

Workshop 1 : Theatre for Early Years

Date: 13/07/2019

A Report

Monisha Diwan

WORKSHOP 1 REPORT

Workshop 1 Title: Theatre for Early Years
Date: 13/07/2019
Time: 9.30-15.30 hrs.
Venue: SNTD Ghatkopar
Facilitators: Shaili and Nishna from Gillo Repertory Theatre
No. of Participants: 30 plus AECED and Venue partners
AECED EC: Shobha, Rekha, Meera, Purnima, Moon, Monisha and Pankhuri

Session brief

Gillo Repertory Theatre works in Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA), creating performing arts experiences that engage children and young adults with theatre. Their work, that includes content development, performance and training, creates opportunities for children to develop deep and life-long connections with the arts.

Theatre and Performing Arts for children in India has mainly catered to children between 6 and 12 years, particularly since the 1970s when the Bal Bhavan movement began. For decades children below 6 years were left out of this cultural landscape, often receiving hand-me-downs from artists and storytellers.

A recent trend, especially since 2015, has been the creation of performances specifically for children between 0 and 6 years, called Theatre for Early Years, which includes Toddler Theatre and Theatre for Babies.

Performing Arts for Early Years has been a part of the early learning environments for over 4 decades in Europe, and more recently in Korea and Japan. But in India it is a relatively new phenomenon. This approach believes that all children have the right to be viewed as spectators of today and not only of tomorrow, even the ones below 6 years. Children are born with the right to culture, which is generally called Cultural Citizenship and the onus to fulfil these needs lies with artists, educators and parents.

This workshop shall inform teachers about the ideas behind theatre for early years and how educators in India can start including this in their curriculum. Participants shall be introduced to techniques of making performances and performance art for children between 0 to 6 years. The main focus of these performances being to stimulate a child's senses and hopefully open up ways of seeing and experiencing the world. A part of the workshop shall also include techniques that educators can use in their classrooms / learning spaces.

Gillo hopes to facilitate collaborations between educators and artists, so they can work together in research and play making, eventually leading to culturally diverse and rich learning environments for young children in India.

Facilitators Profile:

Shaili Sathyu works in education and the arts, with a specific focus on children. She is the co-founder and Artistic Director of Gillo Repertory Theatre, an organization that specializes in Theatre for Young Audiences.

Over the past nine years Shaili has established Gillo as a repertory of 15 artists, produced 19 plays for children of different age groups, conducted several workshops, run a round-the-year drama club for children and staged over 400 performances. As an artistic director, Shaili's focus has been on developing and showcasing original Indian content; developing value for performing arts; creating age-specific performances; training performers and making theatre more accessible for children.

As a writer-director her plays include, 'Kyun-Kyun Ladki' (2011), 'Mister Jeejeebhoy and the Birds' (2013), 'She-He-She' (2013) among others. 'Chidiya, Uddi' (2018) is one of her latest plays, especially created for toddlers. She has also trained repertory artists of Gillo to design and conduct theatre based workshops with children and teachers.

Her recent projects include Rage Productions' 'Class Act' collaboration with Traverse Theatre (Scotland), where she was the Indian mentor for a playwriting workshop for high school students, and Junoon's 'Theatre Inclusive Programme', where she was one of the facilitators.

She has served as the Honorary Secretary of ASSITEJ India chapter (The International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People) for two years.

She has worked with renowned directors like Satyadev Dubey, Prasanna, M S Sathya, Ramesh Talwar, Nadira Zaheer Babbar, Rajendra Gupta & Salim Arif.

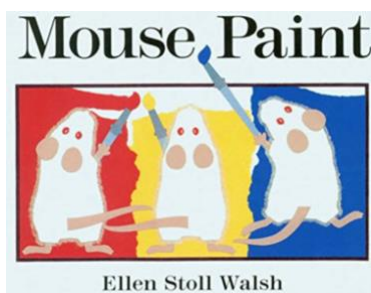
Nishna Mehta
Nishna Mehta is an English Literature graduate from the University of Mumbai. She has been a part of Gillo as a performer, administrator, technician and workshop facilitator since 2011. She has also been working with other theatre organisations in Mumbai, including Q Theatre Productions, Theatre Professionals Pvt. Ltd., The Drama School, Patchworks Ensemble and Prithvi Theatre. She is passionate about TYA and wishes to share the joy and magic of theatre with child. She is also a member of the ASSITEJ Next

The workshop commenced with Monisha introducing AECED through a QnA with participants instead of the introductory ppt since only 15% were new to AECED workshops. The entire journey of IAPE to AECED to linking up to NEP 2019 was done. Participants were directed to the AECED website for registration as well as Facebook to participate more proactively. Following that Theatre for Early Years as a workshop and the Facilitators- Shaili and Nishna were introduced.

Shaili, the lead facilitator, then started with establishing clear expectations for the workshop, some of which clearly indicated that the participants had the responsibility of picking up the nuances and adapting to their contexts and the facilitators role was to just present the ideas and scaffold the days journey but not to tell or direct. She also emphasized that the queries be linked only to the workshop topic and not to peripheral issues like management, academics etc

Activity 1: Demonstration

Nishna then presented a theatre performance based on the story with basic props and makeshift music provided by Shaili. The story was for 3-4 year olds experiencing primary and secondary colours.



Debrief: Shaili led the debrief first by eliciting responses about the performance from the participants / audience and then drawing the main nuances of the same.

1. This was a performance; it can only be an experience with **engagement** with children through more interactivity...
2. Not letting children **explore the material** is a crime
3. **Less is more**, leave lots to children's imagination
4. A good performance will move **from illustration to sharing an experience replete with feelings**
5. A good performance will **balance** how much to perform and how much to leave to the audience
6. A good performance is **not make belief, it is rooted in belief**. Performer believes so the audience believes and that's how it moves to become a shared experience right from setting up to playing with the props to performing
7. **Silence is important**, with loud performances, children may be entertained but shall not engage
8. Silence by itself **respects the ability of children to experience the performance** and it calms children down rather than get them all excited.

Activity 2: Theatre for Early Years

Shaili posed some anchoring questions for participants to deliberate on

1. **What does Theatre for Early Years (TEY) mean?**
Theatre meant for 0-6 years
2. **Where do Children have access to TEY?**
While there were many answers ranging from puppet shows to digital media, however, the conclusion was that there is limited access to theatre truly meant for Early Years
3. **What is the need for TEY?**
To build cultural citizenship primarily

Debrief- TEY

1. A child should have **access to culture** right from the day he/she is born.
2. Child is **born as an audience**
3. Child below 6 needs to be viewed as a **human being not as a human becoming**
4. TEY is needed –
 - a. To bring **curated content** for children
 - b. To build **cultural citizenship**
 - c. For **diffusing performing arts** in child's life

Activity 3: Viewing a range of TEY samples from other cultures

The facilitators shared some TEY performances from Italy, Finland, Germany and India. Similarities and differences were discussed.

Some of the performances were-

1. La Baracca Testoni Ragazzi – I colori- The colours of water (Italy) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtE8aeD0HVE>
2. Fro – Sweden
3. La Baracca Testoni Ragazzi - Spot (Italy) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cj1hBSAYSAM>
4. Hallo Hallolo (Germany)
5. Woodbeat (Germany) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oAho3gDrquQ>
6. Chidiya Ud - Gillo(India)

Debrief- Nuances of TEY

1. Orientation
2. Numbers
3. Safe space
4. Transforming spaces
5. Don't use blackouts
6. Take care of emotional well being
7. Clear instructions to parents/educators/caregivers
8. Contained visuals not overstimulating
9. Connect with energy of children
10. Gaze most important- converge on children, don't get distracted
11. Idea most important
12. Audience experience most important
- 13. BELIEF VS MAKE BELIEF**

Activity 4: Clay and sculptors

Participants were divided into groups of 6 at first and subdivided into two groups each of 3. One subgroup in each group were sculptors and the other clay. Sculptors were instructed to mould and clay to flow as per manipulation. Participants were found struggling as they started with image in mind, no process was seen. Groups were instructed to feel their body being moulded and for sculptors to use the clay bodies more expressively. Groups were seen becoming more open in the process thereafter.

Debrief- questions

1. How did you feel-
 - a. When you were the sculptor
 - b. When you were clay

Activity 5: Earliest Memory

Participants were divided into groups and encouraged to share the earliest memory they could reminisce. Then they were to choose one of the memories in their group and do a TEY performance.

Debrief- performances

1. The memories performed by different groups essentially illustrated feelings like Joy, excitement, irritation, greed, fear, attachment.
2. When playing child characters, BE the child not act like the child (caricaturing to be avoided)
3. If there is no speech, then larger actions needed
4. Use space well

Activity 6: POEM Enactment

Participants in groups had to choose a poem. Pick up 4 elements of the poem and dramatize using own twist to the tale. Enactment was carried out and the floor was opened up for feedback.

Activity 7: EARLY YEARS THEATRE IN INDIA

The closing activity was passive and involved viewing background pics of early years theatre in India. The need to widen the circle and broaden scope was reiterated by Shaili, the lead facilitator. Also, the need for educators and artists to collaborate but stay true to their core was emphasized. Feedback forms were given as well as the vote of thanks to close on an effective theatre workshop.

Some Snapshots

