

International Research in Theatre for Young Audiences

Background and Context

UK development in TYA has been untypical. In most of the world TYA means professional performance to children and young people by adults or children under adult direction, drawing on the professional theatre traditions of each culture. In the UK, TYA practice has been heavily influenced by educational drama since the 1960's. By the 1990's the mainstream of TYA in the UK was also drawing ideas from an academic focus on Applied Theatre. In broad terms this means a political or instrumental rather than artistic approach which has in some cases led to a distinct and unique form of theatre. UK TIE practice from the 1960's has influenced TYA in Australia and UK and US Drama in Education models are followed in Anglophone Africa where University teachers are largely educated in UK or US institutions.

In most of mainland Europe there is a clear line of development in parallel with the established theatre traditions, with strong local variations in emphasis. In France, Germany, Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark, local conditions and cultural policies, literary traditions and political currents have naturally shaped the detail but TYA has tracked mainstream theatre styles and fashions quite closely.

In East Asia older theatre traditions are currently being rediscovered and given greater prominence after a period of domination by 'western' models.

In francophone West Africa however, most active professionals working in the field were educated in theatre schools or conservatoires in France, Belgium or Quebec. Theatre writing in French is quite similar whatever the origins of the playwright.

In the Spanish speaking world, TYA is less developed as an independent field than in Europe or East Asia. The literary tradition of Spain dominates and the lack of resources means that theatre makers mostly live hand to mouth, hardly ever writing down the work they create. Most playwrights are, as in the USA and most of the developing world, working within universities or as amateurs. TYA in the USA is also heavily constrained by social norms and reliance on large paying audiences. College programs in theatre provide many first experiences for young people at school.

In the former USSR a network of some 60 Theatres of the Young Spectator (TYUZ) has largely survived. Each large city had a professional company of 30 or more actors and a large staff to deliver a repertoire of mostly conventional shows for all ages: folk tales for the under 8's and classic adaptations for older young people, with a leavening of contemporary dramas about current social problems. Tashkent,

capital of today's independent Uzbekistan, is typical in still having an active Russian language TYUZ which was founded in 1928.

The UK contribution has been regarded by most other countries as a rejection of artistic excellence and a deviation from the mainstream. Until recently UK theatre productions were hardly ever considered worthy of attention from producers of European festivals of TYA. Since the mid-90's however UK shows have been seen with increasing frequency at festivals in Asia and elsewhere.

A Worthwhile Field of Study

A study of the relationship between political currents, cultural policies and the kinds of TYA produced in different countries would give students a perspective on the field. Practice in the UK is unusually constrained by what schools and teachers will accept as useful to their primary educational aims and objectives. In most of Europe an introduction to the cultural heritage, often through exposure to theatre especially created for young audiences, is considered an important role for schools. It is usual for performances to be offered in theatres rather than schools: part of the cultural experience is being in the special environment of a theatre and learning its language.

Reception of the theatre experience received by young audiences is possibly more studied in Europe than elsewhere. While UK PhD students are likely to study topics such as the work of particular authors, historical periods, movements or currents in theatre, analysis of how children receive theatre performances in the Early Years, for example, is more likely to be found in Italy or Belgium.

The archives of UK TIE companies, now reaching the end of a natural cycle with the retirement of the founder generation in the 1960's, represent a wealth of valuable study material. The UK experience needs also to be put into the context of its time, with the political, social and educational changes of the years since the 1944 Education Act opened a remarkable window of opportunity for theatre in UK schools.

Traditions elsewhere in the world had other roots and roads to travel.

Sources

The International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ) was founded in 1965. Its original members were from UK, Western and Eastern Europe and the USA. Theatre was clearly defined as an artform with a straight line of development from the Greeks, through Shakespeare and Brecht to a text-based modern theatre repertoire. Other traditions and applications were actively excluded.

Only in the 1990's did East Asia, Africa and Latin America begin to have a presence. By 2011 some 80 countries are in membership, from all continents and most theatre traditions. Today ASSITEJ is the principal source of information for world TYA.

Research Routes

While English is the current working language for ASSITEJ business and exchange, the principal accessible collections of publications are mostly in German, French and Spanish.

ITYARN (International Theatre for Young Audiences Research Network) is a growing group of academic researchers and teachers associated with ASSITEJ.

www.ityarn.org

The **ASSITEJ Archive** is held at the German ASSITEJ Centre in Frankfurt am Main. www.kjtz.de links to an extensive site, with publications of many kinds, a catalogue of scripts and links to festivals and events organised by ASSITEJ Germany. A small number of these publications are available in English.

Grimm & Grips is the annual directory of productions offered by some 200 companies in Germany with lists of authors of the 800 plays in repertoire. Now in its 25th Year.

The work of **Roger Deldime** in Belgium has centred on reception. Deldime founded the Centre of Sociology of Theatre at ULB Bruxelles and now directs the Magic Mountain Theatre in Brussels (www.theatremontagnemagique.be/) Publications include a series of booklets, Questions de Theatre, intended for students of theatre as an artform.

Deldime's academic publications and many francophone play texts, including from Africa and Quebec, can be found at www.lansman.org. **Emil Lansman** is a tireless publisher and activist for francophone theatre of all kinds.

The ASSITEJ National Centre of **Spain** in Madrid holds an extensive collection of records, plays and publications from Spain and Ibero-America, mainly in Spanish.

www.assitej.net

ASSITE USA has a good website and a regular printed magazine. www.assitej-usa.org

Karian Schuitema is a PhD student at Westminster University who has created a website for **UK children's theatre** research and is preparing material by several UK contributors for publication. <http://childrenstheatre.wordpress.com/>

www.tya-uk.org is the website of the UK National Centre of ASSITEJ (**TYA UK**) where plays, reports and production flyers are accessible.

Plays for Young Audiences

ASSITEJ International has a catalogue of plays and a directory of international festivals . Go to www.assitej-international.org and follow 'Products'.

A new initiative is write local. play global, an international network for playwrights. www.writelocalplayglobal.org/

See www.lansman.org for plays in French.

Plays in German are catalogued at: <http://www.jugendtheater.net/Katalog2020.asp?>
Some 20 private agencies actively promote plays for young audiences in Germany.
An example is www.theaterstueckverlag.de

www.colombine.se is the leading publisher of Swedish and Scandinavian TYA plays.

What's On?

Different approaches to promotion and distribution of theatre productions exist across the world. One collective association is CTEJ in francophone Belgium which for 30 years has published a regular promotional newsletter, **le Petit Cyrano**. <http://www.ctej.be/cms/pdf/cyrano/cyrano129.pdf>

In France several bodies support TYA. **Theatre-Enfants** is a portal providing information about current productions. <http://www.theatre-enfants.com>

The government-backed ONDA (Office National de Diffusion Artistique) supports promoters of TYA within France. www.onda.fr

The website of ASSITEJ **Brazil** contains a directory of companies: http://www.cbtij.org.br/ponto_encontro/grupos_cia.htm

Books on TYA

A relatively small number of books on the practice and theory of TYA are available in English. *A list will be prepared as an appendix to this paper.*

Paul Harman: September 2011