

University of Theatre and Film Arts, Budapest
Doctorate School

**The tradition of Theatre in Education (TIE) performances in Hungary.
Recollection of children- and youth performances of the 1970s and 1980s**

Theses of Doctoral Dissertation

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The aim of my doctoral thesis is to find what antecedent did Theatre in Education (TIE) performances have in Hungary. According to my assumption, already before the funding of Roundtable Theatre In Education Company in 1992, that is considered the first Hungarian TIE company, the presence of such theatre groups, or pursuits can be seen that beyond the aesthetic-artistic theatrical practise also put the pedagogical will forward.

I define Theatre in Education performance as a theatre performance for children and youth in which the theatrical experience is fully formed with the participants' activity: this activity is part of the theatrical event, and during these opportunities every participant can control if they wish to be part of the actions, be partners in creation or if they wish to stay in the viewer's position. Besides the glossary of TIE I introduced another perspective in my analysis on performances for youngsters: this aspect is the shift/change of the audience's perspective by which I mean that the audience gets into the participatory position from the conventional viewers position: given opportunity for action, to offer an opinion, common thinking and creating.

Within the reconstructed performances, the first for children and youth that is part of the canon and changed the audience's perspective was created in 1970, the last in 1987. Besides the aesthetical-reception and sociological point of views in analysis I needed to present this era by an institutional history approach so the milieu where these performances were born can be seen. This is how I got to a determining moment in the first period of performances for children and youth, 1961. This is when Bartók Children's Theatre was founded. The 1992 closing date is the forming of Kolibri Theatre for Children and Youth, the Budapest Puppet Theatre and the Roundtable Theatre In Education Company. So the 1961–1992 period indicates the institutional context of children and youth performances.

Through the research of tradition of Theatre in Education (TIE) performance I defined two analytical angles: one I call formal tradition, the other mental tradition.

By formal tradition I mean that the audience can become participants during the performance. A participant who – in controlled ways – can form their opinion on a given topic/problem and is even able to make decisions in correlation to situations depicted in the performance. So the viewer gets an opportunity for active participation, is concerned with the questions or topics raised in the performance and is motivated in processing the subject. To formal tradition I also

list frames, 'frame-distance' that is the point of view through participants connect to the events, like openings, as encouraging for participation by the actors, creators, interaction, the opportunity of two-way communication. In my thesis I call opening and interaction possibility to act, because I would like to emphasize the momentum of opportunity. The makers create the possibility to act, but it's unassured that the viewer will take the chance, and it's not sure that they will actually become participants. Take in, taking in, the process when the viewer is affected emotionally and/or physically and/or in a cognitive way by the theatrical events and can be taken into the story, this I don't list as a formal tradition, because there is only a few traces left of the audience's participation, activity. Instead I count the morphosis of the perspective of the audience and actors/creators as formal tradition.

By the mental tradition of Theatre in Education performance I mean how the creators approach a topic: they avoid didactical teaching nature, raise questions, don't make any statements, and see the audience as the children, the students as partners. And by partnership I mean that during the theatrical event the creators and the children, youngsters are collaborators who see each other as equal parties.

I did basic research where I filtered children and youth performances for children between 3-18 ages. My dissertation' thesis order is defined by the recognition, that a performance for children and youth is successful, memorable, it reaches its pedagogical aim when it is for an accurately specified age group, when the creators can take into consideration and synchronize given age groups' psychological parameters with the theatrical performances' formal and mental world or rather the possibilities of actions. Thus I use age group classification when presenting the researched performances of creators and amateur theatre groups, because I'd like to draw attention to the fact that artists in the 1970s and 80s made their performances and created the shifts of perspective that they took the children's age group, the psychological parameters into consideration.

The reconstructed performances are not yet part of the (children and youth) theatrical canon. As a historiographer I was seeking to build the searched children and youth performances, and the shifts in the viewers position within, the formal and mental phenomenon of TIE from the periphery of influence-historical consciousness into common knowledge.

The analysed, presented performances in the dissertation draw a specific surface of Hungarian theatre-historical canon, namely the official, approved and banned events got into a common set. Creators who were overshadowed because of their adult theatre activity, made performances for children, like Péter Halász' and Anna Koós' Lakásszínház (Apartment-theatre). During the researched period there were directors, who had a strong institutional background, actors, stage technology: Péter Levente worked at Mikro-Mikroszkóp Színpad (Micro-Microscope Stage), József Ruszt at the Katona József Színház (József Katona Theatre) at Kecskemét, than the Hevesi Sándor Színház (Sándor Hevesi Theatre) Zalaegerszeg, and János Novák at the Egyetemi Színpad (University Stage). There were some actresses who created their solo performances for children and youth without any institutional background: Kati Sólyom and Itala Békés. Hunor Bucz worked with labourer performers at Térszínház (Room Theatre), but next to the children's performances the group made mostly theatre performances for adult audiences. Éva Mezei founded Gyerekjátékszín (Children's Scene) with future pedagogues and university students only so that they can play for children and youngsters.

Next to all these performances for children and youngsters, in the *Appendix* I felt necessary to present the adult performances of two organisations, because formally and mentally they bear such elements that even though the age group difference, they irregularly became an essential part of my dissertation. One of them is Imre Csili Soós' performance at the Irodalmi Színpad (Literary Scene) *Történelem alulnézetben* (History from worm's-eye-view), and the KISZ Központ Művészegyüttes' (KISZ Centre Arts Ensemble) two performances the *Kisvárosi Lady Macbeth* (Small-town Lady Macbeth) and the *Kirostált kavics* (Cast-off gravel). The leader of both groups was Róbert Dévényi.

Following the Philther-method I placed the analysed performances into theatre cultural context first, then I examined the dramatic text and dramaturgy, I looked into the direction after and as much as I could the acting, I analysed the stage design and sound, and at last I observed the influence-historical features of the performances. Depending on the listed above I took upon to reconstruct the performances for children and youth in the 1970s and 1980s, so with the help of oral history interviews I made, contemporary scripts, posters, programmes, photos, recollections and articles I analysed them looking for the formal and mental characteristics of a Theatre in Education performance (TIE).

My research showed that side by side with the creation of the English TIE in 1965, there were Hungarian creators who, without reference to the English impact, used theatre as a tool to make children and youngsters to think and form their opinions in a theatrical framework. Éva Mezei was the first who was familiar with the traditions of English TIE and created performances following these, I consider *Itt járt Mátyás király* (King Matthias was here) the first TIE performance from 1978, and the 1979 *Tavaszi tótágas* (Springtime headstand) the second, while the other creators were experimenting with the shift of perspective of the audiences of performances for children and youth. The common thing was that they wanted to create possibilities of action for the audience through theatre.

I present a list of performances for children and youngsters from the 1970s and 1980s till present days, and with the exploration, documentation and reconstruction of these I show how you can find the present of theatre in education (TIE) performances in the past.

List of publications of outcomes during my research:

- „A szabadság laboratóriuma”. A Pinceszínház mint a diákszínjátszás egy lehetséges útja. *Theatron* 15, 2021/1. 102–114.
- Kulturális közösségi terek az államosítás után. in: Jákfalvi Magdolna – Kékesi Kun Árpád – Kiss Gabriella – Ring Orsolya (szerk.): Újjáépítés és államosítás. Tanulmánykötet a kultúra államosításának kezdeti éveiről. Budapest, TMA – Arktisz, 2020. 118-136.
- *Kettős tudat - Mezei Éva közönsége és közössége.*
<http://resolver.szhaztortenet.hu/study/STD16277>
- Gyöngysor-dramaturgia. *Theatron*, 2020/4. 92-102.
- Az Egyetemi Színpad mint kultúrház. Gyermekelőadások az Egyetemi Színpadon a Bors néni bemutatójáig, 1980-ig. *Theatron*, 2020/3. 20-34.
- *Gyerekszínház és politika – Kérdez és nem állít,* In: Színházi politika # politikai színház (szerk.: Antal Klaudia, Pandur Petra, P. Müller Péter, Kronosz Kiadó, Pécs, 2018), 209-220.
- Mezei Éva gyerekszínházi pillanatai, a Gyerekjátékszín három előadásának performatív mozzanatai, *Symbolon*, 2017, XVIII. évfolyam, 93-107.