: *So you have to remember everything?*

Matilda: *Yes, and you have to remember what it’s all about, and write it down properly, you know. (From Brinch, 2003)*

Perhaps the visit to the theatre would have been seen more positively without the school bench feeling with obligatory essay assignments? Perhaps more would have been gained from a discussion based on the performance articulating the needs, thoughts and experiences of the pupils themselves.

---

## ATTENDING THEATRE WITH SCHOOL AUDIENCES FROM 13 YEARS

### Reactions in the auditorium

Most children and youth meet with theatre via the efforts of their schools. Thus the attitude of teachers and other adults involved is highly important. From an early age, children link theatre to school and the demands set by the adult world for fostering and utility of knowledge. They know they “ought” to learn something from their visit. Not uncommonly mood in the auditorium can be interpreted too hastily. We would like to believe that quiet pupils are more interested than those who react boisterously. But we can fool ourselves. An audience which on the surface seems unsettled can be more interested and involved than a quiet audience. Restlessness can circulate round the audience when sensitive situations and strong feelings are dealt with. Show respect for views held by each individual pupil – listen to those ones keen to discuss! Some pupils will wish to keep their experiences to themselves, at least straight after the performance:

*It got to me so much it left me with an uneasy feeling inside. I didn’t really want to talk about the performance after the play, not until I’d calmed down inside. (Audience Voice: Ung scen/öst)*

### Theatre – what young people say

Theatre can describe what it is to be human, life, death, love, society – everything that occupies the minds and feelings of young people. Hence theatre is also able to challenge and to ask questions. Self-esteem can be reinforced if events on stage bring insight and empathy.

Opinions can vary widely: *When we left, the general opinion was that it was weird. Some thought it was rubbish, while others were completely fascinated by it, filled by it. I didn't really know what to think, except that I'd got a real surprise: can theatre really be like this!? It left me wanting to see more plays. It seemed like so much new was there to be discovered.* (Audience Voice, Ung scen/öst)

### Talking about reality in theatre

Experiences and feelings of empathy can be the basis for discussion and reflection. For example, afterwards audience members can discuss plot and relevance of content – why is it topical now? Or why not? A good way forward can be together trying to formulate and describe what has been seen and experienced – perhaps with each individual (or those who wish to) saying something about the play and what they especially remember. Sometimes pupils say they didn't “understand” it – in which case a memory recall session can put words to experiences. Besides, gaining a grasp of everything might not be needed – like when listening to music, understanding might be contained in experiences or feelings. Different people “understand” differently – this is an excellent basis for letting thoughts and views confront each other. Trying together to describe what a performance is about can frequently be enriching and provide greater depth. A good start to discussion is to talk about plot, subject, relevance, actuality etc before going on to values and taste. In this way discussion is often more involved and with greater nuance.

A young audience frequently discusses what it sees as real and unreal at the theatre, if it seemed “weird” in the sense of unrealistic. But often what is important is “inner” realisticness – whether or not plot, roles and situations are experienced as realistic. Some plays make no attempt at being “realistic”, and use symbol, music, dance and image to convey feelings and mood.

### Theatre and existential issues

Many young people are unused to theatre and might see it as “weird” – at the same time it appears young audiences often get absorbed, perhaps showing spontaneous comments and reactions to a performance. Theatre often covers major issues, relations and existential subjects – things which young people are interested in and which get them discussing. Just like adults, children and young people relate performance content and themes to their own reality: *it had depth, yes, but depth for me.* The thoughts and feelings conveyed by theatre



*Kompis? = Friend?, Fulast! = Uglyest!, Kaos = Chaos, Hjälp = Help, Vem är jag? = Who am I? Kär = In love, Sex = Sex, Duga = Suffice*

are allowed to reflect the world children live in. Theatre can be an arena for recognition and identification, empathy and consolation. Let theatre be an opening for discussing existential issues.

### Theatre and society

Theatre portrayal of society gets compared with the individual's own views, and young audiences refer the problems portrayed by theatre to their own experiences.

Young people like theatre that deals with issues which feel important, which reveal problems in society, so people *understand the problems exist, through theatre. Because it's about the best way of putting a message across* (pupil interview, Lund 2004). Let theatre to be an opening for discussing issues in society.

## Young audience

Modern young audiences are competent culture consumers. In our media-society, young people are inundated with a selection of music and various kinds of texts found in various genres such as films, television programmes on numerous channels, computer games and hi-tech culture. Theatre offers a unique cultural meeting place, a specific sense of witnessing the fleeting creative moment. What young people perceive and experience with theatre often differs from adults. Young people enjoy dramatic content itself, outwardly directed events, strong feelings and sheer contrasts between the comic and seriousness to a greater extent than adults. Seeing a visit to the theatre as something interesting in the here and now is important – with no side intentions relating to raising children in existing adult taste.

Excerpts from “Opening New Worlds – a guide to visiting theatres with school and pre-school children”, published in Swedish by Riksteatern (The National Swedish Touring Theatre) in 2005 and translated into English 2006. Editors were Ulla Allmér, Karin Helander, Lisa Hugosson, Anna Mattsson, Joakim Stenshäll and illustrations by Micke Olsson.

Contact information can be found at:  
[www.riksteatern.se](http://www.riksteatern.se)

Karin Helander is a professor in Theatre studies and heads the centre for research into children’s culture at Stockholm University. She has worked with theatre for children and youth from several different perspectives: In the seventies as actor and director; in the eighties as a music theatre pedagogue in schools at all levels including the municipal music school. Since 1994 she is a researcher into drama and children’s culture, as well as being children and youth theatre critic for the Svenska Dagbladet national newspaper. She has had several books on Swedish children’s theatre published and has worked extensively with research into the ways in which children and youth experience theatre.

# METHODS OF TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE

## The “Tittut method”

Margareta Sörenson

”Dockteatern Tittut”, Tittut Puppet Theatre, was founded in 1977 as the first – today the world’s oldest – theatre for children from 2 years of age. A small art theatre for an audience of small children. But offering great art and great experiences. Dockteatern Tittut tours within Sweden and abroad and is known for pioneering theatre for few-year-olds. Christer Dahl, author, director and puppeteer has worked in the theatre since decades and shared for long the mission of directing the theatre together with it’s founder, Ing-Mari Tirén.

At this point, close to one million people – two thirds of them children, one third adults accompanying them – have seen a performance at Dockteatern Tittut. Much has changed during Tittut’s thirty years, for theatre as well as for children, and especially for the very youngest, who have taken their rightful place in the public sphere as individuals, within the family and in society.



Photo: Dockteatern Tittut

*Ing-Mari Tirén in The secret of the Doll, 1989.*



Photo: Docteastern Tittut

*Christer Dahl in Little Tiger and Little Bear, 2002.*

Christer Dahl claims that two basic questions must be put forward in order to understand the aesthetics of a theatre for very young children.

*Why* do we want to create theatre, perform for small children?

*How* can we help them have the profound experiences of which they are capable?

The answers form what can be called the "Tittut Method", worked out by Christer Dahl.

### *Why 1*

Small children's capacity for emotional empathy, imagination, and creativity is great. All small children are geniuses in this area – any child is better equipped than most adults when it comes to power of imagination and empathy. Children's emotions are considerably stronger than those of adults. What happens on stage is only the starting point for what happens in the brain of the small child, and the drama in that brain can be immeasurably greater and richer than the drama on stage. A play for children is seldom comparable with, say, a play by Shakespeare as far as complexity and depth are concerned. But the drama taking place in the brains of the young audience members is richer, deeper and more emotionally charged than that which takes place in the brains of the adult audience members.

Actually, it is wrong to speak of "spectators" or "audience members" when it comes to children. The children in the audience are co-creators of the drama beginning on stage and reaching its completion in the brain of the child. What happens on stage becomes real, becomes a part of the child's own existence.

One example from the production of *A Special Trade* at CTC in Minneapolis: The girl Nelly is sad that her friend Bartholomew is in the hospital; she longs for him, misses him every second. Then a

small girl in the audience creeps up to the actor playing Nelly, takes her hand and comforts her: "I know how you feel. My little baby sister is dead."

When we use puppets we let the puppeteer be fully visible most of the time. But to the children the puppeteer is only visible on a subconscious level. The puppeteer gives focus to the puppet by intensely concentrating his/her attention on the puppet, so that the eyes of the child are led to the face of the puppet. But peripherally the child also sees the face of the puppeteer in the background and creates an amalgamated image in which the puppeteer's facial expression and movement animate the face of the puppet.

Adults often speak routinely about how fantastic it is to perform for small children, they are such an "honest" audience. If children like something, they show it, if they don't like what they see, they show it without compunction. The entire interaction is seen from the perspective of the actor.

I think it is more important to try to see it from the perspective of the small child. To realize that the child can have a uniquely deep and rich experience of a theatre performance.

### *Why 2*

We know that our society right now is being reshaped and changed more rapidly than ever before in history. New scientific gains influence our living space, our working life, and our political and social conditions. For example, who 20 years ago could have imagined the extent to which the computerization of today would influence our lives? And in another 20 years from now, nano-technology will probably impact us even more. And after nano-technology, who knows? What we know is that change – provided nothing catastrophic intervenes – will happen more and more rapidly. The number of scientists in the world today is greater than the sum of all previously living scientists.

We also know that children growing up today will probably have to relearn or retrain more times during their lifetime than any previous generation has had to do. Old knowledge will quickly become useless. What today's children will need as adults is imagination, ability to empathize, creativity, curiosity, and eagerness to learn, not already obsolete knowledge.

I am absolutely convinced that the "pedagogical pre-school" idea is counter-productive. A theatre like Tittut, which encourages and recognizes the child's capacity for empathy, imagination, and creativity, is not only for fun but also deeply, fundamentally beneficial.

*How A: The interaction between the stage and the children's brains*

Our performances are created in the interstice between the sparse signs of reality exhibited on stage and the children's own creativity and imagination. The result is rich, blossoming performances in their minds, performances the luminosity and intensity of which we can barely imagine.

Hence Tittut's externally directed style of playing. Between two actors/puppets on stage is created a powerful, invisible – but quite real – line. We are never satisfied with that line alone. The lines from each actor out to the audience are at least as important: we are really talking about power triangles, with connections from actor to audience, from audience to actor. The actors/puppets affirm the audience and the audience affirms those on stage.

That is why our actors-puppeteers, also the puppets themselves, address the audience at least as much as they address their fellow actors on stage. That is why we always try to pull the audience into the drama on stage, by wordless, unspoken questions or by direct, spoken questions.

Because we want the children to realize that they are a part of what happens on stage, that their imagination and creativity are as necessary for the performance – the actual one on stage and in the audience, as well as the virtual one in their minds – as the imagination and creativity of the actors and puppets.

Of course we never say this in so many words, only through our way of approaching the children. From the first moment we see them when we come out into the lobby to greet them and lead them into the performance area, this is what we are projecting to them, this is what we convey in every way possible except speech.

*How B: Friendly guides in the theatre world*

A theatre performance for small children is part of their world. What happens on stage is literally a matter of life and death. This means that the action can sometimes get too dangerous, too scary (although adults may find it all pretty innocent) since the children's power of imagination and emotional capacity are so enormous.

The actors therefore have an important task also in that they are safety anchors for the children, companions and guides in the world of the theatre – one might almost say protectors and champions.

The role as guide is taken on by the actor from the first moment he or she meets the children: "I am the one who knows this space, I know the rules, I'm the one you can trust. I am the one who de-

cides things in this space and I know that there is nothing dangerous here, even if things might get very suspenseful and exciting."

We always meet the audience outside the theatre space proper and bring them into the theatre. This first encounter is incredibly important. Here we establish the relationship between the child audience member and the adult actor – equals when it comes to creative power, yet when it comes to responsibility and protection, the adult is clearly in the driver's seat. This makes for a difficult balancing act, which we are continually working to refine and improve.

It is just as important that the children are given time after the performance to process their experience, to slowly leave the theatre world and reenter their own reality. That is why we hand each one a card with a picture from the show after the performance is over. This gives them a little extra breather and the card becomes a concrete symbol and reminder of their entire experience.

*How C: Tiredness, lack of concentration – how do we counteract that?*

Children's capacity for emotional empathy, imagination and creativity makes it easy to create theatre for and with them.

On the other hand, the fact that their brains are in a phase of intense development creates problems. The small child has not yet learnt to distinguish between important and unimportant, it is in the throes of an intensive learning phase to learn precisely that. So the child's brain devotes the same amount of attention to all incoming information. And that is why the child is easily overwhelmed and exhausted. All small children can be said to suffer from "ADHD/ADD."



Photo: Deckstern/Tittut

*Fly with me  
Thumbelina!,  
2005.*

If a little child is to have the strength to absorb a performance of more than half an hour, you must reduce the information flow from the stage to the absolute minimum. Only what is necessary stays, all superfluous elements are peeled away. Our means for achieving this minimum – they simultaneously spell out our aesthetic – are: focus, one thing at a time, purity, clarity, simplicity, and measured pace.

#### *How D: Focus*

By clearly signaling where the focus is on stage, where the action takes place in that moment, we remove superfluous information. To direct focus is important in all theatre, but much more important in theatre for children, since it is not obvious to the children themselves where the focus is. We direct focus with the help of lights, sound, and the eyes and active attention of actors and puppets. When we switch or change focus, we take care that we do it clearly and cleanly and not too quickly.

#### *How E: Slow pace – or rather, “the time between”*

Actually, Tittut’s performance pace is not generally slow. What we do take extra time with are shifts of focus, such that, in a shift between, say, focus A and focus B, we slow down in “the time between” A and B. Small children need time to process information reported by their senses – precisely because they are learning to sort information into important and unimportant, good and bad. That is why it is so important to give them a chance to stay a little longer in focus A, so that their brains will have time to properly process the just-experienced event. When this has happened, focus is shifted – with the aid of looks, lights and sound – from A to B, firmly but not too quickly. The actual action in focus B is not triggered immediately, however. The puppet or actor in B shifts focus by preparatory movements, alerting the child that now something important is about to happen – wonder what that might be?

The significance and importance of “the time between” cannot be overstated.

#### *How F: Clarity, simplicity, and “one thing at a time”*

Our aim is to weed out the superfluous, the unnecessary. Not a word too many, not a thing on stage which does not serve a purpose, not a movement that is not needed. If the actor makes a careless move which actually does not mean anything, the child’s brain will still process that movement as being as important as the other movements which actually have something to tell. Trying to squeeze a

meaning from this meaningless movement is an effort which pulls concentration from what we really want to communicate.

Nor do we want the child’s brain to have to process two or more parallel, simultaneous tracks of action on stage, which also quickly leads to exhaustion and lack of concentration. That is why we say, “one thing at a time.”

“One thing at a time” is often held up as an ideal also in theatre for adults. In reality, this is most often just lip service. Actors used to performing for adults or older children are often shocked when they begin acting for Tittut’s audiences and discover what “one thing at a time” really means.

If you observe the principles above, you can probably tell small children almost any story in the theatre. Slowly but surely we at Tittut have expanded the sphere of topics we find possible to share on stage. Personally, I am very eager to produce *Waiting for Godot* for the Tittut crowd, says Christer Dahl.

Translation into English by Anne-Charlotte Hanes Harvey

This text is an excerpt from *En stor liten teater/A great little theatre* by Margareta Sörenson, Stockholm 2008. Margareta Sörenson, who lives in Stockholm, is a long-time theatre and dance critic for the major Swedish daily *Expressen*. The author of several books on theatre, puppetry and on children and the arts, she is an internationally sought after lecturer and panelist. Margareta Sörenson held a workshop at the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing 2008.

*Where stage and audience meet.  
Keys to theatre – with drama as method*

*Jeanette Roos*

*Introduction*

Dramatic arts are based on a non-hierarchical attitude and openness towards various solutions to a variety of problems. Hence the specialness and extra importance of also working with culture, democracy issues and democratic leadership in countries that still in particular ways are made up of hierarchical structures.

The general layout of the further training course outside Sweden worked very well, with most matters running according to plan. However, the teachers' previous knowledge and experience of theatre performances was at times limited; though they still had the enthusiasm to take part in practical studies and improvisations. Drama/theatre studies can be used to develop work with teacher groups, to be used by them with pupils in classrooms. Teachers may continue to find inspiration and ideas in the book but it is sometimes useful to release method from professional theatre performance if such performance is less common. I have also experienced the same powerful interest in participants from small theatre groups. Participants who come from a context where they frequently work on a non-profit basis and with a social orientation. They have called for more training weeks for themselves, something which I feel needs to be affirmed since other target groups are then reached.

Despite the cultural differences that exist between countries it is most interesting to note the major similarities in views on theatre work, culture, attitudes and children that prevail. It is especially pleasurable in the concrete work on plays and the responses of actors, and the improvisations with teachers, to see how similar people are in their basic questions of life. How well we understand one another, despite coming from different parts of the world and despite the cultural differences we possess.

During a further training course at the Rangayana Theatre in India in the summer of 2006 I worked on selected parts of the book "I gränslandet mellan scen och publik. Nycklar till teater – med drama som metod". (Where stage and audience meet. Keys to theatre – with drama as method.)

The background to this work was translation of the book to the Indian language Kannada. Hence the wish from the theatre for methods training on work before and after performance. Part one consisted of working with 40 teachers and actors with basic theatre studies. Theatre in education. Here actors and teachers were involved in practical collaboration with each other. The second part was an in-depth look at artistic methods work with actors only. As our basis here we used Bertold Brecht's "The Good Person of Sezuan". We took a deeper look at characters and the main issues in scenes, as well as enhancing methods work on how to involve an audience in the theme of a play. The principle moral we worked with was: "A woman with nothing gains something. How might she keep it in a world full of other needy people?" The messages the actors found in their scenes concurred well with what I had previously noted. "Those who have low-status jobs and through this behave badly might despite all be good individuals", and "it is important to try to keep what you have got and need". The answers of the actors following play analysis were for me confirmation that we understood one another and that more in-depth development was possible. We could indeed reach one another here. On the other hand, in our work to involve the audience several surprising solutions to specific problem situations in the play arose, solutions clearly linked to the cultural reality pervading in India.

*Work done before and after a theatre performance*

Theatrical art lacks boundaries, creation is unpredictable, creativity transcends and gives life. It should be accessible to all. The basis of work meeting an audience before and after a theatre performance is a belief in theatrical art that addresses people. In the meeting between theatre and reality something can be created – a thought, a feeling, a will, or a desire may grow. This is the borderland, and it is here the pre- and post-performance work is done. This work



involves creating links between audience and performers, between school and theatre. It is about providing keys into the magic world of theatre and opening the way for linking a performance to reality so that art and everyday life relate to one another as a matter of course. The theatre performance is the experience in common, and it is this that is at the core when carrying out pre- and post-performance work. The audience group is gathered for a practical and thematic meeting prior to the performance. A similar meeting is then held afterwards.

#### *Aims of pre-performance meeting*

- To awaken appetite for, interest in and curiosity for theatre.
- To supply a degree of understanding of theatre as language.
- To open the way for themes and associations prior to the performance.
- To emphasise that the important element is the experience of the audience.
- To show that theatre relates to the current lives of people.

#### *Aims of post-performance meeting*

- To receive audience theatre experience, and launch a vital discussion with the help of questions and interpretations.



Photo: Jeanette Roos

*Audience of school children during the further training course in Mysore, 2006.*

- To go through the plot of the play and make a practical analysis.
- To allow the audience time to become aware of what they have seen.
- To reflect on the theme of the performance and the reality of the audience.

#### *School as audience*

School and theatre are two separate worlds, and sometimes the ignorance of one to the other can create unnecessary problems. Contacts between school and theatre should be based on mutual respect for the basic conditions of each world, so that difficulties can be seen and at the same time areas where school and theatre might enrich one another can be established.

#### *Separate worlds*

One thing that can frequently be noted when young people meet theatre is how 'weird' and alien it seems to them. A 'Hot Seat' exercise provides young people several chances to decide whether they feel theatre is alien to them. Normally almost the entire class says it is. Theatre is something that many people have little contact with, and a general feeling exists of failure to understand it. Whatever is not understood is easily dismissed as ridiculous, too deep or boring. Sometimes, when in schools, it is as though I come from a different world. For example, facing 15 surly lads on a vehicle technical course with baseball caps pulled well down over their ears. They look and give a sigh. It is only after exercises and gaining respect that discussion gets going. We find something that unites us, and contact becomes possible. At the same time, young people can surprise, often through their ability to see behind the surface and through spontaneous and direct reactions to performances. A great will exists to philosophise on existential issues and to see the world in more than black and white. How do we accommodate this?

#### *Voluntary*

People should be positive towards what they do, they should want it. They should want to and dare to try situations alien to them, be curious, want encounters. This is not always the case. A lot of people are busy with their old habits. Schools have many 'must do's' that pupils have to follow. Ideally a visit to the theatre should be a positive choice among young people at school; those who wish to go to

the theatre should do so because they want to, while others could do something else. But who would choose theatre? Who would not? And why? Should theatre be voluntary for school children? Should perhaps maths, gym and English also be voluntary? Down the years I have met so many pupils who would never voluntarily have visited the theatre, but went and gained an experience! At times apprehension towards something can turn into a positive and important occasion. At the same time, some people may be put off for life, having seen the wrong theatre performance in the wrong context, never wanting to visit the theatre again. Teen times are sensitive, so extra care is required both from theatre and school with regard to an audience of young people.

### *Why should young people see theatre?*

Theatre is about us people, what it means to be human and for better or for worse live among other humans. Theatre can be seen as a reflexion of life. You can mirror yourself in it and reflect on the world about you. A theatre performance makes it easy to approach particular subjects, such as prejudice, racism etc. It is a starting point for discussion of existential questions, relations, sensitive subjects and society – discussion about which there is a great need of at present. If a subject is sensitive in class it is always possible to create distance by referring to the theatrical performance.

Everyone has a story to tell. By seeing and using theatre school pupils are able to find their own story, their own life, gain perspective on the past and the future, consider where their story begins and ends. It is a route towards social competence.

### *Drama as method*

In my descriptions of exercises and method I frequently turn to youth groups or adult education/study circles since it is here the material finds its chief areas of use. However, it is also possible for all the models to be used in meetings with adult audience groups. The basic needs for pre- and post-performance discussion are not as great as with younger groups though the reward and pleasure appear to be. We rarely take the time and scope to look deeper into existential questions. Adults are more ‘polite’ than young people, but usually just as unsure of what is ahead of them and what is required of them. Indeed, fear of not understanding may even be greater among adults than among those younger than them.



Photo: Rangiyana

*Teacher's training course in Mysore, 2006.*

### *Teacher presence at class meetings and performances*

It is best if the teacher who attends a performance with pupils is also present at pre- and post-performance meetings. Not as an assistant or behaviour controller, or to influence content, but because the teacher is the adult pupils meet on a daily basis. Teachers have a chance to see pupils working in a different form in the workshops, and when interesting discussions arise or sensitive subjects are taken up it is the teacher who remains at the school and who is able to keep discussion going. The hope is that the accumulative experience of performance plus discussion before and after should spread through the classroom like rings of water.

### *Leadership*

When in charge of exercises it is important to have a basically positive and encouraging leadership attitude. Show respect for what participants have to say, start where they are. Really listen to what they say. Be positive. Ask plenty of questions. Let meetings be pleasurable, with laughter and fun. Have fun even if the theme is serious. Give prominence to what is beautiful and poetic. Don't be afraid to enhance situations and expressions. Work out a structure suited to you, the group and the occasion. There is constant need for flexibility.

### *How to proceed?*

The following descriptions of pre- and post-performance models of approach suggest what might be done and what might be the result. I have attempted to be as clear as possible by providing details, examples and pictures of situations. Nothing suggests meetings have to be like these, but they provide the feeling of a meeting and represent a start. All the models and exercises are based on practical experiences and are designed to be used as inspiration from which they may be changed and remodelled. The most important thing is to listen to your group; pick and match from the material you have in ways that suit the occasion.

#### **In the classroom**

The furniture in the classroom or location used often has to be re-arranged. Benches and tables need moving to the walls while chairs are placed in a ring. If you are on a visit to a school ask if this can be done before you arrive. If not, ask pupils or participants to help re-arranging the furniture and see this as warming up. Lining benches and sitting in a ring disturbs the established order in a classroom and makes building up an attractive and creative atmosphere easier. Everyone sees everyone else and participates on a physical level.

#### **Doing the rounds**

All meetings start with participants sitting in a ring with everyone given the chance of telling 'something' (Themes presented in the book.) To make things easier and benefit concentration it is best if individuals close their eyes and think about what to say before a round starts. After a few minutes ask them to look up when they are ready. Each person can present themselves and talk about the chosen theme. An alternative is to split a group into pairs and ask them to relate to each other what they are thinking about. Afterwards they can then present each other. This gives everybody a chance, but forces nobody. A round where participants present each other puts them in the centre twice, making for more activity with all pairs talking to each other. A round is particularly important at the start of a meeting so everyone gets to say something as soon as possible, easing the way for daring to express oneself later in a meeting.

#### **Attitude – Valuation exercises**

Attitude exercises are something I have used a lot, since they quickly engage participants in interesting discussions. They are a structured way of introducing discussions that lack given answers, with

the aim of breaking down prevailing group structure and making room for everyone. The goal of attitude exercises is not consent and total agreement, nor is it to find the 'right' answer, but rather to allow everyone present to have their say. They involve thinking about subjects and adopting attitudes in various issues plus listening to the ideas other people have. Participants gain greater awareness of their own sets of values and those of others. They train in expressing and motivating their viewpoints and have the chance of hearing how different people can reason when making up their mind about something. All backgrounds differ, with different experiences that mean people talk, think and act as they do. Hopefully, by seeing and respecting one another's differences we can increase mutual understanding. Attitude exercises in the book include: Hot Seat, 4-Corner, 5-Corner and Stand on a Line.

#### *Pre- and post-performance meetings – points to remember*

The points below can be used as a checklist of what is useful to include at any pre- and post-performance meetings. Always start a meeting by sitting in a ring.

- *Introduction/Presentation.*
- *Doing the rounds.*
- *Warm-up.*
- *Tell about the performance.*
- *Theme.*
- *Links between performance and reality.*
- *There is no right or wrong way of experiencing artistic expression.*
- *Audience is important – the life-blood of theatre. Theatre is a meeting in the here and now.*
- *Aims.*
- *Question time.*
- *Close of meeting.*

#### **Drama pedagogy**

Doing theatre exercises for their own sake – not in order to set up a play – is what drama is about. The task of the actor is to enter deeper into her or his role character. Working with drama means going into depth as regards your own person and character. This might be through role interpretation, but personal development in interplay with others is always most important. When doing drama in a group there is no way of being that is better or worse than any other. Jointly we look closer at situations and ourselves, with the

help of ourselves. Efforts are oriented towards processes rather than results.

Drama means action. A pedagogue is a person who leads someone else to knowledge. Drama pedagogy = action that leads to knowledge. Knowledge about life – knowledge essential to life. You meet yourself in several ways when working with drama. This is what attracts and what scares. In all the groups I have worked with there is an initial insecurity and worry about what will take place, and by the end there is almost always an enthusiasm and joy over what has been achieved together.

The article is build on excerpts from "I gränslandet mellan scen och publik. Nycklar till teater – med drama som metod". (Where stage and audience meet. Keys to theatre – with drama as method.)

Written by Jeanette Roos.

The book is in Swedish and can be ordered from: [jeanette.roos@falun.se](mailto:jeanette.roos@falun.se)

A short version of the book was published in Kannada language in 2005 and can be ordered through Rangayana Theatre in Mysore: [rangayanamysore@yahoo.com](mailto:rangayanamysore@yahoo.com)

Jeanette Roos has worked as a drama pedagogue for around 25 years, within theatre and as a drama teacher within the upper secondary school aesthetic programme. She has developed an interactive method showing the enormous depth of what drama and theatre have to offer, and the greater experience and understanding that can be reached if a visit to the theatre is complemented with workshops and pre and post-performance discussion. This method is described in the book "I gränslandet mellan scen och publik. Nycklar till teater – med drama som metod". (Where stage and audience meet. Keys to theatre – with drama as method), which in 2005 was translated to the Kannada language spoken in India. In this connection she held further training courses in the method at the Rangayana theatre in Mysore, India, for teachers and actors.

The article is based on that work and excerpts from her book.

## YESSS! – *On children, art and profitability*

*Bernt Höglund*

It's Friday morning and soon 10 o'clock. My actor colleague and I help the last group of children into their places. The recorded music to be heard in the small theatre room is calming and peaceful. Soon 60 four and five-year-olds are seated in whispering expectation in front of the pale light of the stage. The performance is soon to begin.

For us two actors shortly to start performing, the play has already begun.

It started in the foyer where we together welcomed our audience. Such a gentle and calm welcome contributes to letting in an audience free from anxious running about and loud voices. The pre-school personnel are given clear signals by the calm we show. They stop worrying that 'their' children will misbehave. They see that we are in control of the situation and we take on responsibility. All the children are met as individuals before being shown in small groups to their places on cushions and chairs. A small boy on the first row of cushions seems just this very day to have extra busy legs. A calm look and a whispered "are you sitting alright?" and a final agreement is reached between us. Everyone is ready. The show can start!

Wonderful! Actors and audience are ready together, and we can start at a level below that of the day-to-day clamour. Concentration and watchfulness are at their best. From here we can go anywhere! Being part of the audience puts you in the position of receiver rather than sender – a prerequisite for being affected. Does greater pleasure exist than a smoothly functioning performance in the offering? Both children and adults have their ears cocked to hear the nuances of the performance. Aware and honest scenic formulation has the ability to get under skin, the skin of both children and adults. Often at the same time, but in different ways.

We have just played that scene where the beloved teddy falls off

the sledge and disappears into piles of snow. Sixty small lower lips (and some adult lips) have quivered in sorrow over a dear friend probably lost forever. The audience follows the painful series of events in great collective silence. Sixty children are holding their breath together on the edge of the unendurable. The soft melody of a violin creeps slowly forward out of the background. The on-stage action lingers in tranquility. The stage lighting slowly gets stronger, slowly. Isn't the feeling that of slowly leaving a dark tunnel together? One of the stage characters knocks delicately on an outside door.



Photo: Ulf Johansen

Bernt Höglund performing in "Heaven is blue", 1997.

Has anyone here lost a cuddly teddy? It seems one has been found. Very wet, but still in one piece...

A collective release of breath in the audience. Together we have coped with fear, but now it's over.

When the performance is over we actors stay in the room until all the audience has left. Some children are reluctant to leave, they have something to tell.

– I've got a teddy like the one in the show. A yellowy-coloured one.

– Did he really get soaked through?

– You know, I lost my teddy once too but he never came back...

The performance was also watched by student teachers and their drama teacher. They stay afterwards for a chat with us actors. The teacher asks her students if they noticed that the reactions of the audience during the play could be read. Could it be seen that we adapted nuances in the action to suit audience ears? One of the female students remarked that this worked well: eye-level contact.

The teacher oozes pride and smiles. You can see they have already discussed the advantages and quality of small audience groups.

Someone asks where the limit is before silent communication dis-

### YESSS games

YESSS is a part of a series of exercises or games designed by the British theatre personality and director Keith Johnstone. They all have the aim of reminding us of the need to keep impulses in both acting and life in general unblocked ("don't block!").

Like all other theatre play, Johnstone Yesss games are truly naive. Participants move freely around the floor, relaxed yet at the ready. Any of these can make an enthusiastic suggestion as to a simple physical action by calling it out loud. The important moment is when everyone accepts this and shouts out YESSS!

Whereupon each and everybody takes on the suggested action together with great enthusiasm like a simple pantomime. After a few seconds, when it can be seen that the action is being carried out by all with full energy, it is time for the next one. It's open to anyone to cut off an action and start a new one by calling out their idea, which is accepted without hesitation with a new forceful YESSS! Everyone then launches into the new pantomime, and so on.

After a while participants often enter into a kind of flushed-with-joy-EVERYTHING-is-possible stage, with a sheer delight developing in everything that we are able to create together...

(The working methods of Keith Johnstone are to be found in his book *Impro*, which has been published in several languages.)

continues. One hundred four-year-olds; 200 or 300 children together...?

– With such large numbers of children making up the audience perhaps you no longer can talk about culture for children, I say.

A big audience means a big level of sound, and acting can easily become insensitive and over-stated. The risk then is the performance being reduced to entertainment for children, which is something else.

When culture and art for children gets the chance of penetrating through on conditions set by itself, without hushed admonitions, then it is capable of hitting home. Good culture and art for children poses new questions specially adapted to the age group. Good art

creates a slight shift in reality; imagination becomes a creative tool.

Someone among the students – most probably aware of the financial aspect – spontaneously blurts out:

– But doesn't this cost lots of money. I mean, performing for so few children, it can't be very profitable!?

A heated debate breaks out. Profitable for who? The theatre? Society? If we are going to grow we need nutrition, says somebody. Spiritual nutrition, what about that? Can society afford not to put money into culture? What's the best way of teaching empathy?

It is soon time for the teachers-to-be to move on to their next lecture, and their teacher summarises: you have to continually start again from the start! No solutions last forever; all truths have to be conquered anew. Children have no voting rights, responsibility is with us adults to see that the smallest ones experience theatre. Especially those of you who are to become teachers. Don't forget to make notes. Bye for now, I'll see you in two weeks!

I fetch two cups of coffee. On return my friend the drama teacher is looking in the mirror.

– I look like a parrot, don't I? At least, I feel like one. I get the feeling I say the same things over and over again to my students.

We drink our coffee and agree that parrots are allowed to make any noises they like.

And as a teacher you are allowed to repeat knowledge. Just as it is permitted to repeat humanistic ideas to a young audience when doing theatre...

My fellow actor comes in, newly showered and on the way out. He wishes us good luck on our journey the following week.

– So now you're off travelling again with a Sida grant aid to a country far off in Asia? Claiming only one truth exists in children's theatre: your truth, he says to wind us up.

– Jealousy will get you nowhere, I reply. Just because it's not your turn this time to enrich your life meeting devoted colleagues in a different culture.

– You're right, poor me, he says, and shuffles over-dramatically towards the exit.

My guess is you're planning to open your workshop with YESSS? The drama exercise based on everyone having something to contribute in cultural exchanges. "It's about listening and collaborating without leading the way." Right?

– That's right, quite right, I say. It's a good exercise, reminding us that play is one of the prerequisites for theatre. When you just dragged yourself towards the exit crushed and full of self-pity you

got us laughing. Laughter, mutual laughter, gets us relaxed. We are affected by YESSS games with their childish, tittery joy. Prestige and grandiosity disappear, and the worry of not being serious enough relents. We are given the chance of discovering each other, and that's when true meetings arise.

– Yes, I know, my colleague says, and slips back into his usual self. Remember when some of us at the theatre were asked to run a staff personal development day for hospital personnel?

Those taking part in the YESSS games openly took on one another's suggestions for small and simple actions. YES shook the place and they carried out the actions together with great gusto. They were crazy racing car drivers, ski-jumpers and folk dancers on the moon in slow motion. The tempo was high, and they listened to and confirmed each other. Nobody tried to take over and everybody had great fun with laughter echoing from wall to wall.

At the end of the day a nurse came up to me. She said she'd experienced true liberation just by saying YES without needing to evaluate it. She had been struck by the insight that her daily life contained far too many NOes. She was considering how many of these were in fact necessary and how many were simply there from tired old habit.

– I've got a favourite quote, says the drama teacher: "In our age it is a true blessing to meet a serious playful person". We who work in theatre know that life is enriched by this earnest play. It is fantastic that it works internationally.

– YESSS! Says my colleague. Good luck, hope you have a nice journey. Say hello to Asia!

Bernt Höglund is a theatrical creator and director. He works with all types of theatre and together with various colleagues has set up over 30 productions throughout Scandinavia. He is currently working on a production together with a theatre in Japan. Bernt has held workshops and drama seminars in some 15 countries in the Baltic, Africa and Asia.

Together with Barbro Lord, Bernt Höglund conducted a workshop for Children's Voice in Laos 2007 and together with Lena Lindell held a workshop in India 2008.

## *How to bring children's voices to the fore through drama in education and theatre*

*Diary from a workshop in Bangladesh*

*Åsa Ekberg Kentros & Nina Kjällquist*

### *Our aim...*

Meeting children and listening to what they have to say when we perform children's theatre in Sweden gives us inspiration: our aim is to experience the same thing in a shorter process in Bangladesh. Can ten weeks' work be squeezed into six days? We decided to try.

When doing work of this nature in Sweden we meet the children on several occasions, both as reference audience during rehearsals and as audience at the final performance. We follow up every performance by meeting the audience. In this way we meet around 3 000 children each period of performances. These children often provide us with inspiration and ideas for the play to follow.

We wanted the groups in Bangladesh to try a method for creating plays with current topics based on the thoughts and experiences of the children themselves. How might adults meet and discuss with children on their terms. How might the experiences of the actors themselves of being children be utilised? How might individuals be trained to take a children's perspective?

Briefly, our work was to:

- Work with actor groups in taking a children's perspective.
- Conduct research efforts with children in school.
- Create a short play on a chosen subject.
- Perform the play with follow-up afterwards.

In order for the actors to have a method around which to build up a play we worked with dream improvisations. Such improvisations are furthermore a fun way and practical way of meeting with children, and training groups in their capacity for interplay.

Instead of starting on a ready text our wish was to find a different way of creating a play, with the help of memory improvisations. (To get the actors to try and remember how it was to be a child).

### *... and what we did?*

Diary notes from our journey to Dhaka and Khulna in Bangladesh 2006.

14/7

Arrive Dhaka early morning. In the afternoon we meet Rhakal the group we are to work with. This consists of 20 or so youths with varying theatre experience, mostly students of about 20.

15/7

We give a basic course in drama as method. Drama here is the pedagogic use of games, group exercises and improvisations where the efforts are more important than the ends. It is also a way of stimulating, utilising and developing communication between people. Our goal is to get the group going and give people the tools to use in their own work with children and youth.

We present the dream improvisation technique. This briefly is when someone in the audience tells one of their dreams, and a team of five or so actors, on the basis of specific rules, plays this dream as a short play. Help is confined to a musician (if one is available) and access to sound illustration, and a simple cloth backdrop that can represent anything from palace to ocean to stomach.

Actors try out dream improvisation in groups of five.

Here just as in Sweden it is easy for the entertainment demon to get the upper hand, but good improvisation cuts down on the laughs...and we point out that the most important thing is to treat the dream and the dreamer with respect: is it a sad or frightening dream? Any kind of revelation or poking fun at what is related is absolutely out.

After this people in the group close their eyes and think back to their own childhood. Can they remember a situation where they felt unfairly treated?

Next are the 'memory improvisations' with the same rules. Instead of relating a dream a memory from childhood is related. This is a way for us – along with the experiences and thoughts of the children – to together approach what will be material for our play.

The group works really well. Their own memory improvisations often relate to when they were beaten as children. We discuss this subject. Would they like to change things? And how might this be achieved? The day ends with preparations for the school visit to come.

16/7

Union strike. Dangerous on the streets. We stay at the hotel all day. This means re-planning since the result of losing a day is not being able to fit in all the exercises we planned for.

'Children's Voice' is an exchange project, and in the evening we see the university drama school performance of 'The Proposal' as an example of theatre in Bangladesh.

17/7

School visit. An important part of efforts to come in close to your target group and get ideas from their lives and experiences. We visit a small school under mango trees on the outskirts of Dhaka. The group carries out practical research with theatre and drama exercises to get material for the play to come. We start with various games and exercises with everyone taking part – a way for all, both adults and children, to arrive at the same level. Then child-adult pairs form with each one interviewing the other for later presentation among the group. Finally, work comes to an end with children and adults forming statues on the basis of children's answers to the question: 'what are the biggest problems facing children in Bangladesh today?' The answers are: stop child labour, child-adult relations, equal society, working mothers, parents' respect for children, co-education, teacher behaviour, we want peace.

The good and respectful attitude shown by the group towards the children impresses us.

We chose three of these subjects to work with in the afternoon: 'equal society', 'child-adult relations' and 'school'. The actors could choose the theme they wished to work with, with appointment of a chief 'director' and someone to write down the action. The final hour was spent on brainstorming in each group to find a short play (15 min). Important that everyone's ideas and thoughts gain expression.



Discussions during the workshop in Dhaka, 2005.

We go through the set-up briefly:

- ★ Choose WHEN the play is set (now or when they were young themselves).
- ★ Who the play is about.
- ★ What the CONFLICT is.
- ★ Choose FORM (Music? Singing?).
- ★ Seek out the SPECIFIC.
- ★ And most important of all: take the CHILDREN'S perspective.

18/7

Keep working on our short plays. 'Writing' complicates matters. We realise we are expected to teach the writing of plays, while the emphasis here is on buoying up main points of action and writing down lines that work. We look at the efforts of all the groups and together work on the sketch of one of the groups where the subject is 'co-education'. The storyline in brief is as follows:

A girl goes to a co-ed (mixed) school but following a playground row her father decides she is to move to a girls' school. The girl wants to carry on going to her old school together with her best friend – a boy – but her parents don't listen to her. In the final scene, girls play on one side and boys the other side of a wall. In the end they climb up and meet over the wall.

We rehearse the play a few times, and the actors make the achievement of finding 18 roles in the 15-minute-long play! There is not enough time for translation into English, so we are given a rough idea of what is said in the scenes.

The actors work really well, with great enthusiasm. Their acting is coordinated, and they have largely taken the 'children's perspective' on board.

We end the day by going through the work to be done following the play to get a discussion with the children on the go.

19/7

School visit. They perform the play. It goes really well. Afterwards we head the post-performance work together with actors and children. The children are allowed to choose their own memory from the play. Then the audience chooses scenes where children in the play face problems. The scenes are re-performed and the audience has the chance to make changes to improve the situation for the children in the play. On the basis of this we discussed if and how similar situations might be influenced in reality.

20/7

Joint evaluation. The actors are very enthusiastic. We feel really pleased about the positive response to us, and are thankful for the interpreter's fantastic ef-



forts and the generosity and warm hospitality of our hosts. We are impressed by the work of the group and its openness to our ideas.

We have a party together and experience more folkdance, music and a play. Boat journey on the river and visit to war museum.

21/7

Exciting car journey to Kuhlna in southern Bangladesh. Picked up by Rupantar in a mini-bus. We are presented to the group the same evening. About 20 actors and musicians, most are both.

22/7

Drama in education (as in Dhaka).

Dream and memory improvisations. The group is highly professional and physically expressive.

23/7

A.m. school visit to small village outside Khulna. We sit outside in a large circle under a tree. The children are happy and enthusiastic. They all have big plans for the future. Contact between the acting group and the children is good, and the morning meeting is memorable.

In the afternoon we choose the main theme for a play: 'poverty'.



Photo: Asa Elberg Kemros

Training at the workshop in Khulna, 2005.

The actors are divided into three groups with each group working on the same subject. We run through the requirements for setting up a short play on the subject. We put special emphasis on finding the PERSONAL, what the children can recognise and FEEL for. And showing up problems, but not presenting answers. That a conflict can be INSIDE someone.

In the evening we see one of Rupantar's performances of 'pot theatre'. Fun to see!

24/7

Rupantar also works with eco tourism, and we are taken in one of their boats to Sundarban. Tiger watch. We saw the tail-end of a crocodile! The groups set up plays and rehearse.

In the evening we see another of Rupantar's performances in traditional style about a fisherman and his love problems.

25/7

We see the three plays. Form-wise really good! The music works as a support and binding link in all three plays. The stories are on a general level, saying how things are.

We work together on one of the plays about a boy who can't go to school because his parents can't afford to buy him a school uniform. We add a friend and one or two scenes where the children talk to each other about their thoughts and feelings. The actors are skilled at passing from one scene to another and physically symbolising everything from house to factory to machine and to tree.

26/7

Our play is performed for the children, and more or less the entire village that gathers to see what we are up to. We lead post-performance efforts as in Dhaka, and everything goes really well this time too.

27/7

Evaluation. Several people say they've experienced that children are not empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, but also have a lot of ideas themselves. We are impressed by the work of Rupantar and its social and community engagement.

We all enjoy a fantastic concluding evening with lots of guests invited, with speeches and the performance of the play again.

## *Reflections*

Central to our work is how children are seen: it is important to see them as thinking and competent human beings and inspiring colleagues. (When speaking with children you sometimes wonder why they are not allowed a bigger say in things).

In Bangladesh the distance between children and adults was short. Everybody understood the difficulties facing their society – a very good precondition for our work.

Since the work and meeting up with children frequently concerns values and requires considerable sensitivity to nuances and what is perhaps not said directly in words, interpreters have a real task. Sometimes it felt frustrating not being able to talk directly with the children and gain an understanding of HOW something was said and what was NOT said. Hearing side comments and the children chattering to each other – things that can be as important as what is said directly.

Åsa Ekberg Kentros studied at the state university college of acting in the early eighties and since then has worked as a freelance actor, director and writer at several of Sweden's theatrical institutions. Since 1999 Åsa works for Teateralliansen and also runs the independent theatre group Frilansteatern.

Nina Kjällquist is a teacher in drama and education, and since 1993 has been working at the Dalateatern with the building of links between school and theatre. Nina has also worked internationally with, for example, the training of teachers.

Åsa Ekberg Kentros and Nina Kjällquist have together held workshops for the Children's Voice project in Bangladesh 2005 and in China 2007 and 2008.

## *A dramatic workshop on writing theatre for children in South India*

*Lena Fridell & Zac O'Yeah*

How realistic is this anyway? was the thought foremost in our minds when we got to Mysore in 2005, and met for the first time fifteen local playwrights, who all wrote in Kannada, and who expected our guidance based on the Swedish experience.

The idea, of course, was enchanting: The workshop aimed at developing children's theatre in Karnataka by encouraging the writing of new and original plays, using local themes and motives, combined with focused discussions around the participants' own work-in-progress. And this was to take place in Mysore, which is such an inspiring old town to be in – with its cafes, its colourful silk shops and the Cauvery River with its warning signposts for crocodiles!

Taking into account the globalisation buzz and the fact that children in India and Sweden alike are in the grip of Pottermania, it was high time for some alternative cultural cross-fertilisation. But on the other hand, there was nothing to suggest that all of us, from countries so far apart, could actually collaborate across the cultural divides!

So how did we go about it? Most of the first week was taken up by presentations and discussion of the participants' own writing projects, and lengthy individual discussions with the playwrights where plot ideas were evaluated (during these individual discussions the other playwrights were working on their own material).

In the evenings we watched video-recordings of performances together, which were frequently interrupted by power failures and other technical problems. Some of these Swedish plays, which were studied in order to understand the working methods of contemporary Swedish playwrights and theatre repertoires, were "The story of the little gentleman" by Folkteatern and "Romeo and Juliet" by Backa Theatre, etc; as well as play scripts by Staffan Göthe, Göran Tunström etc. We also saw "The Post Office" (directed by Lars-Eric

Brossner) performed by CTR at Rangayana on the first day of the workshop.

It seemed to us that children do enjoy the same kind of stories in both India and Sweden. As the discussion broadened to touch upon questions of language, gender and education, it started to appear that children's theatre might well be the foundation on which the future is built. For whereas most of us have a hard time recalling what plays we've seen as adults, we probably have vivid memories of our childhood visits to the theatre and the stuff that shaped our earliest thoughts.

Constructive optimism marked the days that followed. Using themes from Karnataka – folk stories, modern lifestyle 'conflicts' as reported in local news and literary material – we explored how these can be used as the basis for theatre plays. However, aware of the difficulties of getting into the politics of literature, we made it clear to the participants that they weren't expected to write any particular kind of play, but were free to decide on theme and plot and target audience. Our particular task as workshop leaders, or 'teachers', was to then try to suggest ways in which to improve the material dramaturgically.

At the end of the first week each participant was expected to have conceptualised his/her play and completed some degree of work on a rough draft, which they would then bring home with them and finish during a six-week period. Throughout the process we were meant to give feedback on the material: the plot, the ideas, the characters, etc, by email if necessary.

This period B was meant to take place at the participants' own homes because it was conceived as an individually managed writing period; however, some participants only worked on their plays during the workshop periods, so for them the six-week home period was more of a gestation stage. Only one playwright availed of the opportunity to communicate directly about play development (by email); this lack of communication was largely due to the fact that most of the playwrights didn't know English well enough to communicate with us. Translations of the plays, which were meant to be available in English, were not done very seriously but resulted in sketchy descriptions or synopses, which in turn made it difficult for us to go deeper into the text during our discussions.

Finally we met for one more week, for a 'Rewriting and editing workshop', to further develop the plays. There was meant to be a theatre laboratory with the CTR group from Rangayana testing scenes from the plays on stage, but this didn't happen because the

actors were tied down working with other things outside Mysore. However, since the playwrights were talented actors themselves, it was possible to stage one of the more complete amongst the plays, in an informal after-hours dramatic enactment at the end of the second week in a garden near the workshop hall.

It was a very funny and tragic play for young people, lasting about 60 minutes, by Mr Dundiraj of Mangalore. His play contained social satire and took up the subject of child labour, and it has great potential – the experience of watching it, being performed outdoors on the last evening, was sheer magic, and it was highly appreciated by participants as well as chance viewers and hotel staff, and it also proved that extensive interaction with Rangayana actors would have been of great benefit.

At the conclusion of a total workshop period of two months, we were staggering and washed-out, but happy that the workshop had produced almost twenty new plays for children!

But it hadn't been easy to reach the end of the workshop successfully. Occasionally during the workshop we had to ask of ourselves: what can we do here, being just like a few grains of sand in a huge desert? As 'teachers', we frequently felt very handicapped, trying to grasp the meaning of the intellectual worlds that we had the privilege of peeking into. For instance, sometimes we couldn't quite understand the overwhelming emphasis that the participants appeared to place on pedagogical agendas and didactic elements, with priority over artistic expression. But gradually we realised that education is the major issue that the playwrights grapple with: many of them work as school teachers, therefore they were affected by the lack of resources among educational institutions, the often inflexible curriculum set down before them, and some of them lamented how their students were forced to labour and earn to support their families, instead of coming to school. It wasn't quite culture shock that we experienced, perhaps more of a culture clash; but eventually we understood and sympathised with the pragmatic issue of why they saw theatre as an auxiliary tool in education.

Some of the discussions became very animated, which added to the overall excitement. Everybody had to adjust somewhat, both participants and us as 'teachers'. Very soon we stopped seeing ourselves as 'teachers' but rather as creative co-workers in the workshop: we had all come there, to Mysore, to learn from the other participants – about their conditions, ideas, caste system, life experience – while everybody tried to transmit as many ideas as possible to the others. At the end of the last week we had a lively debate

moderated by Mr. Narayanswamy, playwright and educationist, on the relationship between the theatrical play and the children watching the play.

Despite the difficulties we all had to overcome, it was fantastic to see the work-in-progress turn into actual plays and to see how the artistic aspects developed over time. After having discussed, for instance, dialogue-writing techniques and after making comparisons with Swedish sample plays, playwrights developed their ability to write more lively dialogues using shorter phrases, fragments of speech etc, in order to enhance the theatrical energy and suggest a more realistic way of speaking. Several of the participants – used to writing for performances with children as actors – refrained from using a more advanced language in order to facilitate for the young artists, but faced with the prospect of a professional repertory using their scripts, they started thinking of new ways to write dialogue and also created more complex characters.

After extensive discussions about dramatic form, many began focusing their material on a more dramatically suited theatrical unity of theme, scenes and characters. Sometimes, for instance, it could be noticed how reducing the amount of ‘action’ and the number of songs helped in strengthening the central dramatic premise of the play. In this context, even the number of characters had occasionally to be reduced in order to concentrate upon the most important



Photo: Lena Fridell

*Participants at the workshop gather for discussions.*

issues, since the at times vast number of characters threatened to side-track the core story.

We also noticed how attitudes towards using traditional themes underwent a gradual change, possibly influenced by the video screening of the very contemporary Swedish version of “Romeo and Juliet”, so that eventually several of the playwrights innovated around or reinterpreted mythical stories or found new ideas from history books. Other playwrights started using very contemporary themes and ideas, encountered in newspaper stories or in real life, for instance plays were written on children encountering terrorism and other forms of violence or children having to face oppression.

We were happy to notice how, gradually, during the workshop periods, the child found a place on centre-stage: if the plays originally had only minor child characters, thus mostly having the drama take place between over-shadowing adults, towards the end many of the playwrights saw the fascinating possibilities that arise from using strong child protagonists (whether performed by professional adult actors or children).

On the whole, we were quite excited as we went through the various completed plays. Major changes had been made thanks to new ideas coming from the discussions around the Swedish examples and methods, but also from within the group sessions when we jointly analysed the scripts by all participants. So multiple forms of cross-fertilisation took place and it seems that everybody benefited immensely from the workshop. Including us, the ‘teachers’.

Life has many unforgettable moments. Etched in our memories are the enormous outbursts of creativity that took place on the banks of the Cauvery River during the workshop, the boundless enthusiasm and the mind-boggling variety of play scripts launched.

All’s well that ends well, one might quote Shakespeare. But of course, it wasn’t over just because the workshop ended. Later, we found out the destinies of some of the plays that we had helped ‘midwife’ into being. One full-moon night a year later, we witnessed the play “Devarappa” written by Mr Ramaiah from Kolar District – an artistically extremely well thought out play, depicting the conflict between the traditional and the modern in an original manner, and where Batman gets beaten by a local folk hero! The play is thrilling at its deeper level, suitable for youngsters as well as adults. The artistic process behind the play is fascinating and worth discussion in itself. It was, to top it all, performed on an outdoor stage up on a mountain to an audience of over 2000 villagers, both children and their parents!

Other plays from the workshop have according to our findings been published in book form and performed hundreds of times in Karnataka, so despite any apprehensions that we may have had at the outset, the workshop seems to have left deep and lasting marks in South Indian theatre for children and youngsters.

## GAINS OF BENEFITS AT PRESENT AND FOR THE FUTURE

Lena Fridell (Ph.D., member of The Writers Guild of Sweden) is a well-known theatre dramaturge, working at several different theatres in Sweden, previously serving as the artistic director of the children's theatre repertory. For many years she worked with the much-acclaimed productions of Backa Theatre. She has written and edited books on theatre and literature, and co-authored many plays. She has also taught at Göteborg University Department of Literature, and at The School of Theatre and Musicals in Göteborg. She currently teaches at creative writing workshops worldwide – most recently in Egypt, Jordan and Macedonia.

Lena Fridell was part of the advocacy seminar in Mysore 2004 and held a two-part seminar together with Zac O'Yeah in India (Mysore) 2005.

Zac O'Yeah (member of The Swedish Writers' Union) is a writer who, apart from his novels and essays, has written four books on Indian culture – the latest, "Mahatma!" having been shortlisted for the August Prize in 2008 – and currently lives in southern India. He has previously worked at various theatres, toured with music groups and studied theatre history and creative writing at university level and served for a period as the International Secretary of the Swedish Writers' Union. He assisted Rangayana between 2001 and 2008. A play scripted by him, "Cupid's Broken Arrow" was performed in Mysore, Bangalore, New Delhi and Madras.

Zac O'Yeah has taken part in several meetings and seminars during the development period of the Children's Voice project and has served as a contact for Swedish visitors to the project. Together with Lena Fridell, Zac held a two-part workshop in India (Mysore) in 2005.

## *Theatre for under-privileged children – a perspective from Bangladesh*

*Liaquat Ali Lucky*

Bangladesh is a developing country in the third world where 45% of the total population is made up of children. Almost all of these children, belonging to either rich or poor families, are in some way deprived of their rights.

If we observe the children of well-off and upper middle class families, we see that they do not lack food, clothes, shelter or any other basic needs. Moreover, they get more than what they ask for and lead a luxurious life. Yet it is true that they are often deprived of their rights. In most cases, they have to suffer psychologically for various reasons. Sometimes they do not get enough time or proper guidance from their parents, society and educational institutions. Sometimes they become bored with their mechanical, materialistic and monotonous lives where no entertainment exists, and in society there is lesser space for children.

The picture of middle class and lower-middle class families is quite different from this. Children belonging to middle class families are kept under serious stress from their childhood. The reason is that they can neither enjoy life like the rich nor accept deplorable life like the poor. So, they have no alternative but to continuously struggle to reach a better condition to survive. That is why they have no time to think or look at the world outside their own circle.

There are children belonging to very poor families who are deprived and under-privileged and sometime marginalised. Among them there are street children without parents, home or any type of shelter. There are slum children living in the streets or by the side of rail line. These children begin each day with the tension of having to gather food. They are at an age when they should go to school, but they have to go in search of a livelihood. They have to work hard until nightfall. Sometimes they even have to get involved in different types of risky jobs which threaten their lives. While growing up, these children usually experience severe malnutrition, social

repugnance and considerable vulnerability. As a result, they often develop hostility, hatred and distrust towards society. This hatred and distrust draw these innocent children toward criminal activities and thus play the most effective role in undermining society.

There are disabled children like the blind, dumb, deaf, lame etc who are deprived from leading a normal life. There are children with a shortage of mental functions. All of these disabled children are neglected everywhere. They are kept apart from common society. In most cases, they do not get the opportunity of education or entertainment. They are even neglected by their family members which is quite pathetic.

There are untouchable children like the Horijon (a term meaning 'God's people' created by Mahatma Gandhi instead of the expression of 'untouchables' in order to raise their self esteem) and gipsy children like the Bede (a community frequently moving from place to place). The condition of these children is more pitiful because they are kept entirely outside mainstream society. Nobody mixes with them. Nobody honours their tradition, culture or religion. Even the common people are unwilling to treat them as the citizens of this country.

In Bangladesh there are 50 types of tribal children experiencing inhuman life. They are deprived socially, economically and po-



Street children involved in theatre training with Rakhal, Dhaka 2008.

litically. Their language, tradition and culture are at stake. They are even left behind in the field of education.

All of these under-privileged children pose a hindrance in the way of social development but they could otherwise be assets to society. If the present situation continues, it will be a social disaster in the near future.

At such a critical moment in society, we should come up with the view of saving these assets of the nation by supporting them to grow up as better human beings. Proper mental and physical growth of children is necessary to bring the ultimate change in the country and in this regard theatre can play an important role. Through art, we can reach all types of children in society, create harmony and increase their mental courage and confidence. In that way we can build a world which is exploitation free and peaceful for everybody.

Through the Children's Voice project we can start activities to create opportunities and develop the living conditions of the children through theatre and work with children from every level of society. Theatre groups were formed with these children and have kept in contact with regular activities such as workshops, training, productions and performances. Each of the groups has already been able to make its own productions.

### *Some examples of under-privileged groups of children reached by activities through the Children's Voice project*

#### **Horijon children's theatre group**

This community is mostly known as the untouchable community. They are always kept away from society in general. Other people think that touching them or being touched by them is a matter of disgrace. Therefore, the Horijon people have created their own society; have made themselves quiet and separate from common society. They accepted this common trend of being outsiders. Their children are also neglected.

But after being reached by our project work, the magic of theatre worked within them. Their morale became strong and they came out from the shell of inferiority complexes. Watching their theatre performances in schools and other premises, the other children have started to accept sitting beside them and working together in schools or other places. Before, no one treated them in a friendly manner but now other children want to make friendship with them.

### Sandarpara Bede Shishu Theatre group

The Bede community used to stay near the Turag river, Tongi. Because of their diverse life style, they are neglected in many ways. They live on boats and the river is very important to their everyday life. But for almost half of the year the water is polluted by the industries nearby and then their suffering becomes beyond imagination. Lack of sanitation facility, no education, unhealthy living atmosphere, insufficient source of income etc sends their morale down. After joining theatre, the children of this group started realising the change they should have. Earlier they were helpless and went on with the situation but never thought of having a different life or a better future. Now being a theatre worker, a sense of dignity has developed in these tender minds and they started speaking in favour of it. No longer, they want to lead a life they have left behind. Now they realise that if they get decent education, they can achieve honour and establish themselves in society. Theatre has an effect on their thinking better and thinking further.

### Tejgaon Slum Children Theatre Group

These children live beside the railway station in Tejgaon, Dhaka, deprived of almost all facilities and rights. They are one of the target



Photo: Rakhal

Street children from Tejgaon railway station in Dhaka during theatre training with Rakhal, 2007.

beneficiaries of RAKHAL. These children are sometimes mishandled by others. They have to work as child labour, because of poverty they cannot continue schooling, they live an unhealthy life, and have to concentrate on earning for their families; sometimes their psychology develops in such a different way that they do not want to study even if they get the education materials free. Some parents sometimes wish for the betterment of their children but actually do not know how to make it possible when they cannot even fulfil their basic needs.

When our team went to them, listened to them and spread the hand of cooperation, they agreed to join in our activities. Now the difference is clearly seen between the children who joined theatre and those who did not. They have now gained confidence in having a better life by going to school and being a good human being. Theatre therapy and interesting activities make them interested in being associated with it.

### Monchomukul Protibondhi Children Theatre

The children of this group from Jhinaidaha are challenged physically or mentally but they have such a rare quality and spirit which 'normal' human beings may not have. Earlier they were scattered but by joining theatre they feel united. They feel that someone is still there to speak for them. When everyone claps at their performances, they find this world worth living. They are concerned about their incapability but have not been able to realise that they also have such talent inside. But at the same time they can feel anxious thinking what will happen when this type of program is over.

### Orao Children's Theatre Group

The children from the Orao tribal community have a hidden rage inside them because of the confusion everyone makes by treating them as Shaotals (another tribal community). Their language is mostly affected. They often feel threatened thinking that they may lose their identity, culture and rituals. But after joining theatre and working here crowning their own community, they still have the hope of practising their culture and being introduced as what they are. They perform in their original Orao language, which makes them confident that through theatre they can speak and show mainstream society that they are still here and can establish their culture.



### Shaotal, Bonua and Koch children's theatre: children from other tribal communities

These children's theatre groups are from respective tribal communities and have been reached by long-term workshops with separate production for each of them, focusing on these children's own culture and wishes. There are two Shaotal groups in Setabganj and Dinajpur. Each group produced their own production and performed at the national children's theatre festival.

### Kora and Garo communities: tribal

These two communities are new in our network. It is an astonishing fact that there are only 15 families existing in the Kora community. No one knows what will happen when these 15 families will be no more on this earth. The heritage of the community is at stake. We hope to work with them like the other tribal groups and save their heritage.

### Dhangor children's theatre group: children from a group of 'sweepers'

This group is based in Rajshahi. They are almost like the untouchable children. We have been working with them, and after several classes and month-long workshops we made productions where the children performed with great zeal.

### Specially deprived children's group: children living in brothels

These are the children of prostitutes. Considering the social norms of the country it is not hard to foresee that they lead a life completely detached from society in general where there is no place for them. In a word they are "outcasts". Such a group of children performed in the National Children's Theatre Camp in 2008. We want to include this group of under-privileged children in our network so that we can change the thinking of people about these innocent children and stop them suffering from something they are not accountable for.

All the above mentioned children's groups have their different ideas and desires but their expectation is almost the same – to be accepted by everyone and to get the basic rights they deserve. Poverty is a crisis for all these tribal communities and other slum dwelling children. With the help of the Children's Voice project we are moving towards fulfilling their dreams, but with limited resources the improvement will also be limited. If we want to bring about change



Photo: Raihan

Children of Bonua community performing their history, 2008.



Photo: Raihan

Koch children's theatre group, 2008.

on a larger scale, we have to work more. To save these children and make them assets for the nation, everyone including government, local authorities, schools, teachers and parents, as well as NGOs, and other concerned institutions, have to be aware and work together.



Photo: Rakhal

*Performance of "Street boys" by Rakhal repertory in Dhaka 2007.*

Only then will the ultimate change come. To bring this change we are making the best out of what we have.

Five years with the Children's Voice project gave us strength to face the challenge and move towards our goal. We continuously need this type of support for longer periods of time to make a better place for our children. Though we could only meet a small part of the huge amount of needs and demands, the project work has shown a strong impact on the groups of children we have reached. But to continue the changes and improvements and make our work sustainable for the future we would hope for more support and assistance in our struggle for reaching out over the country.

We want no children left under-privileged. Because children are the most valuable assets we have and if we leave a large part of the population in the dark we cannot expect the nation to move towards progress.

Rakhal is a theatre organisation in Dhaka with a broad field of activities that have developed in cooperation with Children's Voice and in connection with the adult theatre group that has existed since 1981. Rakhal's core team, People's Repertory Theatre, works under three headings, School Theatre Program (STP), Theatre for the Children (TFC) and Theatre for the Kids (TFK). The school theatre programme incorporates both teachers and parents in its activities. The organisation advocates secularisation and addresses children from different social environments. In addition to this, performances and activities for amateur children's groups gain national dissemination via a well-developed network, and contact at international level also exists.

Liaquat Ali Lucky - B.A (Hon) M.A (In English literature from Dhaka University, 1978), actor, director, playwright, organiser, designer and trainer involved in cultural activities since childhood in 1964. He has acted in 55 plays, directed 65 productions, is secretary general of the PTA (Assitej & IATA national centre of Bangladesh), elected president of Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation, executive director of RAKHAL, and is the receiver of several awards from Bangladesh and India including the gold medal from Dhaka University in 1994. He has participated in and conducted many national and international theatre festivals, seminars, workshops and congresses, and played one of the pioneer roles in development of theatre for children & youth and adult theatre in the country.

*“My journey with the Children’s Voice project changed my perception of theatre as a whole”*

*Sohini Sengupta*

Well, the truth is that I, for the most of my adult actor life, have looked at children’s theatre as something secondary or even perhaps inferior to ‘real’ theatre activity. It was something that you did in your free time (if you had the time) for the development of underprivileged children! You held workshops where you told them how theatre could improve their lives and at the end of all the fun and games a small production was staged where the children acted, their parents came and clapped and everyone went home happy. Most of these children would never take up theatre seriously, would never give due respect to this great art and so I did not see what the purpose was behind this kind of children’s theatre activity, except for the fact that these projects brought in the much needed funds for the ‘real’ adult theatre activity. For me real theatre activity was about the gifted, beautiful and talented actor taking centre-stage, performing in front of an intellectually elite adult audience, showing off his or her subtle acting skills. The plays had to be classics for which rehearsals went on for days. The actors had to be star performers celebrated in their field. The performance took place at 6.30 in the evening, the audience came in and sat on the plush seats, talked in whispers, the red curtain went up and the star walked out. If you did the job well you could be assured of a big review in the leading daily the next day. Children’s theatre was just not my scene!

And so it was with mighty reluctance that I participated in the Children’s Voice project initiated by Swedish ITI with funding from Sida, and travelled to Stockholm and Göteborg in 2002. My parents had been there earlier and were insisting that I go there and see for myself the kind of theatre activity they had. I was not ready to believe this for my parents were too emotional and easily impressed by anything. Of course they would be good. They had so much more money! Anyway, the fun of travelling to a foreign country was what took me there.

My journey changed my perception of theatre as a whole. Here they had a totally different attitude towards children’s theatre. It was not the direct involvement of the child as the actor but rather the adult actor performing for the child. This made all the difference. When you are performing for a child you can be sure of a totally honest response. If you mess up the act, well, you’ve had it! And if you are good with what you do, you have a completely loyal audience for the rest of your life.

*A few details that I remember from my visit:*

We travelled to the different children’s theatre groups. They all had their own performing space with a separate make up room, an office, a rehearsal room, the latest equipment. All of this was well cared for. The actors were present from the morning and they participated in the entire theatre process, managed the office, rehearsed, made new plays happen, performed and even prepared the meals for lunch. The entire team sat down to eat together. It was an entire theatre community being responsible for the work that they did.

I particularly remember going to Tittut. This is a small, very small,



Photo: Nandhan

*Sohini Sengupta, Kolkata 2005.*

theatre house where I had gone to watch a performance about Sven and his grandfather. We had to take off our shoes and wear blue plastic booties so as not to dirty the little wooden theatre room. About 30 little children had come along with their parents (mothers mostly). Some as small as 3 years old. They were very enthusiastic about the play. We went in and sat on the wooden floor of the performing area and the magic started to happen. The players transported me into the world of Sven and I was laughing and crying and was a 3 year old myself. Here I am reminded of an observation that I made. During the performance the children interrupted to ask questions and the performers were not disturbed. They willingly answered every little query that the child had. This became a part of the theatre process. I remember Stephen Hawking in his book 'A Brief History of Time' saying that adults answer the questions of children mostly with a shrug for they do not know the answers themselves. You have to have tremendous confidence in your act to stop midway and answer the child why you are doing what you are doing. If you are not confident you can surely lose your lines and your temper as is the case with most self-obsessed actors performing for the adult audience!

I also remember sitting in at one of their rehearsals where the actor tirelessly went on rehearsing just one scene for about four hours. It was about a fox and the actor could not get the walk right. So he kept on till he finally did. I sat and watched and thought well he surely gets paid a lot to be able to keep on like this. Surprisingly, it is not a whole lot!

We had also visited a larger theatre house where the audience was a mixed young crowd in their teens. It was a totally different experience. The play was about the immigrant crisis. As we entered the hall really loud grunge music was playing and the atmosphere was that of a disco. A beautiful young girl was acting and she was also singing the songs live on stage. It was like a rock performance. A guy from the audience said something lewd to her. She finished her act gracefully and at the end of the performance waited near the entrance for the guy to come out. When he did she asked him quietly why he had teased her during the performance. The guy was taken aback did not know how to answer this girl. Wow! At that instant I fell in love with her. Her strength, dignity and responsibility came from her confidence in her act and from her love and deep concern for her audience. She did not just let it go.

It was with these memories that I returned to Kolkata and started rehearsing for *Dulia* (directed by Swatilekha Sengupta). The play is



Photo: Nandilar

*Sohini Sengupta, Goutam Halder and Debsankar Halder in "Nocturnal Visitors", Kolkata 2008.*

about an old milk-woman who is carrying three pots of milk for her grandfather, her parents, her husband, children and grandchildren. On her way she meets small children and eventually she gives them all the milk from her three pots. The play is about relationships based on love. It is about finding your own family, an extended family, in the world. *Dulia* was made as part of our project for small children who came accompanied by their parents. Later the parents returned with their friends to become children themselves. The play was also performed in front of a Swedish audience, a Chinese audience and of course everywhere in India. It was always performed in Bengali. But *Dulia* was a huge success. Something had changed in my performance. I was performing for children all the time which made me more imaginative, tolerant and most importantly more loving. I connected to my audience in a different way than I had done before. I was no longer this star actor standing at a distance from the audience and showing off my skills. I had my full concentration on the act alone and not on projecting my own self.

I have learnt my most important acting lessons as part of this project. I have tested them time and again for all my performances (even those for the adult crowds) and they have never failed.

### *If you are performing for children:*

You have to really use your imagination and your performance has to be of high quality because children are not fooled!

You have to be loving and understanding but never sympathetic for children have a lot of dignity.

You can almost always expect an honest response to your act. It can be brutal at times for children yawn and fall asleep if you are bad! And if you are good you have a loyal admirer for the rest of your acting career.

By playing in front of the child you are actually building for yourself an initiated and sensitive adult audience. I believe this wholeheartedly. In our time, which is so dependent on television and other forms of entertainment, one has to try and build theatre into young lives. It has to be a conscious effort.

The children who take up theatre (whether as actors, backstage artists or audience) grow up to be more socially responsible because they are constantly interacting with each other. My father often says that you can practice almost all other forms of fine arts all by yourself. Theatre is something that you can never do alone. There must be another person interacting with you. It is this quality which makes it the most powerful tool of social communication. I can go on listing for the list is endless.

Though I joined Nandikar as a child of three and grew up here in the team itself, it took me a long while and a Children's Voice project to put me back on the right track. For I realise that somewhere down the line I was doing theatre just for myself. My small moments of glory. Maybe I am still doing that but I can now look at theatre as something larger than myself. I am just another spoke in the wheel. The child who comes to watch me, love me, boo me, join in with the process with me will take this art forward into eternity.

Sohini Sengupta has been in Nandikar since she was three years old, playing bit parts or replacing artists who failed to turn up. In 1996 she played her first major role with developments from then on. After playing a schizophrenic in the movie Paromitar Ekdin she received the President of India's award in 2000. In 2008 she received the Sangeet Natak Academy Youth Award for the most talented artist on stage below 35 years of age in India (female). She is a graduate in English literature and also a teacher of English by profession. She says she learnt to realise that in order to survive in the theatre community you have to keep doing well for there is endless competition and time runs out fast.

*“This conceptual clarity and willingness is our pride, our gain...”*

*Reflections from three actresses in Khulna, Bangladesh, on their five years' work with Children's Voice*

*Notes taken down and translated by Zohurul Islam*

*Tuku Biswas*

### **On experiences in working as trainer for the children's theatre groups**

When I started working with Rupantar in 2001 I knew nothing but a little bit of dancing that I learnt through looking at TV programmes. I have been determined to perform well as instructed by the organisation to prove my capabilities. I have progressed fast in learning and adapting theatre techniques. I think I have crossed more than half of the way towards success as a performer.

I was perplexed when entrusted with the responsibilities of working with children due to the fact that to work with children one has to behave like a child, think like a child. However, the first training for the children's group at Norail Government Primary school was very difficult. But gradually I developed my capacity as theatre trainer with the assistance of my fellow trainers and training from different theatre groups/trainers coming from Sweden from whom I have learnt various processes and techniques for working with children. Now I work with children using what I have learnt and using my experience.

We select a theme for the children's theatre team at the school. The teachers arrange 30–35 students and we select 20 out of them. In the selection process we also keep the students who give their opinions. As such the school team is developed with the real deserving candidates having aptitude for cultural performance.

Regarding theatre production, we hear stories from the group. They usually go for stories in their text book, giving them the opportunity to memorise the texts better and helping them towards good results in exams. A draft script is developed with the school theatre groups. The students select music, dance, set-up, songs etc. for the production. Thus production development is completed with the free and spontaneous participation of the children.

### Changes and development while working with the children

At the initial stage, the children were very shy, they were afraid of speaking and expressing themselves. They were even found to be afraid of their relatives and any outsiders. They were found shy of talking to the teachers and answering the teachers on their own educational subjects. They did not know how to express something nicely.

Through drama performance they developed confidence that when they could express themselves well in dialogues they would also be able to speak well in all affairs. The children developed their own drama scripts, selected songs and dances. In developing a song they took time initially but later on they could do it easily, even create one song in one day.

The students are devoted to their school lessons, going to school regularly and getting better results in examinations.

Impact on the women in the local community as a result of drama performance

Firstly I should speak of myself. Many people made comments on me wondering could this little girl perform. Later they were amazed by my performance and made comments that if this little girl can perform other girls will also be able to perform. The girls at school were encouraged to come for performance. The parents, in the beginning, did not like to permit their daughters to be involved in drama performance on the grounds that the girls should not take part in anything outside their homes. We tried to explain the situation through the children, and their parents were brought to see their performance. The performances made them realise the fact that drama performance is not harmful to the community but is beneficial to all. They realised the practical effect and they allowed their daughters to take part in drama. In one drama the theme was “No work, no gain, to gain something you need to work hard” and this got many ordinary people returning to work for betterment of livelihood. This drama brought changes in some people who were idle and doing nothing and they started working for livelihood earnings for the family.

### Theatre education in a Bangladeshi perspective

The way we train children is different from the teaching process of children at school. The students are afraid of the teachers. They are even beaten by the teachers. But we teach in a very cordial and friendly environment making them good friends, making the chil-



Photo: Rupantar

*Akhterunnessa Nisha, Tiku Rani Biswas and Namita Mallick in a dance performance, 2008.*

dren positive and enjoying working with us. The great Poet Rabindranath Tagore said, “If the education is not pleasurable that is not practical education”. The teachers teach as per curriculum but we teach them in a pleasant and favourable environment being mixed up with the children as friends through games, exercise, and good behaviour. The children like our process. What we do in 14 days is never achieved by the teachers.



*The actresses at the time of interview in Khulna, 2009.*

Some of the teachers are adapting our process and teach in a more favourable atmosphere and attract the attention of the children. This needs to be continued in all schools for the overall development of the children.

### *Namita Mallick*

#### **Experiences from visiting and performing in Sweden**

I have been working with Rupantar for last eight years and six months. At the start I did not have much experience and began learning. With the Children's Voice project I was initially shaky. In Sweden I performed and was praised by the audience that encouraged me. I saw a number of performances by children that also inspired me, thinking that when these children could perform so well, then I must be able to? I thought of giving up my shyness. My confidence level was enhanced.

I also observed some performances of the adults and experienced some new techniques that I could use on returning to Bangladesh. Moreover, a number of theatre groups and experts visited Rupantar. I worked with them, something that helped me develop my skills. With such skills and experiences I worked as a theatre trainer for the Children's Voice project.

#### **Situation has changed for the girls and female performers**

Initially, there was shyness and shakiness among the girls coming to work as theatre performers for the school theatre team. They were not free to work with the boys. To remove their shyness and other difficulties in working with boys, performance was made by the Core Team of the project and the situation of how we work, boys and girls together, was also discussed. This made them realise the reality and they started working together nicely.

Now, when we go to a school we find that the girls and boys work together, dividing their specific responsibilities. Some tasks are done by boys and other tasks by girls and there is no problem.

#### **Problems facing girls wanting to join a theatre team**

A girl was told by people in the community that if she joined a theatre group, her family would be abandoned by the community since performing drama and music is a sin. We discussed with her parents and her teachers and explained the need for theatre and we asked them to look at our programme. We were successful and a show was arranged for the parents, teachers, school management committee, and local social leaders. Having observed the performance they accepted their mistakes. They were able to realise the fact that there is no difference between boys and girls, and girls can also contribute to society.

#### **Social and mental barriers facing women working with theatre**

When I started this profession, there was a hindrance from my family. My father was a Yatra (traditional popular theatre) performer but felt that acting was not good for women. I tried to convince him of my firm determination to work with music and theatre. I worked with Rupantar and showed my performances to my parents and made them realise their misconception. Now I face no obstacles from my family. Secondly, I felt mental pressure from working with my fellow team members, wondering what the others and my relatives would say when I work with boys. However, through the course of time I could overcome all such barriers. My trip to Sweden also helped me in this respect, where I saw their dress, behaviour and attitudes and I tried to change myself to adjust as per need and time.

### **Relevance of the Children's Voice project in a Bangladesh perspective**

I think the project is very essential for our country. Our school curriculum has eight subjects but three of them are usually not given due importance viz. music, painting and physical exercise.

Complete development of children is not possible through book knowledge alone. They need to develop in a standard educational environment that includes creativity. Such subjects like art and culture can ensure such creativity in students. Music means the combination of song, dance and instrumental music, and all these three aspects need to be inculcated in children. We try to achieve this. But most of the teachers do not understand the need for it. They seem to be unaware and inexperienced on the matter. However, as these subjects are included in the curriculum set by the government, the teachers and school authorities should consider it a regular feature.

*Akhtarunnessa Nisha*

### **The process of becoming a female manager**

It was important that I received a lot of support during my work with the organisation. Firstly, I gathered some knowledge, process, tactics and technical know-how working with a number of teams and individuals coming over from Sweden who conducted training and workshops. This created the scope for me to work effectively with the school theatre education programme working with the school theatre teams. Moreover, the experiences and skill developed through such training further helped me to work as a manager of RIFT and I can perform my jobs with ease and I am result-oriented. This I have learnt during the regular regional meetings and project planning workshops.

### **Hindrances in working with theatre in schools**

Religious fundamentalism was one of the main hindrances in working with theatre. Secondly, I found some gaps between the teachers and school management committees who also felt pressure from people in the surrounding community. In the initial stage we had to waste time facing questions such as why did we come? What will happen with the work? But now the attitude of the teachers, school management committees and community is changed.

### **Demands on the future work of theatre in schools**

The process in which we work in schools and with children, has

successfully removed shakiness and shyness from children and they now go to school with more enthusiasm. This created keenness on project activities in neighbouring schools with them also wanting such activities in their schools too. They wanted students in their schools to attend more regularly, become attentive to studies and show better results in examinations. This demand is appreciable and the credit goes to the Children's Voice project. However, greater numbers of cultural teachers are needed to be included in schools. There are many grassroots cultural organisations and workers who are gaining the scope to flourish but their latent talent remains dormant. This is a prime issue in Bangladesh. Their professionalism needs to be developed to help support their livelihood. In a Bangladesh perspective, this is essential.

### **Some examples of results obtained from this work**

A student of Norail Government Primary School took on leadership through working in the school theatre team. He developed a scout group in the school with his strong leadership ability. He left the primary school and was admitted to high school where he also became a leader.

A girl at the school named Lata also worked in the school theatre team. When we started the work she was very shy, even shy at talking to others, but she started slowly changing and did good performances in drama. After leaving the primary school she was admitted to a Madrasa. She expressed her view of developing a theatre team in the Madrasa with the girls. This conceptual clarity and willingness is our pride, our gain.

The project has created awareness in Radio Bangladesh, Khulna Centre, so that when there is a radio programme for children the authority contacts us.

The UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer – sub-district chief executive) of Dumuria expressed interest in starting school theatre activities in 10 schools and requested our assistance. He expressed his opinion of arranging musical instruments for 10 schools using the government fund.

### **On differences in gender perspectives and increase in self-esteem**

When I started working I was shy but I was able to overcome this problem. I was very shaky while working with different teams from Sweden but I did not face any problems working with them, rather I was encouraged and I developed courage within myself. The same



happened with me when I participated in regional meetings and project planning workshops (LFA). I developed the confidence of being able to work and perform at any place and with any person as well as with any type of work. I can be social with any person.

Regarding school children, I would like to give an example. We observed while working in Ranbijoypur high school that the boys and girls remained away from each other with a big gap between them. There was no cooperation between these groups. But after having implemented the Children's Voice project in the school and developing the school theatre team visible changes can be seen. The girls and boys became friendly and cooperative. The tasks are being divided among them and completed with due cooperation and discussion.

### Summary

The Children's Voice project initiated a positive demand in the community for children's theatre. Many of the schools initiated development of children's theatre teams in school that are incorporated in the project.

A lot of children's theatre workers developed their leadership to such an extent that they now develop children's theatre teams in other schools and at community level.

The children developed aptitude for learning, especially showing devotion to studies and more regular attendance, reducing the dropout rate. They show better results and are more cooperative to others and towards society. They participate in family tasks and social activities.

The performers, trainers and managers of Rupantar developed their skill and expertise through this project. Their initial shyness and worries are no longer with them. They realised the importance of children's theatre education and are willing to assist children in developing theatre groups and in other aspects.

The members of the Core Team of Rupantar and all the school theatre teams are devoted performers and committed to the well-being of the children and the nation.

*Tiku Rani Biswas* joined Rupantar in 2001 as a folk dancer. She soon became a theatre trainer after having received training on various theatre issues. She worked with the Children's Voice project from the beginning and is skilled in organising and developing children's theatre teams at school level. She has been involved in the production of children's theatre in schools and has been associated with the production of more than 15 dramas for children aimed at establishing children's rights.



*Namita Mallick* joined Rupantar in 2000 as a folk performer. She received theatre training. At present she is a senior performer and theatre trainer. As a lead singer for Pot song, she visited Sweden and since then she has been involved in the Children's Voice project. She has been involved in the production of children's theatre in schools and has been associated with the production of more than 15 dramas for children aimed at establishing children's rights.

*Akhterunnessa Nisha* joined Rupantar in 2000 as a theatre performer and developed herself in various theatre arts, including Alternative Living Theatre processes as used by Rupantar. She developed skill in theatre production and management, working as manager of Rupantar Institute of Folk Theatre (RIFT) and supporting 115 theatre workers in the organisation. She took part in various training efforts that enlarged her knowledge and experience in supporting her role as manager. Her role as manager is probably unique from a Bangladeshi perspective.



## *All God's 'chillun' need wings – in search of children's theatre*

*Nandikar's history and vision  
told by Rudraprasad Sengupta in Kolkata, May 2009*

*Syamal Bhattacharyya listened to the story and put it into print.*

In our early youth we thought though not a utopia our world could become a habitable planet with space for freedom, democracy, equality and protection as regards health, education and such other basic needs. We found the world changing for the worse; our dreams turning into mirages, or perhaps we were myopic and could not find the silver lining.

Though 'misfits' in political society we remained committed. And theatre was at hand to render our existence meaningful. Thus started our tryst with theatre. Our repeated success made us forget the larger world beyond the stage and the stalls. Yet the gnawing feeling persisted that there was something rotten in the state of this planet. True, the present was bleak. But our future? And as cultural seismographers we discovered that children are our future, and we could invest our theatre into these children. Again fresh doubts arose: did we know our children? Was doing child-centric theatre an ego trip? Were we being 'reformers' with theatre as our 'Bible'?

One thing became clear, children are by and large captives of the adult world, sometimes pampered, more often bullied. Simultaneously, we felt that theatre – rooted in values such as democracy, integration, existential multi-centeredness, concern for the present and a responsibility to the future, search for creativity, liberty and joy – could indeed be useful to children. The art of living or theatre actions, both needed dreams, plans and so on. But chance is also important (principles of uncertainty!). By chance, during a flight the education secretary, govt. of India, an admirer of our theatre, read our thoughts and – lo and behold! – offered support to our theatre in schools.

### *Theatre in education: journey in schools*

We – along with guardians, teachers, governors, theatre workers – started our brainstorming; however, the crystal seed came from one

child. Again, Tagore, as usual, was our inspiration. We realised that children love to 'spectate' and 'act'. Theatre must be a joyful recognition of their creativity and respect for their own 'centres'. During our journey into schools across our state we devised some guidelines for ourselves: "Abolition of hierarchy", "Respect for the voice of the child", "never measure their action in numerical yardsticks" and "Faith in the journey itself as a reward not the neatly packaged end-product".

We began to reach schools across the state, always learning more than we taught. Theatre lent the children a voice, a centre, and joy. And, believe it or not, our new-found little fellow-travellers became more articulate, more responsible towards school society, and scored higher points in academics too. Recognition from society came our way. Many people started to believe in theatre in schools; but it wasn't roses all the way!

Many guardians remained suspicious, many teachers deep down remained status quoists. Even the best within the 'system' accepted theatre only in small doses; theatre should remain 'extra-curricular', never 'co-curricular'. Hence, with its limited recognition, theatre in schools continued to be somewhat uncertain.

Yet we noticed some of the children starting to flutter their wings and a few even began to fly. Hope and pragmatism prodded us to continue in Schools.



Photo: Nandikar

*Rudraprasad Sengupta in discussion with children during a school visit in Kolkata, 2004.*

*In search of children's theatre:  
beyond the middle class, beyond the formal school*

As child-theatre workers, we now possessed greater skills, firmer faiths. Again a chance-meeting with the Ford Foundation India offered us the opportunity to enlarge our activities at multiple levels. Theatre started working with slum-dwellers, pavement-dwellers, visually handicapped children.

*With pavement-dwelling children*

The children in the formal school system we knew, but the psyche of the children constricted by the 'dinginess' of the slums or 'too-open' existence on the pavements, come sun or shower, was a different ball game. It took aeons to discover their fairy tales (not the Snow White genre). We knew not their nocturnal space, their dreams (often nightmares) or their lack of dreams when they could not have a wink of sleep because of water-logging in their street. Hobsbawm described our century as being one of 'displacement' with each of us being a 'displaced' person in one sense or another. Yet could we really perceive the agony of these children when the Police Halla-party (In Kolkata parlance, police-operations to evict protesters or squatting of refugees on pavements are known as Halla-parties) threw them out almost every third night to ensure cleaner pavements! We met the pavement-dwelling children at Dr. Jack Pregor's Calcutta [Kolkata] Rescue. The first day was memorable. Though Dr. Pregor's outfit was clinically clean, some of our colleagues, afraid of contracting disease from their have-not looks, felt extremely embarrassed when asked to share breakfast from their plates. For months no clue as to where and how to 'begin'. A road map was missing though friendship began to grow. Once they had a few skills and the vestige of a mechanical discipline, we got these children to mirror their own sub-human existence in the name of theatre! They did it skilfully, but they felt no joy! It took time to realise that naturalistic theatre or theatre verité, for them, was a cruel reminder of their sordid existence.

*Story of Halla*

It was both fun and fright to work with these children who were 'displaced' with no 'home' yet had greater space than any of us; who had more cunning than the adults yet were as angelic as children!

Chance informed us about their most favourite game: converting an abandoned car – with nothing inside, just a shell of a motor

car – into a dream chariot which could carry them to Mumbai and Madagascar and to the heavens above! Again, we were often amazed at the 'skill' with which these children negotiated their periodic routine eviction. As soon as the Halla-party (the police team) – responsible for evicting these 'displaced' pavement-dwellers to keep the city clean – would swoop to sweep them out, the children – with their seniors, make-shift shanties and meagre possessions – would 'vanish' in a jiffy. The moment these sweepers turned their back, all these children again in a jiffy, would reconstruct their homes (we wish the town planners in the developing 'third' world could emulate these skills).

A gem of a play – Halla – evolved out of these metaphors. Every day with this empty automobile they would journey into 'everywhere'; one as the pilot, the others becoming willing passengers. Once of the children had carefully put his 'responsibility', a six-month-old sibling, in a corner inside the car. The Halla-party came, along with a new menace a crane. All the children – excepting that six-month-old – fled while operation cleansing was on. Amidst the debris, the car – with its sole passenger – hooked to the crane was



Photo: Nandikar

*Children performing in Kolkata, 2007.*

being taken away! As the Halla-party departed, the children came back to find their dream car gone. Again, with their usual reconstructive skills, in a jiffy, they improvised their habitat. After a while they acquired a long bamboo pole, began to imagine this as their new chariot and their dream trips continued. As the curtain came down everyone felt, however momentarily, these children did fly.

This play gave them joy, confidence, their own fairy tales and a popularity in the cultural circuit of our city. But their childhood was always so short-lived, most of them growing into adults in unusual haste. Of these, there are at least three whose names we cannot help mentioning, Najma, Rani and Mujahid.

#### *The tales of Najma, Rani and Mujahid*

Najma was an extremely good actress. Her prettiness prompted her guardians to give her hand in marriage at the age of 11. Najma defied. As a result she lost her shelter. We rescued her and got her admitted to an orphanage. Here she began to get formal schooling but was forbidden from joining theatre.

Rani was sprightly, a bundle of energy. She could dance, sing and act well. All of a sudden she disappeared and came after a period of 8 months with sunken sad eyes, a mother at the age of 13, her new-born in tow!

Mujahid was a born actor. His name and fame began to spread. His photos featured both in print and electronic media. Coming to know about this stardom of Mujahid, his father – who had earlier left his mother and settled in Delhi with a new wife – came to Kolkata to take him as a potential milch cow to Delhi. Mujahid was made to work as a shoeshine and, like thousands of others, Mujahid vanished! We do not know if Mujahid ever became a Slum Dog Millionaire! However, theatre indeed provided all three the wings to fly, though very temporarily.

#### *Children in slums – another version*

Slum-story was a different story. These children came from middle-class stock without its material resources. This time we avoided the pretentiousness of acting as their 'saviours'. While rehearsing KING'S ILLNESS, we permitted them to doll-up: the joy we saw on their faces was unbelievable.

A new problem arose as our friendship made them believe that we were miracle workers; they wanted us to play the role of a welfare society. Here, too, their childhood was so short-lived. One after

another, children like Radheshyam and Ananda were sucked into the adult world. Mamoni at 11 had to be ready to act the surrogate mother to her 8 year old sibling Sonamoni, and ready to act as the deputy to her mother, a maid servant serving 13 households! Sometimes political bias in some guardians – who believed that theatre was apolitical – caused the disappearance of some beautiful children from our theatre journey.

We were no Hercules capable of cleaning these Augean stables! The pain – while watching the dropping out, the depletion all around, the sudden inexorable waste of so much potential – was excruciating. Yet, each of our visits was a kind of home-coming. The little friends – so potent yet so frail – were eagerly waiting for us. And each day made us feel like mother-birds trying to teach their fledglings how to flutter in the empty space called theatre and begin to fly!

#### *Blind opera – theatre with visually handicapped*

That Nandikar, by now, was acclaimed as a champion of Children's Theatre was proved when Calcutta [Kolkata] Blind School Authorities commemorated their centenary with celebrations and requested Nandikar to undertake a theatre journey with their visually handicapped children. Confidently (overconfidently?) we jumped into the fray.

But how could we get them to do theatre? These sightless children communicated, not frontally, but side-wise; their body language was neutral, conversations sing-song with no signs of emotions; our ego took a beating.

As patience humbled us, we discovered their points of strength: astonishing strength and ability in senses other than sight, unfailing sense of musicality, perceptions and confidence about any space once they got a measure of it, and, above all, their proud refusal to be treated as underdogs – all these were good enough to provide both the theme and form for their own kind of theatre.

Now we had the road map. Bonded with love and affections, we began production of HOWEVER FAR WE WENT. The theme was their own quest and pride; the style was musical, the choreography was initiated and motivated with sound inputs. Thoroughly prepared and given a measure of the performance space, a theatre event happened which was a lifetime's experience both for us and these visually handicapped children as they flew and flew that evening.

Evidently theatre could bring configuration to their physical gestures, empower their voices by connecting them to their bodies, hone their other senses much more with theatre games etc. Theatre could become an active input into their education. And theatre could make them confident and proud! Zealously we tried to persuade the authorities to incorporate theatre into their syllabus. They were cold!

Troubles surfaced soon when a movement by students started against some abusive teachers and a number of administrative staff members. It transpired that the leadership of this movement was largely provided by the students participating in our theatre process. The authorities realised that this theatre was engendering truth, courage, articulation and commitment to the community. So cleverly they precipitated discontinuity in our theatre actions.

However, afterwards, some of our theatre colleagues with their experience of working with the blind floated the idea of Blind Opera. We became a sort of pioneers of theatre by the blind. Soon enough, though, discussion arose whether this venture was exploitative or truly committed to the cause. But that is another story.

True, we could not ensure their childhood, but we could give them a fleeting taste of childhood that never was to be theirs. By now Nandikar came to be known as a nationally significant pioneer in children's theatre.

In 1997 our funding from the Ford Foundation was running out. Usual theatre-in-education activities continued. Full-scale children's theatre stopped. A lull followed for some years.

### *Children's Voice project*

Again chance favoured us. During 2002–03, Nandikar was included in the preparatory process for the Children's Voice project.

In 2004 five consecutive years of the Children's Voice project began. In December 2008, the activities halted. We are as yet too immersed in the hangover or aftermath; truly objective analysis would require a little settling down. However, the highlights are unmistakably clear.

A steady supply of adequate funds for five uninterrupted years enabled us to :

1. Find freedom from fear of uncertainty and discontinuity.
2. Feel courage to assess and plan.
3. Find strength to reach out to wider sections with qualitative and quantitative improvement.

4. Acquire infrastructural inputs such as a big Tata Sumo (multi-utility vehicle) and a clear air conditioned space at Federation Hall. We never had this kind of place before. A space good enough for workshops, Sunday sessions, meetings, regional meetings and LFA sessions, making us feel taller.
5. Raise a professional ensemble for children's Theatre – Nandikar's professional ensemble for children which can boast,
  - A combined team of trained young and older people.
  - Regular productions and performances of children-friendly plays all over the state and the national scene and, occasionally, international festivals resulting in a growing popularity – though to a small degree – of children's theatre. A movement seemed to have started.

### *Some benefits from working within the project*

#### *The centre for children and young people: unique in its kind*

Four groups in the age groups of 5 to 9 and 9+ to 15+ regularly assemble on Sundays and holidays to taste freedom, joyful creativity, democratic values etc and evolve beautiful theatre good enough for spectators of all kinds.

Secondly, the guardians of these children – as co-partners – have started searching for an understanding of their role in the blossoming of their kin.



Photo: Nandikar

*Performance of "Andharmoni cave" by Nandikar repertory in Kolkata, 2006.*

Thirdly, some of these children, now almost 17 or 18, have started to act as a bridge between adult theatre and children's theatre. They are now trainee-cum-trainers.

#### *Monitoring, regional meetings and LFA project planning*

In our earlier projects there was either the usual bureaucratic overseeing or sometimes too much freedom. In the Children's Voice project, regular annual – often more frequent – assessments ensured advance planning for continuity, diversity, quality, proliferation and a search for new directions.

#### *National and international networking*

This is a new concept. Planned networking with fellow-travelling local groups, regional and international partners widened our areas of activities, initiated a consistent learning process from each other; this also generated the crystal faith that we are not alone.

Nandikar had stood to gain from networking during the years with the Swedish theatre personalities and fellow-travelling groups from Bangladesh.

These interactions have brought many new insights and innovations for us, for example our work with a silent theatre group from Sweden who helped us greatly in designing the technique of our theatre work with the hearing and speech-impaired children of a school. Further exponents of the clown and mask tradition of acting, from Sweden, greatly helped in creating a new form of acting. From Bangladesh, we emulated the use of *potgan*, a very popular, traditional performing art of rural Bengal combining storytelling with paintings, music and dance.

#### *Advocacy was a major fruit bearing agenda*

- a) *The Government of India introduced theatre in the school curriculum for the Central School Board. The NCERT is currently engaged in preparing the relevant syllabus; the committee concerned has Nandikar's representation.*
- b) *The state government took the initiative in organising a Children's Theatre Festival, which was recognition of its acceptance of the need and importance of children's theatre.*
- c) *A more positive response from the state government was seen in the initiative it has taken to constitute an Academy for Children and Young.*

#### *Both adults and children in performative roles*

A major feature in our Children's Voice project has been the inclusion of both adults and children in performative roles.

We believed that – simultaneous with children's theatre by adults – the children could perform for themselves. This ensured they could be both spectators and actors at once! We could say we had taken the right decision.

#### *Conclusion or whatever!*

The project Children's Voice has achieved things in good measure. An adult ensemble for children happened; a 200-strong children's ensemble with a repertoire of half a dozen plays has entered its fourth year; there is now a collection of plays, training manuals and CDs; research-based monographs have been generated and are being disseminated; networks began to happen across borders and oceans; advocacy for children's theatre has started; Nandikar has earned pioneer status.

But this Project has concluded. We wish this would continue for some time more to encourage consolidation and further proliferation! We are afraid the quality and scale shall certainly take some jolt. However, we are determined that the journey must not stop and children must be gifted the wings to fly! Only a small distance has been traversed; we have miles and miles to go!

We began chancily, let us work and keep waiting for chances till the end of our time!



Photo: Nandikar

*Debsankar Halder at the time of school theatre training in Kolkata, 2007.*

*Nandikar* is an independent group with a fifty-year history in Kolkata, West Bengal. It is well known in India and has toured internationally. The group's activities include not only an adult and family repertoire, but also performances for children and youth, drama training with school children and street children, drama activities with and among prostitutes, pioneer activities within theatre for blind young people, and communication training for teachers and other groups of workers. Its characteristic artistic drama language is the use of bodily, visual and musical modes of expression. On top of this it also has broad social engagement with ideological emphasis on human rights and gender equality issues.

*A personal comment by Syamal Bhattacharyya*

*“The theatre journey with school children improved my class teaching”*

In the year 1989 I was invited by Nandikar to a meeting for theatre for school children through one of my common friends. I was overwhelmed in the meeting. This meeting was like an eye-opener for me. It changed my attitude towards my students completely. I had been searching for such an approach since the starting point of my career as a teacher. Seeing my interest and enthusiasm or thanks to the vast experience of Rudra Prasad Sengupta, I do not know, I was accepted by the Nandikar team for their children's theatre.

The first phase was how to approach the children, what should be the syllabus, training of the trainer etc. This was prepared by several brainstorming sessions and ultimately we prepared a syllabus for children's theatre and a guideline for us also. We decided that these guidelines should be strictly followed and the syllabus to be of flexible nature.

My daughter was then five years old and I practiced the syllabus with my daughter and found the syllabus very effective for children. Since 1989 I have been working with Nandikar in their children's theatre.

With Nandikar I was present in at least 250 different schools situated in cities, deep rural interiors, depressed industrial locations, suburban areas and institutions in sub-culture situations too. Everywhere though the situation is different in each school but the result is always the same, i.e. joy. I have learnt more than what I taught them. Everywhere I found the students more articulate, more responsible to the school society and scored greater points in academics, too. But that is not the final result. I myself became more articulate, became more self-confident, and as a result of applying these theatre techniques my popularity as a teacher improved to a large extent.

Rudraprasad Sengupta is a teacher, author, cultural critic, actor and director of nationally reputed Indian theatre group Nandikar, which he joined in the beginning of the 1960s. He has directed a large number of plays for the group and since the 1970s he is the leader of Nandikar. For the last twenty years he has worked for children's theatre and has received top national awards and other accolades as well as having kept a sustained exposure to the international arena with dialogues and performances.

Syamal Kumar Bhattacharyya is a teacher of chemistry. His love for theatre has grown since his school days. He has worked with Nandikar for the past 20 years in their children's theatre activities. He is currently a school headmaster.

## *Children's theatre as a tool for development*

*Karin Markensten*

Development is not only a question of increased income or resources. Poverty is multifaceted. One important aspect of poverty is lack of power, the lack of influence in society and lack of basic human rights.

The purpose of the Swedish development cooperation is to reduce poverty by offering tools for the poor so they themselves are able to change their living conditions. From this point of view theatre can be a tool for development.

Art and culture, as for example theatre, can contribute to the democratic development of societies. Good theatre can be a source of inspiration. Theatre can stimulate engagement, it can be a heart and a mind opener. Good theatre triggers alternative thinking and can open new perspectives. In a good theatre performance you can identify yourself with other people. You train your capacity to reflect and to analyse as well as sometimes developing your dreams. We need good art to develop our minds.

The Swedish development cooperation has the perspective of the poor. This means that when Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) supports theatre programmes, these programmes should benefit the poor. Poor people shall be the users that should be in focus and they shall be those who benefit. With good theatre as a tool, poor people could be strengthened to take part in the democratic development of their society.

### *Children's Theatre programmes – two components*

In societies with extensive poverty children are often those who suffer most. In many of these societies governmental schools do not apply modern teaching models, and hierarchic methods are often used. It is very rare that art and culture directed specifically at children and young people are created in these societies.

All theatre programmes supported by Sida and directed at children and youth (unfortunately not many) work with two components: professional performances and drama workshops, for and together with children and young people. This is not a Sida invention. The few theatre companies that also direct their professional work at children work almost without exception with these two components. The professional theatre workers have understood the need for this combination.

The 'Children's Voice' theatre programme also works with these two components. It aims to establish a basis for professional theatre for children in a few regions in India and Bangladesh. Such professional children's theatre did not exist before the programme started. The participating professional theatre organisations work with long lasting drama workshops for and together with children and young people. This way of working was also practised before the support from Sida started. But it is important to notice that before the Sida-supported programme started, only one of the participating theatre organisations, Nandikar in Kolkata, aimed with their workshops to strengthen the children's and young people's capacity to express themselves – and to strengthen their capacity to speak up, to take part in discussions, to interfere in conflicts etc, in short to become active in the future in democratic processes. The drama workshops were not, according to Nandikar, looked upon as a nice hobby (which they of course can be). They were looked upon as a method to achieve change, an impact, on the participating children and young people.

### *Mid-term review Children's Voice programme*

In 2005, at mid-term in the Children's Voice programme, Sida asked me to follow it up, to investigate what had been done compared to what was planned for, and to look at the results, qualitative and quantitative, achieved so far. The local owners of the programme were visited, i.e. the four professional theatre organisations, Rupantar working in the Khulna areas, Rakhal in and outside Dhaka, Nandikar in Kolkata and its neighbourhoods and Rangayana in Mysore and some other parts of Karnataka state. Together with the organisations I visited some of their activities and I had discussions with about 200 teachers, parents, headmasters and school authorities about the possible impact on the participating children from the programme activities.

Most of the interviews were carried out in groups of 15–20 peo-





Photo: Rupantar

School children looking at theatre by Rupantar in Khulna, 2008.

ple, but also individual interviews were made. The common attitude was that the theatre programme with its two components was useful for the children. Especially the drama workshops were of much interest. Teachers and headmasters witnessed a better learning climate at schools. The children took more active part in the classes. Many times their marks became higher. Another positive result, and maybe not expected, was that the new and more active participation by the students in the classes also affected the teachers and made them change their teaching towards more interactive methods. This had also resulted in drama training by the professional theatre organisations for teachers.

### *Twenty-five per cent higher self-esteem*

Another example is Theatre Day productions/TDP in Gaza. It is a theatre company and training institute. It is a large organisation with about 30 employees, almost all of them trained by TDP. TDP has since it started in 1995 had close collaboration with the Gaza Ministry of Education and the Education Department of the United Nations (UNWRA). Besides the daily professional performances at their theatre house in Gaza city for school classes and their teachers, TDP also works intensively with outreach programmes all over the Gaza strip where children and youth are trained in drama workshops after school. In Gaza, as in all the occupied Palestinian territories,

children and young people live in an extreme conflict atmosphere caused by the occupation. Life is tough, normal living conditions are rare. According to TDP, good professional theatre performances dealing with daily issues for Gaza children can give relief and support long-term processes. The purpose of the drama training is to give a sustainable impact. TDP combines the two different ways of working with the children to achieve as good result as possible.

However, since two years and not least since the last war in 2009, TDP focuses even more on the drama workshops in order to make a change for the Gaza children. Performances are still presented every day, but extra intensive work is directed at long lasting 'in depth' drama workshops with a restricted number of participants. With long lasting training TDP means at least three months of continuous training for about 60 hours.

The aim for TDP is, and has always been, to strengthen the participating children, to train them to express themselves freely, to support them in improving their self-esteem. Conflicts can be solved in other more creative ways than fights. The children should not be afraid of telling a story to others, or having opinions different from others. To be able to achieve such an impact on participating children and young people, all TDP staff has received intensive training on how to work with children in the drama workshop. All staff members have to know the purpose for the drama workshops: to support children in becoming more independent, to support them to express themselves freely.

"For us long lasting in-depth drama training means time," says TDP, "time for kids to get to know each other, to understand what drama is and how it works, to realise that it is not a test or a formal school lesson, that they have choices that we work with imagination. This takes time. Some kids don't even understand that they can take off their shoes, or laugh, or ask a question to the drama teacher. During 60 hours of a workshop, over a period of about three months, kids can change. In a once off two-hour workshop, they cannot." This is what TDP means when they say 'in-depth.'

"We do not ask kids 'what's bothering you,' or 'what's wrong with you'," TDP continues. "We begin with drama games. These are classical games designed by theatre and drama experts recognised and taught the world over. To judge our methods, one has to be a drama specialist. To achieve an impact on the participating children there is an absolute need for all the TDP trainers to know the aim for the drama."

In 2006, TDP took part in an applied research programme where

it was investigated how long lasting and ‘in-depth’ drama training together with much exposure to professional theatre affected the participating children. Could drama training be proved to have an impact on children?

Four hundred children, 10-15 years old, were involved in the research. Two hundred of them were tested with specific methods before and after drama training during four months, once a week. The other 200 constituted the control group with no drama training at all. TDP collaborated in this research programme with the Ministry of Education in Gaza. The research showed that children that had participated in long lasting drama training achieved 25% better self-esteem and creativity compared to children that had not been trained in drama.

The research was lead by the Polish researcher Adam Jagiello-Rusilowski. The measurement tools for the investigation were developed as part of his earlier PhD thesis: “Participation in Drama and Agentive Control Beliefs of Young People” at the Institute of Education at the University of Gdansk. Jagiello-Rusilowski had, when he carried out this research, a long experience of drama in social and educational contexts and from theatre for development.

### *Conclusions*

The impression from the interviews with the 200 adults in the Children’s Voice programme is that better self-esteem and independence was achieved for the participating children when they had taken part in long lasting drama training. The purpose from the very beginning for the programme regarding the drama training had been that the participating children would be able to use the training to better express themselves freely. Children’s voices should be listened to.

One example: One of the headmasters in Kolkata told me that he had since ten years worked together with Nandikar with regular and long lasting drama training after school. This school is a relatively poor private school with low fees and with poor middle class students as their main target group. Students examined from this school most often during the last few years have got surprisingly good and qualified jobs. According to the headmaster this was because the students had learned to express themselves and that was because of the drama. Today the school is known in Kolkata for its eminent results both as regards the students’ grades and also for their behaviour. Also richer families today apply for their children

to study there. When examined from this school, the chances of getting a job or going on to university studies are good.

Another example: In the rural areas outside Khulna, the teachers in a small governmental school told me about the young girl that had been very shy in primary school. She was an only child. She was clever at school, ambitious, but she did not want to take part in sports or in games. She kept to herself and had few friends. Her teachers almost forced her to take part in Rupantar’s drama workshops. The drama training helped her little by little to speak up. She developed a good creative capacity and was a more active child with much better self-esteem when she later started in secondary school some miles away from her home. This school happened to be the only secondary school which worked together with Rupantar in drama workshops. The girl therefore could continue to take part in drama training in school. But one day, after about a year, she came to her drama teacher and told her, crying, that she had to terminate her studies. Her parents wanted her to marry an older man. The girl had no right to refuse the marriage, but she asked her teacher for help. The teacher asked the girl to first make a try herself and talk to her parents. “You have learnt so much during our drama training” the drama teacher said. “You are very good at arguing your point, you always understand how other people feel and at the same time



Photo: Nandikar

*Girls in a school of Kolkata training dance with Nandikar, 2008.*

you can argue for your own opinion and what you think is right and what is wrong. Go ahead, give it a try. If you cannot manage, I will talk to the headmaster and we shall try to talk to your parents.” The girl talked to her parents herself and prevailed. She could continue her studies at secondary school. She did not marry the older man. She is now a young woman studying at university. One day she will marry someone she likes, she says. The teachers at the small governmental school were very proud of her.

There are many moving stories like this. One might think that taking part in drama workshops always creates miracles. Of course not, but sometimes they do. Art is a tool to open our minds. Good theatre can be a contribution to the fight for human rights. Schools and authorities in charge of children’s development and welfare in all parts of the world sometimes forget what good art can do for its society. I hope they will learn that good professional theatre directed at children and youth can be a good tool for children’s development. And let me remind you about the results from Dr. Jagiello-Rusilowski’s research in Gaza. Long lasting drama workshops carried out by professional theatre organisations with the purpose of strengthen the participants’ self-esteem and free expression can have a real impact! In development cooperation results are always asked for. Theatre for development gives results.

The Mid-term review made by Karin Markensten in 2005-2006 was published by Sida in 2007 as “A Review – The Regional Children’s Theatre Project in South Asia”. The publication can be downloaded/ordered from [www.sida.se/publications](http://www.sida.se/publications).

Karin Markensten has worked for the City of Stockholm at Stockholm’s Culture Administration since 1972. During the first decade she worked in the suburbs of Stockholm with the task of building up cultural activities together with the local organisations and where citizens took an active part. Later on she worked as head of the Department of Culture Support, with focus on financial support to non-institutional professional culture in Stockholm, i.e. theatre organisations, music, fine art etc. For a number of years she also worked for Sida, largely in Africa and Central America, with development cooperation focused on culture.

## APPENDIX

## Collaborators in the Children's Voice project

### SWEDEN

**Svensk Teaterunion-Swedish Centre of the ITI**  
Kaplansbacken 2  
SE-112 24 Stockholm  
Phone: +46 8 462 25 30  
Fax: +46 8 462 25 35  
e-mail: [info@teaterunionen.se](mailto:info@teaterunionen.se)  
[www.teaterunionen.se](http://www.teaterunionen.se)

Ann Mari Engel, Director Swedish ITI  
Phone: +46 8 462 25 30  
Fax: +46 8 462 25 35  
[anmmari@teaterunionen.se](mailto:anmmari@teaterunionen.se)

Christina Nygren, Project Manager/Swedish Coordinator,  
Children's Voice project  
Phone: +46 8 84 68 38  
Fax: +46 8 669 97 67  
e-mail: [cny@privat.utfors.se](mailto:cny@privat.utfors.se)

Emma Jansson, Project Assistant, Children's Voice project  
Phone: +46 8 462 25 30  
Fax: +46 8 462 25 35  
e-mail: [emma@teaterunionen.se](mailto:emma@teaterunionen.se)

Mats Eriksson, LFA Moderator  
Phone: +46 300 30825, mobile: +46 7381 76300  
e-mail: [matseriks@hotmail.com](mailto:matseriks@hotmail.com)

## Swedish International Development Cooperation

**Agency (Sida)**  
Valhallavägen 199  
SE-105 25 Stockholm  
Phone: +46 8 698 50 00  
Fax: +46 8 20 88 64  
e-mail: [sida@sida.se](mailto:sida@sida.se)  
[www.sida.se](http://www.sida.se)

2002–2007

Lillemor Lind, Senior Programme Officer, Division for Culture and Media, Department for Democracy and Social Development

FROM 2007

David Holmertz, Senior Programme Manager, Regional Team for Asia, Department for Long-term Programme Cooperation  
e-mail: [david.holmertz@sida.se](mailto:david.holmertz@sida.se)

## BANGLADESH

### Rakhal (Regenerative Action for Kaleidoscopic Human Activity & Learning)

House-20, Avenue-1, Block-F, Mirpur  
Dhaka-1216  
Phone +880 2 987 28 17, 989 09 20  
Fax +880 2 987 28 60  
[www.rakhal.org](http://www.rakhal.org)

Liaquat Ali Lucky, Executive Director  
Mobile: +880 1711 537618  
e-mail: [multigrp@bangla.net](mailto:multigrp@bangla.net)  
e-mail: [l.ali.lucky@gmail.com](mailto:l.ali.lucky@gmail.com)

### Rupantar

14/1 Farazipara Lane  
Khulna – 9100  
Phone: +880 41 731876  
Fax: +880 41 810747  
[www.rupantar.org](http://www.rupantar.org)

Swapan Guha, Chief Executive  
Mobile: +880 1711 345175  
e-mail: [swapan@rupantar.org](mailto:swapan@rupantar.org)

Rafiqul Islam Khokan, Director  
Mobile: +880 1715 018463  
e-mail: [rafiq@rupantar.org](mailto:rafiq@rupantar.org)

Kartick Roy, Coordinator  
Mobile: +880 1712 686876  
e-mail: [kartick@rupantar.org](mailto:kartick@rupantar.org)

## INDIA

### Nandikar

47/1 Shyambazar Street  
Kolkata 700 004  
Phone: +91 33 2555 4946  
Fax: +91 33 2843 0767  
e-mail: [rudraprasad\\_sg@yahoo.com](mailto:rudraprasad_sg@yahoo.com)

Rudraprasad Sengupta, President - Director  
Residence: +91 33 2350 3030  
Mobile: +91 9830 503107

### Rangayana/Rangakishora

Vinoba Road  
Mysore 570 005, Karnataka  
Phone: +91 821 251 2639  
e-mail: [rangayanamysore@yahoo.com](mailto:rangayanamysore@yahoo.com)  
[www.rangayana.org](http://www.rangayana.org)

Prasanna, Director (2002–2004)  
Chidambara Rao Jambe, Director (2004–2008)  
Chikanna, Director (2008–2009)

B. Jayashree, Director (from 2009)  
Phone: +91 821 251 2639  
e-mail: [rangayanamysore@yahoo.com](mailto:rangayanamysore@yahoo.com)

D.Yogananda, Coordinator Rangakishora  
Mobile: +91 93414 93458  
e-mail: [rangayanamysore@yahoo.com](mailto:rangayanamysore@yahoo.com)  
e-mail: [dyogananda@gmail.com](mailto:dyogananda@gmail.com)

Collaborating organisations in Southeast Asia  
may be contacted via Swedish ITI or through the local  
coordinator of each country.

#### CHINA

Chinese Theatre Association, Beijing  
Central Academy of Drama, Beijing  
Shanxi Drama Vocational College & Shanxi Provincial  
Dramatic Theatre, Taiyuan  
Children's Art Troupe/Kunming National Song and Dance  
Ensemble, Kunming

COORDINATOR: Wang Ling, Chinese Theatre Association-Chinese ITI  
Phone: +86 10 640 799 58  
Mobile: +86 1380 1235 408  
e-mail: ctawangling@bbsn.cn  
www.chinatheatre.org

#### VIETNAM

Vietnam Youth Theatre, Hanoi  
Ho Chi Minh City Drama Theatre, Ho Chi Minh City  
Small Stage Drama Theatre, Ho Chi Minh City

COORDINATOR: Ho Quoc Hung, former Officer of Vietnamese ITI  
Mobile: +84 903 259 785  
e-mail: quochung74vn@yahoo.com  
e-mail: hung74vn@yahoo.com

#### LAOS, Vientiane

Vulnerable Lao Youth Development Association (VYDA)  
Lakon Vao (Lao Central Theatre Troupe)  
Tuk Kata (Lao National Puppet Theatre)  
Kabong Lao (Object Theatre Kabong Lao)

COORDINATOR: Phannaly Thephavongsa, President-Director, VYDA  
Phone/Fax: +856 21 771 399  
Residence: +856 21 770 413  
Mobile: +856 20 2444 898  
e-mail: phannaly@laotel.com  
www.vyda.org.la

## Swedish professionals involved in Children's Voice project 2004–2009.

Persons may be contacted through  
Svensk Teaterunion - Swedish Centre of the ITI.

Alejandro Bonnet	Hans Wigren	Mette Marqvardsen
Anders Linderoth	Helena Nilsson	Mia Törnqvist
André Kaliff	Håkan Bertilsson †	Michael Cocke
Anna Lena Evermann	Ingrid Kyrö	Monica Sparby
Anna Östlund	Ipek Mehlum	My Aureskoung
Annika Arnell	Jeanette Roos	Mårten Hedman
Annika From Borg	Karin Rudfeldt	Nina Jemth
Bara Lyngdal Magnus- dottir	Katrin Brännström	Nina Kjällqvist
Barbro Frambäck	Lars-Erik Brossner	Olle Törnkvist
Barbro Lord	Lena Fridell	Per Sörberg
Bengt Andersson	Lena Lindell	Peter Engkvist
Bernt Höglund	Lisa Hugosson	Rolf Sossna
Bo W Lindström	Lisa Kjellgren	Sara Bexell
Brita Papini	Lisbeth Pettersson	Sophia Segrell
Cia Frode	Lotta Lundgren	Susanne Lind
Daniel Rudholm	Lova Eriksson	Sven Wagelin Challis
David Melin	Magnus Lundblad	Thomas Hallonsten
Elin Tisell	Margareta Sörenson	Torbjörn Grass
Erik Norlin	Maria af Klintberg	Ulrika Mannerfelt
Erika Marklund	Maria Hedborg	Victoria Kahn
EwaMaria Roos	Maria Hjalmarson	Yrsa Sturesdotter
Greta Sundberg	Maria Weisby	Zac O'Yeah
Gunilla Rööf	Marie Feldtmann	Åsa Ekberg Kentros
Gunilla Westin-Wallin	Marie Hedenius	Åsa Wennström
Hans Brorsson	Mathias Lafolie	
	Mats Eriksson	

## Literature and further reading

Collaborating groups and institutions have published books, articles and plays as well as recordings, CDs and DVDs in their own languages in connection with the Children's Voice project. For inquiries about these publications, please refer to each group/institution.

The following books on children's theatre have been published in English:  
Ramanatha, S., *Learn 2 Play and Play 2 Learn. Introduction to Theatre Games*. Rangayana, Vinoba Road, Mysore, 2006.  
Sengupta, Swatilekha, *Theatre Games for School Children*. Dasgupta & Company Private Limited, Kolkata, 2007 (2005, reprinted edition).  
*Bulletin of Children's Voice project*. Published yearly by Rakhai, Dhaka (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008). Editors: Liaquat Ali Lucky, Kristee Hefaz, Yeasmin Ali & Saria Tanjim Sumona.

★

Yearly reports and Final report on the Children's Voice project are available from Svensk Teaterunion/Swedish Centre of the ITI  
info@teaterunionen.se  
www.teaterunionen.se

Further published by Svensk Teaterunion/Swedish Centre of the ITI:  
5 x *Swedish plays for children and youth*. Stockholm 2001 (out of print).  
6 x *contemporary Swedish plays*. Stockholm 2008.

★

A mid-term review made by Karin Markensten in 2005–2006 was published by Sida in 2007 as *A Review – The Regional Children's Theatre Project in South Asia*. The publication can be downloaded/ordered from  
www.sida.se/publications.

For further reading on the child in Swedish development cooperation, please refer to publications by Sida  
info@sida.se  
www.sida.se