

CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO  
A SPECIFIC THEATRICAL PRESENTATION

by

LEONA ELAINE REID

B.A., University of Waterloo, 1977  
B.Ed., Queen's University, 1978

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ACCEPTED

We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standard

Dr. Antoinette Oberg//

Dr. Geoffrey Potter

Dr. Bill Zuk

Dr. Giles Hogya

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Supervisor: Dr. Antoinette Oberg


### ABSTRACT


This research is an analysis of two children's responses to a specific children's theatre presentation. The study was conducted using naturalistic research methodology--observations, interviews and drawings. Additional data were gathered through letters submitted by students of the grade six class from which the two subjects were chosen.

The results indicate that children respond very differently to a theatrical presentation. For example, twenty-six dissimilar responses were given to the question, "What thing did you like the most in the play?" Differences were also found in the extent to which children grasped the message intended by the play. It is important for a company purporting to communicate a message of educational worth in a learning institution to provide an educating and not just an entertaining experience. It was also found that children, for the most part, do not like plays for their seriousness. This raises questions concerning the appropriateness of presenting realistic social problems in children's theatre productions. Finally, it was

concluded that more cooperation is needed among children's theatre companies, teachers, schools, school districts and government before the quality of these presentations can be improved.

Examiners:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Geoffrey Potter

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Bill Zuk

  
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Dr. Giles Hoya

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The overall aim of this thesis is to answer the following question: "How do two children respond to a specific children's theatre presentation?"

This chapter will define and discuss the purposes of children's theatre, explain the importance of the question, briefly outline the research methodology to be used in order to answer the question, and indicate what information will be found in the remaining chapters.

#### Children's Theatre

Theatre for children has been in existence for decades. It began in the United States in 1903, in England in 1914, in the USSR in 1918, and in Canada in 1953, to mention only a few of the countries where it is prevalent today. In all countries where children's theatre has been pursued, a multitude of influences, often political and economic, resulted in the appearance of different styles, themes, and methods.

Children's theatre has been defined differently by many people who have been active in this type of theatre. In 1956, Ann Viola and a committee of seven other drama experts offered their interpretation of the

difference between creative dramatics and children's theatre. Creative dramatics was defined as a process whereby children with the aid of a teacher create their own scenes or plays. In contrast, children's theatre was defined as an event "in which plays, written by playwrights, are presented by living actors for child audiences. The players may be adults, children, or a combination of the two" (Siks, 1961, p.8). The aim of creative dramatics was the personal development of the children while the aim of children's theatre was the satisfaction of the child audience. Davis and Watkins used a similar definition for children's theatre in 1960, adding only that the players are preferably "a combination of both - adults in adult roles, children in child roles" (Davis & Watkins, 1960, p.18).

In 1974, Moses Goldberg, who has devoted his life to the study of theatre for children, defined children's theatre as "a formal theatrical experience in which a play is presented for an audience of children" (Goldberg, 1974, p.5). He went on to further differentiate between "recreational drama" and "children's theatre". In the former, children perform; in the latter usually only adults perform, for children.

In 1983, Christine Redington expanded on Goldberg's definition, making more specific the adults and the place: "Actors performing plays to children in a theatre or a school" (Redington, 1983, p.10). As Ann Viola had almost twenty-seven years before her, Redington also expanded this definition with reference to "theatrical elements" and rehearsals held in a "formal theatre manner" (Redington, 1983, p.10). She also suggested that the audiences are large for this type of theatre, and that the term is usually associated with the five-to twelve year-old-age group.

The purposes of this type of theatre varied depending on the beliefs of the members of individual companies within each country. Some people have felt that the performances "are preparing the audiences of tomorrow" (Prins, 1950, p.10). It was believed that society could not have "trained, intelligent [theatre] audiences" (Ward, 1936, p.392) unless its children were taught how to appreciate good entertainment. Through exposure to good children's theatre, children would develop an appreciation for theatre and would attend performances as adults.

Others have believed that the purpose was primarily to entertain. This was reflected by the

choice of material, fairy tales and fantasy, found in the early children's theatre of many different countries. The purpose most often found in the past, in the present, and most surely in the future, is to teach, not in a static, didactic manner, but to offer a chance "to make the learning process itself a pleasure" (Hilton, 1980, p.47).

Although expressed in differing words and phrases, the belief in the capacity of children's theatre to educate its audiences is widely accepted. This has been expressed over many years by children's theatre practitioners of different countries. The following represent a sample from 1949 to 1979:

It aids the child in understanding himself and his environment; it provides an outlet for his emotions and impulses; and finally, it acts as an integrating force in a chaotic world (Kozelka, 1949, p.109).

A child audience should get...the understanding and appreciation of life values drawn from human experiences as portrayed on the stage (Viola, 1956, p.140).

General motives given by adult producers include...[offering] not only entertainment but education and training for appreciation of theatre, of art, and of life (Siks & Dunnington, 1961, p.34).

We should give him [the spectator] much knowledge, new experience and...guidance (Briantsev, 1972, p.87).

Perhaps this last reason will be judged as pretentious...but performance should never offer less than discovery about the viewer's identity in the world (Doolittle & Barnieh, 1979, p.26).

In 1984, this view of an educational children's theatre is still popular, as evidenced not only through the literature, but also through the themes evident in the international works of the Vancouver Children's Festival, the first annual event of its kind in British Columbia, held for the second time this year. The various companies represented there dealt with such topics as nuclear war, divorce, and cooperation among people. These companies believe that part of education for children today should include current issues relevant to society. No matter how children's theatre has been defined or presented there seems to have always been concern for the entertainment and education value in this type of theatre.

For the purposes of this thesis the following definition of children's theatre will be used: Adult actors performing a play specifically designed for children, either in a theatre or a school. Its purposes are prodesse et delectare (to instruct and to delight), the motto of the University of Washington's children's theatre (Prins, 1950, p.10).

### Rationale for the Study

Theatre is considered a valuable "medium of communication" (Oaks, 1981, p.3) for exploring a variety of themes, topics and issues. The information often lacking in much of the literature, however, is what child audiences, as receivers of the communication, actually take from this type of experience.

Research concerning the impact of such productions on children is scarce in North America. To the author's knowledge, there are only three companies in Canada which pursue this type of research, and they are all companies in Quebec. However, their theatrical formats are all quite different from the type of children's theatre under study in this thesis. Their work is very similar to Britain's Theatre in Education teams (explained in greater detail in chapter two) where the children participate in the presentation. The knowledge gained from this work is subsequently used in planning their productions. Research on the type of children's theatre defined in this thesis is conducted regularly in East European countries and in the USSR. Children's theatre companies in these countries use the results of their research to improve

their productions, so that they know they are meeting their goals. In contrast, very little research is done in Canada on children's responses to theatrical productions.

Nevertheless, in the last ten years in Canada there has been a significant increase in the number of children's theatre companies who wish to perform in the schools. These companies are often partially funded by government agencies. Conjointly, more and more school districts have been taking advantage of this type of experience, often at considerable expense. The assumption underlying the increased use of children's theatre in schools is that viewing a children's theatre production is a valuable learning experience.

All of the preceding information is an indication that this type of research is not only done, but that it is important research which can be used to improve the quality of the experiences offered to children. Hence this author's interest in pursuing such research.

#### Methodology for the Study

The research methods used in East Europe and Soviet Russia involve both observation of children's reactions while viewing performances, and interviewing of children afterwards. The East European theatres

also encourage younger children to respond to the play through drawings and paintings. Although this latter type of response is often asked for by North American companies as well, it is simply a follow-up activity for the classroom teacher, often sent to the company at their request, but not normally used as research data for improving programs.

The methods to be used in the present research are identical to those used in similar research mentioned above--observation, interview and picture drawing. Each of the children involved in the study will also be asked to write a letter to the company because the company chosen for the study usually requests it.

Many of those involved in children's theatre have made observations of children. As an actor waiting on the sidelines, I remember countless times watching the faces of audience members trying to discover whether they were interested in the action on stage. Joyce Doolittle (1979) comments that "observers...take delight in pointing to the intense absorption of children watching a play" (Doolittle & Barnieh, 1979, p.31). Ruth Frost (1976) mentions "the sudden stillness"... "the restless movement" and "the rewarding laughter" of the child audience (Frost,

1976, p.24). All these things and much more can be observed as children watch a play. Frost suggests that research on the reactions of children has concentrated "on their immediate reactions" during the performance (Frost, 1976, p.25). It seems important to discover as well how children respond after the performance. It has been suggested by some, and seems reasonable, that if one wants to know what children think after they have seen a play, one should ask them. At the Moscow Central Children's Theatre, the observations of the pedagogues (professional teachers who guide the work of the companies) are supplemented by tape recorded interviews, both during intermission and after the play. Frost (1976) supports this procedure, noting that children's "comments or observation of actions are natural" (Frost, 1976, p.25), and if interviewers ask the right questions, valuable information can be gleaned from the children's responses.

Drawings and paintings are another source of data used by both East European and Soviet Russian children's theatres. Korogotsky, artistic director

from 1965 for the Leningrad Theatre for Young Spectators noted,

When we look at the children's drawings and paintings done after a performance, it is easy to see that they symbolically express their feeling and thoughts primarily through color and composition - concentrating on the visual elements of the story...[their] paintings stated [their] feelings (Korogotsky, 1979, p.145).

The methods discussed above have been chosen because they have been found quite appropriate in Eastern Europe and Soviet Russia for eliciting children's responses. Although questionnaires were considered, it was found in a pilot study that a questionnaire did not offer enough information, being limited by such problems as time and the individual student's writing ability. It is hoped that through the use of different and varied methods, these problems will be minimized and the information gathered will offer a more detailed response from each student in the study.

#### Summary

Children's theatre is a phenomenon all its own. Unlike the images of television, film and video, all of which have been studied extensively to further understand what children absorb from these media, children's theatre is a unique, concrete experience.

Without the children there is no play; "an audience co-creates the artwork of theatre" (Courtney, 1978, p.20) This author believes that it is just as important to understand what a child takes from a theatrical presentation, especially since more and more children are being exposed to this phenomenon. It is also of special concern at a time when the arts are being affected by reductions in educational spending to substantiate the value of theatre productions.

Perhaps by asking children themselves what they take from this type of experience, there will be a greater understanding of the impact of such work on students in the school system. This information could be used to define more clearly the present purposes of children's theatre in the schools and to offer future directions to the children's theatre of tomorrow.

#### Succeeding Chapters

Chapter 2 will deal with the history of children's theatre.

Chapter 3 will deal with the theoretical frameworks brought to the study and a description of how these frameworks are used and data gathered in a naturalistic study.

Chapter 4 will deal with the methodology employed throughout the study, outlining each step taken to complete the research.

Chapter 5 will describe the school and the classroom used for the study and the data gathered during the study. It will finally offer interpretations of the meaning of this data in relation to the research question.

Chapter 6 will offer conclusions concerning the methodology used and make recommendations on these methods. Lastly, the chapter will make recommendations to both children's theatre companies and the schools who hire them.

## CHAPTER 2

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Theatre for children has existed in the world for more than a century. In fact, it is difficult to pinpoint its exact date of inception, for it is possible that it existed in one form or another long before anyone began to write about it. What is of great importance to researchers is the many different forms it has taken.

A knowledge of children's theatre history in a number of countries is crucial to an understanding of this phenomenon in a Canadian context. The countries chosen are the United States, Soviet Russia, and Britain. These countries are certainly not the only ones in which children's theatres exist; in fact, there are other countries in which children's theatre is a much stronger force than it is in either the United States or Britain. However, children's theatre in Canada has been widely influenced by both the United States and Britain, and consequently, the history of children's theatre in these countries is included in this chapter. The history of children's theatre in Soviet Russia is also included as a contrast to the other countries. Although its children's theatre is

primarily of the same style as practiced in North America, it possesses a prestige not granted here. This contrast in respectability offers an explanation for some of the difficulties plaguing the children's theatre of North America. A discussion of children's theatre in these four countries encompasses most forms of children's theatre as it has been practiced throughout the world.

#### Children's Theatre in the United States

The first theatre for children in the United States was the Children's Educational Theatre of New York, founded in 1903 by Alice Minnie Herts. It was conceived as a recreational project for an immigrant neighbourhood, and one of its purposes was to introduce the conventions of American social behaviour to those who were unfamiliar with life in the United States. This approach became popular through the settlement houses of the United States, and was used to encourage community involvement, language acquisition and cultural integration. Goldberg (1974) refers to this as "recreational drama", where both children and adults perform and the experience of the participants is as important as that of the audience (Goldberg, 1974, p.27). However, due to the nature of the work, and the

fact that the productions were usually run by social workers, the theatrical quality of these plays varied. The quality of the presentations was not important, as theatre was simply used as an alternative group activity. Unfortunately, "this attitude was also one of the strong influences on the early children's theatre movement in the U.S." (Goldberg, 1974, p.28). These types of programs only gradually dissipated.

During the next thirty years, two other types of community involvement in theatre developed. One was the establishment of local, non-commercial, community theatres, some of which worked with theatre for children performed by combined adult and child casts. This development was aided by the Drama League, which existed from 1910-1931. The other kind of community program consisted of a sponsoring committee which brought professional touring companies into the community. This began in 1933, and by 1936 there was a nationwide network of these committees. However, this network was discontinued during the war years.

During this same time, universities became involved in children's theatre. In 1925, the Children's Theatre of Evanston was begun at Northwestern University by Winifred Ward. This was

"the most significant university program in terms of subsequent influence" (Goldberg, 1974, p.29). It was the first university to offer the opportunity for those studying either acting or technical areas to receive valuable experience through participation in children's theatre. As well, children from the community were often given roles in the productions, so a strong, cooperative relationship was established between the university and its community. Another early group, The Goodman Children's Theatre, was directed by Charlotte Chorpenning from 1931-1955, who at the time was one of the most prominent American writers of children's plays. This company was operated by the Chicago Art Institute, an actor training academy. The university programs did not become really prominent until after the war, and then there followed twenty years of growth in educationally sponsored children's theatre, with the universities developing stronger programs in children's theatre production and training. This interest at American universities and colleges is still obvious today through courses, productions and often, research.

Also during the nineteen twenties and thirties off-Broadway commercial, professional children's theatre companies were started. These companies almost

always toured, and were financially weak. They offered diverse fare, including such things as mime, puppets and dance. The first significant company of this kind, Clare Tree Major's Children's Theatre, existed from 1921 to 1954; it eventually toured coast to coast with six separate troupes.

The last type of theatre, first established in 1965 and still prominent today, is the "regional theatre" (Goldberg, 1974, p.52). These are non-commercial companies dependent on museums and private or government patronage to make up operating deficits. They are strongly involved in educational programs, and although many still tour, some have permanent homes to which students are bused.

One of the major problems plaguing children's theatre companies in the United States since they began has been lack of funds. Although there have been times of financial support from the various levels of government, the degree of support has varied considerably, and has not been longlasting. Many companies through the decades have folded because of lack of funds.

The content of presentations has differed throughout the history of children's theatre as well.

At first there was an emphasis on fantasy and fairy tales, with little concern for the social significance of the topic. When playwrights did intend to communicate a message, the message was often "over-didactic and static" (Doolittle & Barnieh, 1979, p.70). In the sixties the interest was in musical comedies and the "musical 'spoof' of the classical tale" (McCaslin, 1971, p.281), paralleling the developments on Broadway. Also developed during the late sixties was the episodic or semi-documentary program. These had educational content and drew on the historical and cultural backgrounds of the many races of America, a mainstay of the regional theatres.

It would seem that the forms and genre of children's theatres in the United States are still as diverse today as they were in the past. Both community theatres and regional resident theatres include educational programs in their works. Many of the companies still tour in schools; a few have permanent theatres. Through special funding a few "artists in schools" (Redington, 1983, p.8) projects have been started. Lastly, there is even the occasional TIE (Theatre in Education) program, a British phenomenon.

Because of the proximity of the United States to Canada, the American exploration of this unique theatre influenced the beginning of children's theatre in this country. The United States had begun its children's theatre almost fifty years ahead of Canada, and as its practitioners branched out, they moved northward and continued their work in Canada. The children's theatre of Soviet Russia began in a similar manner to that of the United States, but the Russians quickly developed their children's theatre into a much stronger force than it was in North America, through constant research.

#### Children's Theatre in Soviet Russia

The first professional children's theatre in Russia began in Petrograd in June of 1919. It was a travelling troupe which performed variety programs (songs, pantomimes, fairy tales, ballet numbers) both indoors and outdoors. However, despite the good intentions of the Russian government for "the aesthetic development of our children and youth" (Shpet, 1979, p.1) the company folded after less than two months.

The beginning and end of many children's theatres in the major cities of Russia over the six months following June 1919 were similar to events in

Petrograd. Their programs were varied and sporadic; their buildings, when there was one, were poor; and, they often did not reflect any specific artistic or educational direction. They were also plagued with economic problems, and social and political circumstances often forced their actors to leave the company to return to their home villages.

In 1920 a company was formed which existed for over a year. The Krasnodar children's theatre lasted almost four years. It was the first company to develop its own repertory and to control itself through carefully determined standards and principles. It was a significant theatre which influenced what was to follow.

Despite their tenuous beginnings, all the children's theatres in Russia had two common features. One was a "democratic orientation" (Shpet, 1979, p.8), in which it was believed that the theatre should be accessible to all children. To that end there existed itinerant companies which charged no admission to their performances. The second common feature was an "educational orientation", which was reflected by the companies' search for material within the children's comprehension (Shpet, 1979, p.8).

A further similarity among the companies existed in the attitude toward this type of theatre. Children's theatre was not just a form of after school recreation in Russia as it had been at the beginning of American children's theatre. It was believed to be a valuable learning tool. The movement was led by professional artists who devoted their lives to the development of children's theatre in Russia.

Although many of the first theatres did use fairy tales and the classics, it was found that fairy tales were not challenging enough for the minds of the children and the classics were difficult to understand. When the government finally agreed to support the first State Children's Theatre in Moscow, on July 4, 1920, the Minister of Education made it clear that "its functions were inseparable from the overall development and education of the young generation", but it must also "give immediate pleasure to the young theatregoer" (Sats, 1979, p.45). From that beginning has sprung a history of plays dealing with the personal and political problems of the modern child.

It was Aleksander Briantsev who eventually provided the "theoretical link between twentieth century pedagogy and the theatre for the Soviets"

(Goldberg, 1974, p.73). He understood that if the purpose of children's theatre was to teach, then careful consideration had to be given to the needs of the children. He firmly believed in the theatre's ability to "affect a human being, even a very small one" (Briantsev, 1979, p.89), and to do this the productions had to be better than those designed for adults. Because of his concerns, he designed a special interior for children's theatres, which could seat one thousand spectators with nobody farther than sixty feet from the stage. This model has been used for every theatre built since 1962.

As of 1974, the most recent year for which information is available, there were two types of Soviet theatres in existence: State Theatres and the National Theatres (TIUZs). The TIUZs, or Theatres for Young Spectators, exist in the national republics of the USSR. All of these theatres are subsidized, some as much as ninety percent, by the Russian government "as matter-of-factly as the transit system" (Doolittle & Barnieh, 1979, p.52). There are also laws governing the proportion of children's programs in a given theatre. They are recognized "as highly important means of enlightenment" (Marshak, 1979, p.219), so

children's exposure to this theatre is guaranteed.

Goldberg has studied the Soviet children's theatres extensively and says they are the "aesthetic and educational agency of the Soviet government" whose job it is to influence "the development of future citizens of the Soviet State" (Goldberg, 1974, p.5). Even though the pedagogues are concerned with the political side of the productions, Goldberg believes they are also "humanistically and aesthetically motivated" (Goldberg, 1974, p.11).

Even though children's theatre and its participants have gained little respect in the Western world, in the USSR they are both considered with the highest regard. It is this respect which has led to a powerful, devoted children's theatre in the USSR.

#### Children's Theatre in Britain

In order to understand the history of children's theatre in Britain, it is necessary to comprehend first the nature of theatre for children in Britain at the present time.

A popular format for theatre for children in Britain at the moment is Theatre in Education or TIE teams. TIE is a form of theatre which began as an answer to the changing needs of both theatre and

schools. It uses "a complex mixture of theatrical forms and educational techniques" (Redington, 1983, p.1) in programs which are taken out into the schools.

TIE teams consist of a group of actor-teachers who devise, or write different programs for specific age groups and take these programs into the schools. TIE itself is not a performance of a play, "a 'one-off' event which is here today and gone tomorrow" (Jackson, 1980, p.ix), but is a mixture of theatre and education, including elements of traditional theatre, creative drama and simulation. These elements are carefully coordinated and structured to allow the students to experience a situation(s) arising from a problem introduced by the company. The problems used in such programs often have national or world significance, and are usually connected to the school curriculum.

Beyond the agreement of TIE teams that the students be "active participants" (Redington, 1983, p.2) in the process, there is little similarity in the style and format of each TIE program. The students' participation can vary from a discussion about the problems introduced in the play to a complete "acting out" of events. Jackson (1980), however, does identify three elements adopted by most TIE teams: a classroom

teachers' workshop for all of the teachers whose students will be involved in the program; a project pack or teachers' notes; and, a feed-back mechanism which allows the teachers to offer constructive criticism about the program. This is done either with a questionnaire or a meeting for both teachers and performers (Jackson, 1980, p.ix).

The origins of TIE can be traced back to the beginning of a variety of theatrical forms, most of which still exist in Britain today. The first theatre to which British children were exposed was the annual Christmas pantomime which was produced for the entire family beginning in the early eighteenth century. Children's theatre (Jackson's 'one-off' event) did not really begin until 1914 when Jean Sterling MacKinlay substituted a season of children's plays for the usual pantomime. However, even with this beginning, its growth was slow, and it was not until after the Second World War that theatre designed specifically for children became significant.

It was this growth in children's theatre during the forties which led to the TIE theatre of today. Although the beginning children's theatre companies often simply staged a play, either in a school or a

theatre, there were companies which began to experiment with other forms of presentation. These diverse forms indicated a concern for such things as actor-audience relationship, playing space and subject matter (Redington, 1983, p.33).

Two people who were involved in this experimentation were Peter Slade and Brian Way. Slade began in the thirties with two companies which performed in schools. This led to his work in creative drama in the fifties and the publication of Child Drama in 1954 in which he first proposed the idea of an actor-teacher. This idea came from his work with the Pear Tree Players where he noticed that this particular company was special:

They worked so hard and so imaginatively, they could do script or improvisation in any place of any shape to or with an audience. Not only were they good as a team, but they also taught...the first professional group entirely devoted to education (Redington, 1983, p.33).

These concepts are still prevalent with TIE teams today.

Brian Way also experimented with form and in the forties developed the participation play, where the children participated in the action of the play. Many other companies through the early fifties tried similar

techniques. Way's concern with audience size, suitability of material to the age group, and staging (he opted for the arena production), was influential in the formulation of TIE.

Slade's and Way's work, along with the work of a great many others, eventually led to the birth of the first TIE team at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry in 1965. As both the theatres and the Arts Council (a funding agency) began to see the value of such work, the number of TIE teams grew. However, even today only approximately twenty companies in Britain devote themselves to TIE (Redington, 1983, p.9). There are still many companies who stage the formal play.

Although the work of children's theatres was obviously a strong influence on TIE, so were other types of theatre. Brecht's Lehrstucke (teaching plays) of the late twenties and early thirties used little of the theatrical conventions of sets and props, and were designed to lead the audience to discuss the subject matter of the play. Because today's TIE teams travel to schools, they carry little, relying on only essential pieces of sets and properties. They often attempt to set up a debate about the topic of the play. There were also the political theatre groups of the

late sixties and early seventies which used socio-political themes. TIE also uses this type of theme in an attempt to get children to question society and demand change (Redington, 1983, p.22). The documentary theatre of the sixties which presented a problem, was also copied by TIE. This type of theatre was concerned with the problems associated with a local area, also an element of TIE. Lastly, there were the Repertory companies, many of which started Young People's Theatre societies (Redington, 1983, p.29). By the mid-sixties most of these companies were attempting contact with schools. TIE teams today work almost exclusively in schools.

As TIE has developed, it has influenced other companies in Britain who wish to work with children. It is recognized as having played a leading role in the development of children's theatre as an intricate and vital part of the school system. However, there are still few TIE teams, and they primarily work in the district in which they are situated, so many children might never have an opportunity to experience this type of work.

Another difficulty is an economic one. Although new companies are still beginning , some of the more

established companies must either do other kinds of shows or shut down because of government reductions in funding. Unfortunately, this is only the beginning and as Redington (1983) points out "the present recession will affect TIE in the long term" (Redington, 1983, p.139).

Although TIE itself has not prevailed in Canada, many of its beliefs have become central to the goals of children's theatre in this country. Canada also copied many of the various British experimental theatres, and much of what is referred to as children's theatre in Canada today has its roots in one or more of these movements.

#### Children's Theatre in Canada

Theatre for children in this country has a much more recent history than that of the countries previously discussed. The first children's theatre work did not begin until the early fifties. As well, Canadian writers have not been as prolific as writers in the United States and Britain, so the information available on children's theatre in Canada is limited. What seems most prevalent about children's theatre history in this country, unfortunately, is the lack of respect afforded it by the country and its people as

evidenced by its often unsteady and disjointed growth.

The first professional children's theatre company was established in Vancouver in 1951. Holiday Theatre began through the work of Joy Coghill and Myra Benson. Coghill had received her training at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. At that time children's theatre was generally a weekend and holiday entertainment, and this influenced the beginning of the Holiday Theatre. The scripts from the fairy tales and the classics dominated its repertoire as they did the Goodman Theatre repertory until Canada's Centennial in 1967. Part of the Centennial celebrations included the production of many new commissioned works.

Holiday Theatre provided two types of theatre: the touring shows with smaller casts, and the large proscenium shows which played for Vancouver audiences. This was analogous to the developments in both the United States and Britain whose children's theatre companies had found they had to tour in order to survive. There was also a movement growing which stressed that theatre should be for all children. Touring throughout the province was very important to Holiday Theatre as one of its earliest objectives was to offer live theatre to all British Columbia children.

This company toured for twenty-two years, setting a precedent for almost every other children's company subsequently begun in Canada (Doolittle & Barnieh, 1979, p.71).

From 1969 to 1972 the company's prestige diminished (Doolittle & Barnieh, 1979, p.71), as it merged with The Playhouse, changed its name twice, and lost its artistic director. Around this time two people new to the company "launched the second wave of colonialism" (Doolittle & Barnieh, 1979, p.71), and the company's emphasis turned to the British concept of TIE, which emphasized developing programs for a community area. However, by the 1977-78 season, there was no theatre for children at all because of a number of problems. Two of the problems were based on economics. Canada Council (a funding agency which is responsible for grants to the arts) would not fund TIE because it was educational and education was the responsibility of the provinces; however, the provincial government would not support a program which stayed in one city of the province. Fortunately other theatres started up at this time on the West coast to fill the gaps which were left, including Green Thumb Theatre for Young People, a company still active today.

Other developments occurred later in other parts of the country. The first regional children's theatre of Canada was begun by John Hirsch and Tom Hendry at the Manitoba Theatre Centre. The theatre performed a wide range of plays, and offered classes for young people in such things as movement and speech, and participation in children's theatre. However, there came a time when the artistic director changed every two years and programs for young people took a back seat.

In 1966, two professional children's theatre companies were established--The Globe Theatre of Regina and Young People's Theatre in Toronto. Without describing the complete history of both, it is important to note a few factors about these companies. First of all, each company has managed to exist since its inception and both are the oldest children's theatre companies in Canada. Secondly, although each has differed considerably from the other in artistic style, both have influenced the development of theatre for the young in Canada, with other companies emulating their styles. Lastly, both of these companies represent "both the strengths and weaknesses in Canada's theatre for young people" (Doolittle &

Barnieh, 1979, p.80). Both have had to confront the standard problems of "the Saturday show, the school tour, repertoire and reputation" (Doolittle & Barnieh, 1979, p.80).

The same problems have been faced by the children's theatre companies of Quebec; however, the motive for the work of many French companies has been different from the English speaking companies. Many of these companies conduct research on children and use their findings in the planning of productions. One popular type of research is done through workshops, using methods similar to those used by TIE. For example, La Marmaille uses workshops to allow children to "invent themes, characters, situations, dialogue, feelings, space and objects, thereby exercising their imagination and creativity" (Doolittle & Barnieh, 1979, p.174). The end result of this work can take any of a different number of forms, whether a publication or a theatrical presentation. However, for many of the companies undertaking research, the results are usually applied to a production itself, since performances may be subsidized whereas research is not.

It is obvious from even this brief history that theatre for children in Canada has had its

difficulties. It seems to have had trouble finding its own style, relying heavily on the work of Britain and the United States in its beginnings. Even with some companies commissioning excellent new works, much of what passes for children's theatre in this country is "bright bouncy entertainment made entirely of silly putty" (Deverall, 1977, p.15). Doolittle echoed this sentiment in 1979 in the book, A Mirror of Our Dreams, and suggests that this is a cause of the lack of respect given to children's theatre even from those involved in it:

It is my belief that the lack of a deep belief and faith in the genuine values of a special theatre for children has resulted in a plethora of slight, cynical and insipid pieces of theatre. These, in turn, have engendered an unprofessional attitude in both actors and directors towards what they, often with just cause, regard as trivial and tedious works (Doolittle & Barnieh, 1977, p.56).

A report drafted in 1978 by a theatre officer of the Canada Council, and approved by that council concluded by suggesting that the time was ripe for Canada Council "to grant coherent and significant support" (Doolittle & Barnieh, 1979, p.183) to theatre for young people. Unfortunately, since this report was issued, the Canada Council position of Theatre Officer

in charge of Theatre for Young Audiences has been abolished.

Another problem which has plagued young people's theatre is its reliance on the education system for both audiences and funds. In 1979 Doolittle noted that "in Canada at the present time, a fulltime professional company performing for young audiences could not survive unless it played in schools" (Doolittle & Barnieh, 1979, p.47). And yet education budgets are continuing to shrink. It is difficult to believe that these budget reductions will not affect these companies, if they have not already.

The only thing which seems to be keeping children's theatre alive in Canada at the moment is the sheer determination of the few companies which have existed since the seventies. Extensive touring is hard on performers and few decide to devote themselves to this form of theatre, viewing it instead as a stepping stone to "serious" theatre for adults. Consequently, Canadian companies are constantly faced with the problem of training new personnel.

One encouraging aspect of these companies, especially the more established ones, is the turn in the last few years to more unconventional subject

matter designed to "enlarge children's experiences" and "expand their knowledge" (Spencer, 1978, p.69). This author believes that if a company is performing in schools, then the subject matter should be educational. More and more companies are stressing the educational aspects of their work; some even ask both children and teachers what topics they would like plays to treat and they use this information in planning their work.

Unfortunately, as in the United States and Britain, the greatest problem for children's theatre in Canada is an economic one. The effects of continued decreased government spending, both at the provincial and federal levels, have yet to be fully seen.

#### Summary

Children's theatre has included a variety of elements through its development in the United States, Soviet Russia, Great Britain and Canada. Often its form has developed in response to some outside influence, such as that of the various funding agencies, or in the case of the Soviet Union, political motivations. No matter what form it has taken or for what reasons it has existed in any given country, it is widely believed by those involved in it that good children's theatre is of value to children.

The question which has not been answered about children's theatre as it exists in Canada, however, is in what ways it is of value to children. In Britain, TIE programs are designed with a direct link to the curriculum, and the teachers use the program as a jumping off point for further work. However, TIE is not just a play but a complex combination of teaching and theatre strategies. In the Soviet Union and the East European countries the formal play is used as part of the curriculum. So much research has been done on children and plays in that context that they know what content each level of child will accept and produce their works accordingly, so their theatres are effective learning tools. The same cannot be said about children's theatre in North America.

Research on children's theatre in North America has been scarce. Yet more and more children's theatre companies are trying to get into the schools in order to support themselves, claiming that their work is valuable to children. Few of these companies can offer any evidence to support their claims. If this type of theatre, Jackson's "one-off event", which is the form most children's theatre in Canada takes, is of value, than it is important to know what the value of it is.

This information should be important to both those who are involved in this kind of work, and those who hire these companies. As Melvin Bogen (1966) points out, adults take it upon themselves to choose what children see "without really stopping to examine its value for children" (Bogen, 1966, p.46). If the formal play is really of value to children, then that value should be made obvious. Perhaps an initial method for determining the value is to ask the children themselves.

## CHAPTER 3

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks brought to the study, and provides a description of how these frameworks are used and data are gathered in a naturalistic study. A description of each of the theoretical frameworks will be followed by a discussion of the methodology chosen for this study.

#### Theoretical Frameworks

One of the characteristics of qualitative research is that researchers usually analyze their data inductively (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.29). Rather than entering the field stating what they are looking for, researchers enter the field with no preconceived hypotheses to test and proceed through a process of discovery as they collect and analyze the data. Because of this, it is necessary to have a number of possible frameworks within which the data may be analyzed. This leaves researchers open to tackle their data from a variety of perspectives. For this study there are eight such frameworks, which I have classified under the following names: Sex/Age Preferences, Cognitive Complexity, Involvement/Technique, Attention Getters, Problem

Analysis, Realist, Emotional/Aesthetic and Personal Appreciation.

The first three frameworks have been selected from three experimental projects undertaken in the late forties to the late seventies. Although the present study is not experimental, these projects do offer some interesting perspectives from which the data might be analyzed.

The first framework has been called Sex/Age Preferences. In studies conducted by E.C. Mabie and his associates from the late forties, it was ascertained that both the age and sex of audience members affected the enjoyment of a play. Mabie was one of the first researchers to use scientific methods to discover "what the theatre does to audiences" (Addington, 1974, p.482). His concern was not for the after-effects of theatre, but for the immediate effects on audience members as a performance was taking place. To ascertain these effects, "audience response recorders" were installed next to selected seats in the University of Iowa's theatre in the late 1940's. Studies using these devices were conducted until the mid-fifties. It was found that:

episodes which were dominated by men were rated very interesting by men; those dominated by women were rated very interesting by women. Comic situations were rated very interesting by both sexes and preferred to serious situations. Love situations were preferred by women and rated uninteresting by men. Family situations appealed to the women as very interesting and not so interesting to the men (Mabie, 1952, pp.241,242).

One boy and one girl will participate in the present study, and it may become significant to consider the differences in their responses to the play. Although there were insufficient data in the Mabie studies to warrant firm conclusions about the effect of age, some preliminary findings suggested that "college age persons tended in general to react more variably than others, and that high school students were generally disinterested in scenes featuring satire or ideas" (Addington, 1974, p.483). More recent work concerning younger audiences' preferences was conducted in 1973 by Claire Jones at Oklahoma City University. A questionnaire, "designed to explore the likes and dislikes expressed by children", was answered by four hundred and seventy-five children from grades kindergarden through eight. Although Jones stressed that this was not a "controlled" (Jones, 1973, p.10) study, and she did not separate male and female

responses, the results are interesting:

As evidenced by 475 school children of the Oklahoma city area, the ideal play would be a funny story with funny people, a make-believe type story that they have never heard before, with lots of chases and running around but no singing, lots of action rather than talk, probably with a happy ending (Jones, 1973, p.12).

Similar to the adults in Mabie's studies, the majority of children expressed interest in comedy; only three of the children who answered Jones' questionnaire even mentioned families. The child participants in the present study will be asked what they liked the most about the play.

Another framework, called Cognitive Complexity, evolves from studies of audience reaction to specific characters. In a 1977 study, W. Gourd, another American researcher, considered how different audiences responded to specific characters within a play. Similar to Mabie and his colleagues, Gourd used a scientific approach, analyzing data gleaned from semantic differential and Likert-type scales. These scales were administered to sixty female and thirty male undergraduates after they had viewed each of two plays. One of Gourd's corollary questions was, "Will cognitively complex subjects respond differently in dimensions other than 'like-dislike' to characters in a

play than will cognitively simple subjects?" (Gourd, 1977, p.138). One of his observations indicated that although the former group made considerably wider distinctions among the characters that they had judged" (Gourd, 1977, p.150), each group was partial to different characters from the plays. Although this researcher's study cannot begin to answer the complicated question posed by Gourd, it might be revealing to consider whether the subjects' responses indicate that they prefer any particular character over another in the play to be chosen for the present study and the reasons for this preference.

A final framework from the experimental studies is the Involvement/Technique framework of the Americans Vigneault and Russo (1972) who investigated the effects of changes of theatrical technique on audience involvement with characters. They wanted to test empirically the validity of Brecht's theory of alienation. Brecht believed that if audiences remained distant (alienated) from the onstage action, this would induce critical evaluation of the dramatic situations. Vigneault and Russo hypothesized that "increased attempts to alienate the audience would result in...less involvement" (Addington, 1974, p.486). They

used a semantic differential for data collection. Although the results showed that the play used in the study was responsible for significant changes in attitude, the statistics did not indicate that exposure to different theatrical techniques produced important changes in character involvement. It might be interesting to note if the staging of the play to be used for this present study becomes significant in the subjects' level of involvement in the play.

A rather different framework, Attention Getters, is suggested by the literature concerning the effects of television. Although there are many differences between television and theatre, there are also similarities, evident in the types of focus taken in some of the studies. In a critical review (1981), Tannis Macbeth Williams notes that studies indicate that children are more likely to attend to puppets, children, high action, scene and character changes, scene variability, peculiar voices, sound effects, lively music, and frequent changes of speaker. In another report (S.H. Chaffee & J.L. Singer, 1981) Singer discusses the problems connected with the above mentioned attention devices. He states that "children may react more to the aggression demonstrated or other

lively activities, or to rapidly presented material generally or loud music which turns out to arouse them emotionally" (Chaffee & Singer, 1981, p.23) than to quieter material which does not attract their attention. Consequently, children may focus too much on violence in television because it is easier to comprehend than is more subtle, complicated material. There are some further questions regarding what children comprehend and retain from such material. Children's theatre, in order to compete with the marvels of television's technology, uses many of the technical effects mentioned by Williams. It may become significant in the present study to consider the subjects' responses to the various attention getters used in the play.

Another framework from the literature on television is the Problem Analysis framework. Again, Williams (1981) notes that there is evidence that as children progress through elementary school, they develop a better ability to understand sequences of events, causes of events, motivations for behaviour, consequences of behaviour, and problem resolution. One study (Newcomb & Collins, 1979) suggests that young children have comprehension difficulties partly because

of "the types of roles, characters, and settings portrayed in many of the adult programs" (Williams, 1981, p.187). Developing the correct level of material for a child audience has long been a concern to those involved in children's theatre. In the present study it will be important to consider whether the subjects have understood the presentation, especially since it will be shown to a range of age groups in the same audience.

The Realist framework comes from research done in East Europe, reported by Moses Goldberg (1972; 1974), a long-time researcher of theatre for children. The studies undertaken by the pedagogues of the East European children's theatre companies suggest that children ages ten to thirteen prefer realistic productions dealing with concrete problems to which they can relate. The child of this age "is insistent that the plays he sees be for him--about children of his age, with problems similar to his own..." (Goldberg, 1972, p.8). His interest is directed to the world around him. As well, the Moscow Central Children's Theatre does extensive research on the reaction of children to key moments of the play. These reactions are compared to the content analysis of the

play to ascertain the children's perceptions of what they have seen. This information is then used to judge the effectiveness of the production, and to suggest improvements, if any. In Canadian theatre there has been, especially over the last five years, an emphasis on productions portraying real life. It seems crucial to consider whether a Canadian children's audience appreciates this portrayal of reality.

Another framework is derived from a short article by Jon Spelman (1972) who mentions a very different area of response from what might be expected from a young people's audience; this is the Emotional/Aesthetic framework. He believes that "instinctive feelings" (Spelman, 1972, p.310) would characterize the responses given, describing this type of response as "emotional and sensory" (Spelman, 1972, p.310). Spelman makes a distinction between this and an aesthetic response, which he believes cannot be expected from young people, although he maintains that a more critical analysis can eventually develop from an emotional response. However, he is speaking of an older group than will be represented in the present study, so this author believes that "instinctive feelings" would be more likely generated from the

subjects than analytical responses.

A final framework similar to the one above is Personal Appreciation. This framework comes from a comprehensive research project undertaken in New York City in 1965. Charles Kadushin used observation and qualitative interviews to ascertain how audience members felt about a production of the Shakespearean play, A Midsummer Night's Dream. Like many children's theatre companies this production group toured various neighbourhoods in the city.

Kadushin and his team gathered data using three methods: watching the audiences; counting the race, age and sex of the audience members as they arrived; and conducting forty interviews. They also had informal discussions with both the actors and other staff members. Kadushin found that when individual responses were considered, there were widely varying levels of interest and understanding. He mentions such areas as detail to content, psychological interpretations, emotional levels, and appreciation. His research indicates that although eighty to ninety percent of the audience liked the play, it was not necessarily the cognitive meaning which was appreciated:

Now the point of all this is that the most popular scenes in the play, among persons of all levels of sophistication, were first the lovers' quarrels, and second, the broad comedy of Bottom and farcical happenings in the play within the play (Kadushin, 1966; pp.27,28).

Kadushin further explains that audience members could appreciate what was occurring onstage without understanding why it was taking place. This author also found in a pilot study conducted for the present project that student responses were quite diverse, especially in what students remembered most, liked and disliked.

All of these frameworks suggest various methods of dealing with the data gathered in this present study. Some of the frameworks are more concerned with the "intellectual" learning of an audience, while others stress an "non-intellectual" approach, searching for the personal meaning derived from a production by each individual. It is possible that the data will encompass all of these frameworks; it is just as likely that the data will suggest some things that are not derived from the frameworks presented here. It is important to consider these frameworks constantly while in the field, continually weighing the data against them and noting any item which could be pursued in

further detail.

I personally believe that the results of Kadushin's (1966) study will contribute the most to an understanding of the data in this project. In a pilot study conducted for this project, it was found that students' responses to a play, especially to questions involving personal preferences, were dissimilar. Based on my own experience in the field of children's theatre, I feel that children tend to remember and like better those things which amuse them. Consequently, the purpose behind the presentation is often not understood.

#### Naturalistic Research

Guba and Lincoln (1982) define naturalistic inquiry as a paradigm or "pattern or model for how inquiry may be conducted" (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p.233). The purpose of this type of inquiry is to answer the question, "What is going on here?" (Rist, 1982, p.440). The aim is to describe and analyze the characteristics of a given setting, including the people and their interactions, and the environment in which they live. This information may not be generalizable to other settings. The characteristics of naturalistic inquiry distinguish it from any other mode

of research.

A first characteristic is the belief that in order to understand a situation fully researchers must conduct their inquiry in the "natural" setting. It is only through watching, talking, listening and speaking to people in their actual environments that researchers can understand human beings. So the researcher "hangs around where the events he or she is interested in naturally occur" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.3).

Another characteristic of naturalistic research is one which has received much criticism. It is believed that naturalistic inquiry is "value bound" (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p.238). Researchers' values are always present throughout their studies and may affect the data. Guba and Lincoln extend this even more stating that naturalistic inquiry "is grounded in the value systems that characterize the inquirer, the respondent, the paradigm chosen, the methods selected, and the social and conceptual concepts" (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p.242). It makes sense that researchers' own value systems may be affecting their view of some phenomena because "the researcher is the key [data gathering] instrument" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.27). Everything researchers see, hear, and think about must filter

through what they already know about the world. Rather than attempting to stop this from occurring, researchers are encouraged to use the hunches and intuitions which are based on their own personal experiences. What is important to naturalistic inquirers is that they understand that this is what they are doing and make note of it.

Another characteristic of naturalistic inquiry regards the relationship between the researcher and the object being studied. In the natural setting researchers must constantly adjust their position. During one event they may be detached observers, while during another they may find themselves engaged in the event and an important part of it. Researchers using qualitative methodology must realize that "data collection strategies can change as quickly as the entrance or exit of a single individual" (Rist, 1982, p.443), so they must be constantly aware of their options and react accordingly to changes in the situation.

A fifth characteristic and one which is tightly related to the characteristic above is the inductive approach used by the naturalistic researcher. In this mode researchers enter the field with a vague notion of

what they are looking for, or no idea at all. Rather than entering the field attempting to prove a hypothesis already in hand, they suspend judgment on what will be important in the field. They attempt instead to spend sufficient time in the field to allow the "factor patternings" (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p.250) to emerge from the events themselves. Naturalistic researchers are analyzing as they proceed; there is a constant dialectic between collection and analysis of data.

This final characteristic is an important one to the present study. Since a relatively short time was being spent in the field, it was imperative to focus the study early; hence, the use of the eight frameworks described in the preceding section. These frameworks provided multiple possibilities for the focus of the study, yet did not narrow the focus so much as to lose opportunities for pursuing theories not connected to the given frameworks. It was also important to remember the central question of the study.

As mentioned above, naturalistic research involves collecting and analyzing data at the same time; "the stages of qualitative research are highly interdependent and integrated" (Rist, 1982, p.441).

While still in the field, I found myself considering the frameworks even before the performance of the play to be used in the study. This was due to some observational notes I had made about the students in the class, as well as to my own personal knowledge of the content of the play. I began to understand that contrary to my expectations the subjects of the study would not simply "chat" with me about the play they had seen. Consequently, it was decided to create some questions based on the theoretical frameworks to take into the interviews to be conducted with the subjects. Later, it was the two subjects' identical responses to the first question in the interview that prompted the use of class letters. Both of the subjects chose to draw the same scene from the play and showed considerable interest in it. Therefore I decided to ask the entire class to answer two questions in the letters which were to be written to the company: "What was the message of the play?" and "What did you like the most about the play?" Although I had not previously planned it, I also decided to retain all of the letters written by the twenty-six class members to be used as comparative data.

As the data was analyzed, it was approached thematically: "the clustering and presentation of material by key themes" (Rist, 1982, p.446). This seemed to be the most practical way of interpreting the data, and it presented a clearer picture of the material collected in the study.

## CHAPTER 4

## DESIGN

This chapter describes the methods used while conducting the study. Each sub-section of this chapter describes one of the methods and what occurred while it was being carried out.

## Methodology

Selection of Company

The company chosen for the study was Green Thumb Theatre for Young People. This company fits the definition of children's theatre as outlined in Chapter 1: the company's actors are adults, the plays are designed with children specifically in mind, and the company performs in different places, including schools.

Green Thumb Theatre was formed in 1975 in the city of Vancouver. Its present artistic director is Dennis Foon. Foon is an accomplished director and writer of children's plays. In an opening letter to the study guides which are a part of each program, Foon describes Green Thumb Theatre as "educational theatre". For Foon the purpose of such theatre is indicated in the feedback received concerning some of the company's programs. This feedback has indicated that the

children "developed new skills in understanding themselves and the world surrounding them."

Foon states that the company was formed with a mandate to "address the concerns of children." These "concerns" are presented in the form of plays which have addressed different "health and social conditions." Last season the company toured a sexual abuse show which was felt to be so successful that it has since been filmed by CBC. This season the company has tackled two subjects--nuclear war and diabetes.

There is no doubt that Foon and the Green Thumb Theatre are concerned with the education of children: "We want to give children the tools to successfully cope in our changing world. We want children to take responsibility for themselves and be able to provide a support system for each other." Foon adds at the end of the introductory letter that he hopes the teachers find the program "a successful tool in child development programs in your school." It would seem that the public feels that the company's programs are successful. Green Thumb Theatre not only does extensive school tours, having visited many school districts a number of times, but also presented one of its programs at the 1984 Vancouver Children's Festival, an

international gathering of companies with interest in different forms of theatre for children.

#### The Diabetes Program

Green Thumb Theatre produced two different plays in 1984. The one used in this project was the diabetes program entitled "The Bittersweet Kid" (see Appendix D).

Green Thumb Theatre's study guide for "The Bittersweet Kid" describes it as "a play about learning to live with a disease and how to accept being different". The play is about an eleven year old girl who has diabetes. After spending ten days in the hospital, she returns home to start a new life as a diabetic. Every day she must have two needles of insulin, eat regular balanced and healthy meals (no sugar), and she must get plenty of exercise.

Shannon Wise does not like being a diabetic. In the play she complains that the kids at school will think she is "some kind of freak", and she comments about having diabetes: "I'm being punished for something I didn't do." On Hallowe'en Shannon rebels by eating all her collected candy, and is put back into the hospital. Eventually, through the help of her father and her friend, Josie, Shannon learns to accept herself as a diabetic and begins to take responsibility

for her own body.

Along with the main story are a number of sub-plots. There is conflict among all three characters: Shannon fights with her friend, Josie, because she can do things that Shannon cannot; Shannon fights with her father because of her own fear of the disease; and Mr. Wise and Josie disagree because Josie lies for Shannon, which indirectly causes her a setback. Another problem arises from the fact that Mr. Wise has been "laid off". Lack of funds makes the expense of the drugs needed to treat Shannon's diabetes more difficult to bear. Finally, although nothing is said about it, the mother of the Wise family is noticeably missing.

The play is performed with the audience sitting on two sides of the playing area, which is between them. According to one of the actors, this format has been used for a couple of years and is believed to be a good method for a children's presentation. Most of the time the company performs in a gymnasium and the coloured lines on the floor are used to distinguish the playing area from the audience.

Considering the sparsity of most children's theatre sets, the one for "The Bittersweet Kid" seems elaborate. One entire wall of a kitchen is

represented, with cupboards, sink, counter and refrigerator. There is also a table with two chairs which sit on a large red braided rug. A black, rubber mat represents the door to the backyard, which consists of two ladders with a board joining them together, and a large garbage can. The entire set gives a strong and lasting impression, colouring the action of the play. It is obvious before the play even begins that the Wise family is not a well-to-do household.

The presentation runs approximately forty-five minutes, with a five-to-ten minute question period at the end of the play, during which the actors answer some of the audience's questions. The actor performing the part of Mr. Wise introduces the play, mentioning the name of the company and the play, reminding the children at the front to keep their feet behind the line and asking the audience members "to be as considerate as [they] can" and "try not to talk too much".

#### Selection of Site

The researcher obtained a complete list of Green Thumb's touring schedule for "The Bittersweet Kid", and selected and contacted a school district in a mid-sized town in the British Columbia interior. This was the

closest town to Vancouver on the company's schedule, and the performance dates coincided with the researcher's own schedule.

The school district's superintendent was very supportive and immediately suggested a school for the research, ABC Elementary (not its real name). The principal of this school was then called and the study was discussed. He was very enthusiastic about the work and gave his assurance that the staff would help in any way they could. He also explained that the entire school would be attending the performance, including the grade six classes, the grade in which the researcher was interested. Arrangements were made to send explanatory material to the school, and the principal guaranteed that one of the grade six teachers would be expecting the researcher on a designated day.

#### Procedures for Entering the Field

In chronological sequence, the three steps taken to make field contacts were: contacting Green Thumb Theatre concerning their touring schedule and permission to use their name in the study report; contacting the school district concerned to get permission to do the study in one of its schools; and entering the school a week before the scheduled performance of "The

Bittersweet Kid".

This latter step was carried out for two reasons: it was believed that the research would be easier to carry out if the students were already familiar with the author before the actual data gathering began; and this period in the classroom would allow the author time to choose the two students to be involved in the study. Data was to be gathered for two cases, one boy and one girl. The pre-study classroom observation time was needed in order to determine the most appropriate students to be included in the study.

#### Selection of Students

I entered Mr. N's classroom for the first time and I spent four days informally observing the students in the class and looking through some of the students' written work. The task was to select four prospective students, two of whom would be subjects for case studies and two of whom would be back-up subjects should either of the first two not participate. Since the case studies were to involve one boy and one girl, two of each had to be chosen at the outset. The girls' initial friendliness made it easier to decide the two potential female students for the study. However, the boys proved more difficult as I felt less comfortable

with them. Mr. N had agreed not to discuss the students with me, so it was necessary to rely exclusively on observation and reading of students' written work.

The original criteria for selecting the students involved the use of intuition; during the pilot study, I had found that there were students whom I felt I would like to have interviewed. I also thought I would watch for students who were vocal in class, students who weren't afraid to speak up. This characteristic seemed important since the interview was the primary data-gathering technique. However, as I observed Mr. N's class, it became obvious that there was a criterion more important than these. As I perused more of the written work and the class became comfortable in my presence, it became obvious that the main criterion for choosing the students would have to be the students' ability to work independently without the motivating force of the teacher.

This criterion became important because the nature of the tasks the students would be asked to undertake demanded the independence of this type of student. Away from any supervision or discussion, the students would have to draw a picture and they would have to

write a letter to the director of the play, again without the benefit of discussion. The necessity for this provision had become evident in a pilot study using two groups of students. The study had shown that the group who were sitting at large tables in the library rather than at individual desks had a tendency to discuss things with their neighbours, and consequently, in some instances, produced similar answers. It was obvious that the placement of the desks in Mr. N's room facilitated conversation and that most students had difficulty restraining themselves from talking.

Therefore the four students chosen were the ones who satisfied the above criterion. While the students were having an afternoon art class, I approached each of the four students individually, and asked them to stay after school for a few minutes. I explained that I was doing a homework assignment and would need the help of two students the following Monday. They were also told that the homework had to do with a play they were going to see, and that they would be asked to write a letter in class, draw a picture and undergo an interview in a small room while they were isolated. They did not appear to be bothered

by this prospect.

During the chat the only comments came from the two students who were my primary choices for the study. Tim was upset by the use of the tape recorder. His comments were, "I don't like my voice on a tape recorder. I sound funny." He blushed a deep red while making these comments. I empathized with the statement, having never liked my own voice on a tape recorder. When I explained this to him and assured him that nobody, especially his classmates, would hear his voice except me, he laughed and seemed reassured. Hazel was worried about the drawing. Her comment was, "I don't draw very good." I simply explained that the quality of the drawing was not important. I stressed the fact that I was not an art teacher and could not tell the difference between a good and a bad drawing, and did not care about that.

Although these two students asked the questions, the explanations were directed toward all four subjects in fairness to their general concerns. They were then given a letter requesting parental permission and asked to bring it back signed by one of their parents the following morning. It was also explained that I would phone their parents regarding the various aspects of

the study. When the parents were called, two of the mothers (Tim and Hazel's) had already signed the forms and saw no harm in the study. However, they did want to know how their children had come to be chosen. The criteria for the choices were explained to them and they were quite satisfied. Tom's mother explained that he had decided he did not want to be a part of the study, probably because of some conversations with some of his buddies. Rachel's grandmother could not be reached, but the permission form was signed and returned to the school the following day. Finally, Hazel and Tim were chosen for the study.

#### Methods for Gathering the Data

The primary methods used for this study were observation and interview. The two students involved in the study were also asked to draw a picture independent of the class and then to write a letter to the artistic director of the play in class. The following describes each of the methods in detail.

#### Observation

One of the best known methods available for use in qualitative research is participant observation. Becker and Geer (1970) describe the form of participant observation as "an observation of some social event

[and] the events which precede and follow it..." (Becker & Geer, 1970, p.133). This method describes the observation undertaken in this study. The two students were observed during the pre-performance work, as they watched the performance of "The Bittersweet Kid", and lastly, as they were interviewed and wrote letters to the company with the other members of their class after the performance.

The participant observer takes fieldnotes as he gathers the data from this type of observation. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) define fieldnotes as "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data..." (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.74). The fieldnotes are divided into two sections: those things which are observed, and the observer comments, which consist of interpretations and thoughts which occur while observing. My fieldnotes consisted of anything the students said and/or did during both the pre-performance work and the performance, and a description of the context in which it took place. Did another person distract the students? What was happening in the play in conjunction with their responses? How did they respond to the students

around them?

Fieldnotes were also kept while observing in the classroom for the week before the performance. This observation had three purposes: to allow the students to become comfortable with my presence in their classroom, and to view me as someone different from the school authority figures; to choose the two students for the study; to observe these two students during the pre-performance work. During the first few days, the fieldnotes included such things as the behaviour of the students, comments on individual students who were potential subjects for the study, the class schedule and the management of the classroom. For the most part these notes were used later in writing a description of the classroom and the students.

One of the difficulties of participant observation is deciding the level of involvement the researcher will assume in the setting. Rist (1982) distinguishes between the "detached" and the "engaged" observer (Rist, 1982, p.443); Glassner and Fine (1979) contrast the "observer" and the "friend" roles (Glassner & Fine, 1979, p.157). In the "detached" or "observer" role, the researcher does not interact with the participants, and is viewed as an outsider. In the "engaged" or "friend"

role, the observer is identified as an active member of the group being studied. For this study I chose aspects of these two polarities. I attempted to present myself in such a manner that the students would feel comfortable approaching me. I did not want to appear as another authority figure, yet at the same time, it was obvious that I was not "one of them". I often sat at the back of the classroom, watching and writing; at other times I became involved in the lesson. This especially occurred during the morning news discussions, French class and choir practice. I did not approach the students in a straightforward manner, but allowed them to approach me first, responding to any comments or glances directed at me in an open, friendly manner. It was surprising how easily my presence was accepted by the students; by the third day I had some "nominal status for them as someone who is part of their daily lives" (Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979, p.46).

Observation has long been viewed as a method for studying audiences' reactions to theatrical productions. At the Moscow Central Children's Theatre five pedagogues observe the preview of each new play, noting on observation charts "key moments in the play"

and "the reactions...of the audience to these specific moments" (Goldberg, 1972, p.9). Kadushin (1966) also watched the audiences in his study to ascertain group reactions to a production. This researcher's own experience as an actress indicates that directors constantly watch audiences and often use the information gleaned from such observation to either applaud or censure cast members. Ruth Frost (1976) notes that research on reactions of children to theatre "has perhaps concentrated on their immediate reactions" (Frost, 1976, p.25) too much. Children are always watched and rarely interviewed. She suggests, however, that "it seems more directly useful...to talk directly to children" (Frost, 1976, p.25). For the present study this seemed to be a useful method.

#### The Interview

The interview is another method associated with qualitative research. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) define it as "a purposeful conversation...that is directed by one [person] in order to get information" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.135).

Some researchers identify two types of interviews, "structured and unstructured" (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979, p.38); others refer to them as "formal" and "informal"

(Rist, 1982, p.443). The "structured" or "formal" type assumes that the researcher already knows what information is sought, and he enters the interview with a series of questions designed to uncover that information. The "unstructured" or "informal" type presumes that the relevant questions will emerge as the interviewer and the subject engage in "conversation". No matter what type of interview is undertaken, or whether it is used alone or in conjunction with other data gathering techniques, "the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.135).

An interview system utilizing aspects of the two described above were used for this study. There were opportunities during the week of observation for "conversations" with various students. These discussions often involved school work, and were initiated by the students. Unsolicited comment was regarded as a valuable source of information. With each of the two students in the interview phase of the study, however, a series of questions based on the theoretical frameworks was included, with additional

questions asked wherever they related to the students' responses (see Appendix C).

As Rich (1968) suggests, there are also other elements to consider when interviewing children as opposed to adults. First of all, fact-finding questions have to be more specific and direct. Frost (1976) states that it is natural for children to observe and comment on actions but "the interviewer [must set] the tone and talk about specifics and not abstractions" (Frost, 1976, p.25). Rich further suggests that it is a good idea to begin "by spelling out one's own obligations and intentions" (Rich, 1968, p.32). I found this was necessary long before the interview was scheduled because as I was explaining the methods to be used, one of the students chosen for the study expressed concern about the use of a taperecorder. He felt that his voice sounded funny. He was promised, as the others were, that his classmates would not hear the tape; I also tried to relate to his concern by expressing my own insecurities about my taperecorded voice. Finally, another thing that Rich cautions about is not comprehending children's answers because their frames of reference are different. Because of this, it is necessary "to

ask children to elaborate on their answers much more frequently than adults" (Rich, 1968, p.47). I found this quite true as I conducted the two interviews for the study. Although the subjects appeared to understand their own comments, occasionally I would have to ask a direct question for clarification. This often occurred when the students were referring to the characters in the play.

Some researchers in theatre have supported the use of interviews to explore audience response. Kadushin (1966) conducted forty qualitative interviews in his study of audience response. Frost (1976) believes that if a researcher wants to know something about children, then he should ask them. She cautions, however, that the interviewer must be careful to ask the right kind of questions, or he will not get the information being sought. The Moscow Central Children's Theatre supplements information gleaned from observation with taperecorded interviews, and this procedure is repeated for the first ten performances of every new play. A new book, Can Theatre Teach?, reports on a research project undertaken by the author in which extensive group interviews were held with children who had experienced a TIE program.

Participant observation and in-depth interviews are two methods associated with qualitative research. However, "the greater the alternative sources of data employed in the analysis of a setting, the greater the possibilities for accuracy and a holistic presentation" (Rist, 1982, p.444). For this study an additional two methods were utilized--pictures and letters--making this study thorough and comprehensive in terms of analysing data.

#### The Drawing

Although asking subjects to draw a picture may not be a common data gathering technique, "data is not only what one collects...but what things look like in a 'research' frame of mind" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.116). Because of the literature concerning this practice and my own personal experience, I believe that an artistic mode of expression provided some important data for the study.

As a director of children's theatre productions, I often received thank-you pictures from classes of students which had seen the performances. These pictures were often illustrations of each student's favourite scene; it was always interesting to see what attracted children's attention and how they articulated

their ideas utilizing a visual mode of expression. The East European and Russian pedagogues of the children's theatres have used children's drawings for years to analyze the perception of children. The East European pedagogues are responsible for running contests "which encourage the children to respond creatively to the play" (Goldberg, 1972, p.11). Drawings are a communication device and in this study they allowed the respondents to explore another mode of expression in addition to the verbal and written modes.

For this study each of the two students was isolated and asked to draw a picture representing the scene he/she liked the most in the play, "The Bittersweet Kid". Each student was supplied with identical materials: three sheets of white paper all different sizes, coloured chalk, crayons, coloured pencils, a ruler, a pen, a pencil and an eraser.

#### The Letters

Children's theatre companies often use children's written documents as a method of gathering data. In East Europe, essays are written by older children in response to a theatrical presentation. In Canada, many companies request some type of written feedback from the children. However, this often takes the form of a

thank-you letter, which does not seem to provide any useful or informative response.

Green Thumb Theatre for Young People requests a written response from their audience members. At the end of the question period following the presentation, the audience was told, "If this play made you think about anything, we'd appreciate it if you'd write us at Green Thumb and let us know." Sometimes the company uses these letters as a source of ideas for future productions. "The Bittersweet Kid" was apparently a response to children's letters asking for a play about "being sick" and "being different".

I supervised the writing of the letters for this study. There were two reasons for this. First of all, the only way of controlling the instructions given to the students was to give the instructions myself. Secondly, it released Mr. N from the responsibility of conducting a follow-up to the play. Providing release time was a way of thanking him for allowing me access to his classroom.

For this study the students were asked to answer two questions in their letters: "What was the message of "The Bittersweet Kid"?; and "What did you like the most about the play?" These letters were used not only

to compare the data gathered from the two students in the case studies, but they were also used to reveal information concerning what the class in general appeared to have absorbed from the production.

#### Summary

Rist (1982) believes that the more methods undertaken in the gathering of qualitative data, the stronger the evidence to support the results (Rist, 1982, p.444). This seems important, especially in dealing with children; one child may express himself more clearly in a verbal manner, another may prefer to write out his thoughts, while another may prefer a visual mode of expression such as a drawing. Strength lies in the rich combination of data from several sources in this study--observations, interviews, pictures and letters.

## CHAPTER 5

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter discusses the actual study itself. First, both the school and the classroom involved in the study are described. The second section deals with the data, describing the two case studies, and the findings and interpretations gleaned from the compilation of the data on each of the two subjects. Finally, there is a description of the class set of letters, and then an interpretation of the information gleaned from this data.

## Introduction

The School

ABC Elementary is located in a large town of about sixty thousand residents in the British Columbia interior. The school is situated in a middle class blue collar area. Sixty percent of the students are part of a two parent household, and forty percent come from broken homes. The principal refers to the school as rural; most of the four hundred students in attendance ride bicycles to school, and must stay there for lunch. The principal describes the students as average to above average in achievement. Although the school does have some problem students, the general attitude toward

the students is that they "aren't that bad really".

The building which houses ABC Elementary gives the impression of being large and spacious. This is due to the fact that the school was first built as an open concept school at a time when school boards had the money to experiment with different teaching environments. At that time there were four classes to an area with over one hundred students in each area. About six years ago there was a change in principal and staff, and although the school was not designed in that manner, the teachers insisted in teaching as if there were regular classrooms, using portable chalkboards as walls. Because of this, and because of some parent complaints about the open concept, the school board renovated the school in the following year.

The school is now divided into three zones, with the resource centre comprising the centre of the school. One zone houses the first four grades, another grades five, six and seven, and the last zone holds the gymnasium. Except for this latter zone, the zones are divided into classroom areas. Often the teachers must walk through another's classroom in order to get to their own, but both the students and the teachers seem comfortable with this. All the hallways and the

classrooms are carpeted, except for the areas around both the gymnasium and the general office. The school also appears to be well-equipped; one teacher remarked that the equipment was bought at a time the school board had the available funds.

School begins at eight-thirty with the singing of "O! Canada" and the morning announcements. Recess is from ten-fifteen to ten-thirty, lunch from twelve to one, and the students leave school at two-thirty. The morning is for core subjects such as Language Arts, Math, Science and Spelling; in the afternoon the non-core subjects are taught--Physical Education, Art and Music. Some subjects are taught by specialist teachers, and there is a prescribed time in each teacher's timetable in which the specialist comes in to teach his/her subject. Each classroom teacher is then allowed to decide for himself/herself when he/she will teach the rest of the subjects for which he/she is responsible. These decisions are based on ministry guidelines, and each teacher's own beliefs about the best time of day for each subject. Some teachers believe that it is best to do the core work in the morning while the students still have the energy to pay attention.

Because of the specialist teachers, each class, especially in the upper three grades, sees many different teachers during the week. The principal feels this is good for the students because it prepares them for the rotary schedule they will follow when they enter grade eight in another school. However, it is obvious that the schedule is not always adhered to, as special events may affect a teacher's timetable. For example, the vice-principal teaches all the French in the school; her administrative duties sometimes conflict with her teaching duties. Unfortunately, this seems to be a problem for which there is no solution and the staff adjusts quite well to unexpected schedule changes. As well, the teachers indicate that this is not a year round problem but one which is basically confined to the spring.

The staff at ABC Elementary consists of a principal, vice-principal, two part-time librarians, two janitors, a secretary and twenty teachers. At the time that the author was visiting there were also three student teachers doing practicums with the grade five and sixes.

The staff appears to be cohesive; they work well together. The teachers take an active part in making

school decisions, with every teacher contributing to the process. They are very friendly, as is reflected not only in the way they treat each other, but also in their acceptance of strangers. All of the staff went out of their way to make both the author and the student teachers a part of the school.

The principal is very proud of his staff, constantly stressing the creativeness of his staff members and their energy and enthusiasm for teaching. This love of teaching is evident in the positive atmosphere which permeates the school, in the brightly decorated hallways and classrooms and in the good relationship between the teachers and the students. All the teachers express concern for the welfare of the students. The creativeness of the staff is also evident; many of them are involved with extra-curricular events, running such things as the track team, the choir, and the bands. Some are involved in the community activities as well. While the author was in the city, there was a week of events entitled Arts in the Schools. ABC Elementary took part with art work, two bands and a ukelele group.

The arts are an important part of this school. There is a choir, a ukelele group, grade six and grade

seven bands, and a strong Art program. Two of the teachers also make recommendations to the Fine Arts consultant as to which performing groups they would like to have in the school for the following year. On an average the school brings in twelve groups a year, exposing the students to a variety of the arts--dance, music and theatre.

All in all ABC Elementary is a very pleasant school where the teachers and the students work together to the benefit of both themselves and the school.

#### Mr. N's Classroom

Mr. N's classroom is situated off a small foyer as is another grade six class. This small foyer looks like an art area; there is a small round table and chairs, a kiln, and an incomplete mural attached to one wall. Off Mr. N's classroom are two other rooms--the band room and a workroom.

Mr. N's classroom is six-sided and appears quite large in contrast to the standard square classroom. The room is carpeted with a light and dark green-patterned carpet. Almost all the wall space is covered with tack board, and the room is brightly decorated with both students' work and some of Mr. N's posters.

There are also mobiles hanging from the ceiling. On three of the walls are chalkboards, and a portable chalkboard which sits at the front of the room. The room contains shelving, a sink, file cabinet, locked storage cupboard, two small tables, a teacher's desk and twenty-eight student desks.

Mr. N begins each day the same way. After the morning announcements, he asks the students, "Any news this morning?" The class then spends approximately five to ten minutes discussing any news item which is of interest to them. These items cover a wide variety of topics; while the author was there the Stanley Cup Playoffs were of special interest to both the boys and the girls. Then Mr. N explains what he has planned for the day; although the class schedule is posted, this seems important because of the timetable disruptions which occur at this time of year.

All students take every subject offered at the school except for Band and Art. At the beginning of the year, the students must choose between Band and Art each of which is scheduled twice a week. There is also a school choir which involves only four of Mr. N's students. As well, all through the year the library takes a group of five to seven students for two-and-a-

half hours a week for lessons on the use of the library. The groups are switched every two to three months.

Mr. N's class consists of twenty-eight students, fourteen girls and the same number of boys. Most of the students sit in one of the three rows, which are double or triple desks across. Two of the more troublesome boys sit to the left of the teacher's desk, and one girl sits right against the wall at the back of the room.

Mr. N is a very "laid back" teacher. He does not raise his voice nor use detentions as a punishment. In fact, he does not really punish bad behaviour at all; he occasionally makes a comment to a particular student about his actions, but it is done in a low key manner. One comment he uses to gain the class' attention is, "Are you with me?"

The students in the class are generally quite talkative. They chat to each other during a lesson and often simply call out an answer rather than raise their hands. Some students seem to live in a world of their own, not really paying attention to anything which is occurring at the front of the classroom. This does not seem to bother Mr. N, who often seems unaware of what

is going on. However, careful observation reveals that this is not the case. Quite suddenly he will direct a remark to a particular student, or make a comment as he hands back a test. He also makes extensive comments in the students' workbooks which are marked often. He insists that each test written is signed by a parent. He is aware of the goings on in his classroom, even though he does not say much about it to the students.

Both staff and administration realize that Mr. N runs his classroom very differently from the rest of the staff, and the feeling is that if it works for him, then that is fine. It is obvious from visiting other classrooms that his system is unique. Not only are students not reprimanded verbally, they are not restrained from going anywhere that they wish without asking permission. The students sharpen pencils, get paper, visit friends, wash hands, visit the bathroom or their locker, and approach Mr. N to ask him a question, all without asking permission to do so. It was interesting to note that the students seem aware of an invisible line which they know cannot be crossed. For example, they may go to the pencil sharpener, but if the teacher is talking, they must wait until he is finished before using the sharpener. The staff seem to

feel that Mr. N's system works for him, but it is not one that many of them would use themselves.

It is apparent that the students are comfortable with Mr. N, and that the students learn under his guidance. The general impression, deduced from looking through the students' Novel Studies and Science notebooks, is that the girls are generally higher achievers than the boys. The boys are as bright as the girls, but lack the self-discipline to get the work done. They do well with work sheets and in-class work but do poorly on assignments. Mr. N agreed with this impression; he felt that his classroom consisted of average to above average students.

Although a stranger in the classroom could get the impression that the classroom is not under control, it is obvious from speaking to Mr. N that his classroom is well organized and runs in a manner which is comfortable for both him and his students.

#### The Case Studies

The next sections present the actual data collected from the two students involved in the study. Each student, Hazel and Tim, is dealt with individually. First is a description of the student, and then a discussion of the data collected from each

of the four procedures--observation, drawing, interview and letter. Lastly, the findings and interpretations are described based on the complete set of data.

### Hazel

Hazel is the tallest girl in the class. She has short, curly, light brown hair which complements her fair complexion. Hazel is always neat and tidy in appearance, often wearing a velour sweatsuit to school or, like many others in the class, rugby pants with a matching shirt. Hazel is a very quiet girl who rarely speaks to anyone else in the class unless spoken to first.

Even in group work Hazel always speaks in low tones, and never yells across the classroom as other students do. Although she does occasionally visit a friend, Hazel will not speak if Mr. N is addressing the class. However, unlike many members of the class, Hazel is not in the habit of leaving her desk when a lesson is taking place.

Hazel seems to be friendly with everyone in the class, although she is often annoyed with some of the boys. On the last day that I was in the classroom, Hazel complained to Mr. N that one of the troublesome boys was shooting elastics in her direction. She also

loses patience with some of the boys whose rude comments she overhears.

Hazel is an above average student, exemplary in all respects, and often has her work finished ahead of the rest of the class. Her Novel Studies and Science notebooks, which are neat and tidy, reflect her concern for schoolwork. Hazel's essay-type answers indicate reflective thought, and her solar system title page was carefully and brightly coloured. During the week I was observing in the class the students were working on a report with a partner. Hazel would not allow her male partner to do anything except a bit of colouring. They received an "A" for the report.

In the morning Hazel occasionally offers a news item. However, more often she sits quietly and listens to the others. During class lessons Hazel has a habit of simply answering Mr. N's questions aloud rather than raising her hand. This seems reasonable considering the class' normal routine.

Hazel sits halfway down an outside row of desks. A little farther ahead and to her right are the class' two most disruptive boys who sometimes aim their comments and/or elastics at her. Two relatively quiet girls sit beside her, and three very talkative ones

behind her. Hazel is not easily distracted by noise, however, being quite capable of concentrating intently on the task at hand despite a cacophony of sound around her.

The morning the letters of permission were returned Hazel approached me to ask the name of the play the class was to see, appearing interested in the study. However, on the morning of the day of the performance, Hazel left school after recess. After seeing both her teacher and the school secretary for permission to leave the school, Hazel came to speak to me. She apologized for being unable to take part in the study, explaining that she was not feeling well. Signs of her illness were discernible, but I wondered whether thoughts of the afternoon's activities were a partial cause of Hazel's illness.

I then spent the lunch hour phoning the grandmother of the second girl chosen; however, she was not at home. Fortunately, at one o'clock when school began again Hazel was in her classroom seat. I went to inquire as to her health, and Hazel explained that she had been on a Girl Guide hiking trip the previous Saturday night, and had not returned home until very late. She believed that this lack of sleep had been

the cause of her illness so she had gone home and had slept for an hour and a half. She was now feeling fine and enthusiastically informed me that she could still take part in the study.

#### The Observation During the Performance

Mr. N's class was seated in the gymnasium approximately ten minutes before the beginning of the presentation. While waiting for the play to begin, Hazel chatted with her classmates. Beside her were the same two girls who sat beside her in class. In front of her were three other grade six girls from another class with whom she was familiar. Hazel sat cross-legged on the floor yet still towered above many of the other students.

Before beginning the performance the actor playing Mr. Wise entered the playing area for some introductory comments. Many of the audience members answered his welcoming hello. Hazel did not, but just watched him, as did the girls surrounding her.

During the performance Hazel changed her position only slightly. Sometimes she would prop her chin in a hand, her elbow supported by a knee, still able to see from this position. Occasionally she would sit up straight if someone in front obstructed her view, but

this was rare. Hazel was quite still throughout the entire performance in contrast to many of her classmates who fidgeted almost constantly. The cause of this restlessness did not appear to be boredom, but an inability to see from certain positions in the audience.

In the opening minutes of "The Bittersweet Kid" some very popular rock music resounds from a tape recorder. Although I had observed a previous audience react quite strongly to this music, either through voice or movement, most of this audience, especially the older grades, reacted hardly at all. Hazel did not pay any extra attention to the music, but watched intently as the two female characters practiced their rollerskating routine.

For the most part, Hazel's attention was focused on the events of the play. Twice a girl in front of her turned to make a comment, and Hazel answered her, but these exchanges were very brief. Hazel seemed aware of my presence, glancing at me twice during the performance, both at times when she was laughing at something in the play. Other than her laughter, Hazel did not indicate any reaction to the play except during a scene where Josie stuck a candy up her nose; it was

obvious that Hazel found this disgusting. She watched the play intently, not disturbing anyone else around her.

When the performance was finished, the actors encouraged questions from the audience, but Hazel did not raise her hand to ask anything. After this, the classes were dismissed in an orderly fashion, and I asked Hazel to wait with me until the gymnasium was cleared. From here we went to the music room for the picture drawing and the interview.

#### The Drawing

In the same way that she approaches all tasks, Hazel tended to her drawing with meticulous care. She did not get it done in the time allotted, and because she had a baseball practice, she asked if she could finish it the next morning. Hazel came into school by eight o'clock the following morning and completed the drawing by eight-thirty when school began.

Hazel chose to draw on the largest piece of paper, and drew with precision, using a ruler for all the straight lines. She gave attention to small details. She used a combination of crayons and coloured pencils to colour the picture.

Hazel drew "Mr. Wise Cooking", the title she wrote across the top of her picture. In the interview previous to drawing the picture she had been asked which event from the play she would draw. She replied, "Um...probably when...the father was cooking and made everybody laugh." She liked this scene because it was funny and made the following detailed comment:

Using his fingers to get butter out of the Parkay margarine dish or whatever... and...umm, squishing the tomato (laugh)... and using the carrots...as a piece of the body. Like, that's about it, just making you laugh.

However, despite this interest in Mr. Wise's behaviour Hazel did not draw the actions described above. Hazel asked whether she had to put people into her picture, and I replied that since it was her picture, the decision was hers to make. This appeared to be a great relief since she felt that she was incapable of drawing people. Therefore, rather than a picture of Mr. Wise carrying out the actions described above, Hazel drew the kitchen where it all took place.

She drew the refrigerator, the cupboards and counter, the table and one chair, and the rug. An interesting thing about the picture is the detail Hazel included. She drew the handle of the refrigerator and the food chart which was taped to the front of the

refrigerator, the kitchen faucet and handles, lines from the frying pan representing steam, and she put two carrots on the table where Mr. Wise had been cutting up the vegetables.

The additions and deletions Hazel made to the set were also of interest. Even though there were two chairs with the table, Hazel drew only one of them. Interestingly enough, Mr. Wise did not sit down for this scene in the play; he chopped up the vegetables while standing at the table, while his daughter sat in the other chair and watched. Therefore in this scene the second chair was not significant. Hazel added stove elements to the counter, and drew the frying pan sitting on an element even though there was no stove on the set. An electric frying pan was used for this scene. Lastly, Hazel made the rug a green colour, although it was red on the set.

Considering Hazel's attention to detail it seems that she drew those things which would be found in a kitchen, hence the addition of the stove. She drew everything as realistically as possible, evident through the shading she used on the cupboards, the various colours used on the food chart, and her attempt to make the table three dimensional. It seems that

Hazel was concerned with making sure that her picture approximated as closely as possible the items she had seen on the set.

### The Interview

Although Hazel and I had chatted quite easily a number of times during the week, Hazel's nervousness was apparent during the interview. She spent the entire time playing with a staple she was holding, and often glanced down at the table in front of her while talking.

Through the earlier conversations I had discovered that Hazel responded more easily to direct questions. She would begin her answer, but then would wait for my questions before expanding on the topic. This tendency became even more pronounced during the interview where Hazel answered only direct questions asked of her. She never freely embellished her answers or offered any unsolicited information.

Hazel seemed embarrassed when she had to take time to consider the question before answering or when she did not have an answer. She would hesitate, say "uh" a few times and then fall silent. At one point I tried to reassure her: "Just think about it. You don't have to answer in a hurry". A lot of time was spent

encouraging Hazel to expand her answers either verbally with probes, or nonverbally, with nods of my head and smiles.

I began the interview with the question, "If you were asked to draw one of the events from the play, which one would you draw about?" Hazel answered that she would draw the scene where the father was cooking, liking this scene because, "I like humour...it's funny." However, she only remembered some of the character's humorous actions during this scene, and could not remember any of his amusing lines.

Hazel recollected other funny things about the play as well. She described Josie (referred to as Joycie) as "kind of funny", a character who "talked a lot" and Hazel laughed aloud when she said that Josie liked "going punk". Hazel also mentioned that this character would enter the Wise's house "sounding like a dog" and that all three of the characters "would always make jokes together". The last humorous thing that Hazel mentioned was the reason for Josie's and Frankie's breakup: "Because she talked too much."

Although Hazel recalled some of the humour of the play, she mentioned only a few specific details as to what was funny. The humour of the play did not seem to

be a major focus for her. In contrast, Hazel was able to discuss the more serious aspects of the play in greater detail and depth. The first of the serious elements mentioned by Hazel was the main character's fear of the diabetes. In explaining the play's sequence of events Hazel recalled that Shannon had been afraid to take the insulin upon being told that she had diabetes, but near the end of the play Shannon was "sort of learning how to take it and wasn't afraid of it anymore."

This comprehension of Shannon's difficulties was evident again in answer to the question, "What's the one thing that you can tell me about the play that you liked the most?" I received an unexpected response: "When she [Shannon] learned to take it, take the insulin. Probably make her life a lot better." This was in reference to a scene at the end of the play where Shannon finally gives herself an insulin shot, something she had been unable to face before. Hazel further commented that "during the end she learned how to do it." The fact that Shannon had learned to deal with her disease appeared important to Hazel. She also recognized that the character's fear of the disease and treatment was one of the minor conflicts of the play.

Another minor conflict Hazel recollected was an argument between Shannon and Josie over a ding-dong (a packaged cupcake). Although Shannon was not supposed to have anything sweet "because if she had too much...she would get sick", she insisted that Josie give her the cupcake. Eventually, Josie gives up trying to reason with her friend and leaves the house, leaving the cupcake for Shannon. Interestingly enough, Hazel saw the real cause of this argument: "That she had diabetes and...she was a friend, not a piece of the family." Hazel was able to understand that Shannon was taking her frustration with the diabetes out on her friend. The fact that Josie was not a part of the family seemed significant to Hazel; she had mentioned earlier in the interview that Josie was "sort of the odd person". Hazel felt that the problem with the diabetes was a "family matter" and Josie "was just a friend", who had no part in the family's difficulties.

Hazel also understood the reason behind Josie's last statement in this scene: "You eat it then, because I don't care." When asked, "What did she mean by that?" Hazel replied,

Well...uh...they were arguing and...she didn't care because she had just...finished an argument and...she didn't, probably didn't

really mean it. She just wanted to make her feel bad, feel, make the blonde girl feel bad.

Hazel reasoned that Josie was trying to make Shannon feel badly so she would not eat the cupcake, and Hazel believed that this had been a good way of handling the problem. She also suggested that another method for dealing with it would be to talk to the girl's parents, so they would know what was taking place.

The last minor conflict which Hazel identified concerned the conflict between Mr. Wise's being "laid off" from his job, and the need for money in order to purchase his daughter's drugs: "-Well...umm...the insulin and staying in the hospital and...uh...the special foods that they have to get cost a lot of money...for diabetes." Hazel recognized that this was the only problem which was not solved by the end of the play. What I found of particular interest in Hazel's discussion of this scene was that she remembered that Mr. Wise had lied to his daughter, telling her not to worry, that they would make it through. Hazel realized that "he was just trying to make her happy" so she would not worry about it. Hazel agreed with Mr. Wise's conduct, understanding that Shannon already had enough to worry about with the diabetes.

When asked what the main problem of the play was Hazel replied: "If you don't take your...insulin or any other type of medicine for the disease you have, you'll probably get real real sick." When probed a bit further, Hazel expressed the sentiment that even those people without diabetes could learn something from the play:

Because...if, if somebody was to get the disease or another disease, if they were afraid of it then they probably learned that there's probably nothing wrong with it or...uh...you can still have a good time. And it's better to take it because it might get worse or you may die.

Later on in the interview she added to this when we discussed the message of the play. She felt that the play was trying to tell people that they should listen to their doctor, but more importantly, "that there can be family problems...during this...and there can be school problems...and then after awhile they'll probably all disappear."

Hazel seemed very sensitive to the problems of the main character. When asked to describe the sequence of events in the play, Hazel mentioned only what had happened to Shannon:

Well, at the beginning...she had to go to the hospital and...she didn't know what was happening or...like the doctor wouldn't let her know if she had...uh...the disease or

not, and during the middle of it she...knew what she was having but was afraid to take it, and then near the end, she was sort of learning how to take it and wasn't really afraid of it anymore. That's about it.

Rather than relating the actual events of the play Hazel described how Shannon had dealt with the diabetes.

When asked to describe the personality and physical characteristics of each of the characters, Hazel was able to give a more detailed description of Shannon. However, she did not remember the character's name. She remembered the exact colours of each piece of Shannon's costume, and again stressed that Shannon "was sort of afraid of something that she didn't know about." Hazel felt that the age of this character was "about fifteen, somewhere in her teenage years."

However, despite the impression that the main character had obviously made on Hazel, this was not the character that she liked the best. Hazel's favourite character was the father because "he would always sort of wisen them up or something. And, if she did something wrong then...she, he wouldn't really punish her, but tell her to do it right." Hazel seemed aware of how much Mr. Wise cared for his daughter, and understood that he had done "crazy things with the

vegetables" because he realized that she was unhappy about having diabetes and Mr. Wise just "wanted to make her happy again, make her laugh." Hazel identified this lunch scene with her own life, explaining that when she had been small, her father had tried to cook and would do "dumb things" with different ingredients. She thought that her father's motivation was identical to Mr. Wise's, "to make me laugh".

The character which Hazel "liked the least" was Josie. The reason seemed to be that Josie was not part of the family unit, and therefore should not be part of a problem that was a private family matter. However, as mentioned earlier Hazel realized that Josie was trying to help Shannon and that despite her disease, "treated her as a friend and didn't matter what she had." Hazel also commented that their fights were natural because good friends "can't always like...be perfect, perfectly friends. They have to have some arguments sometimes."

All in all, Hazel seemed to enjoy the play. She said she would recommend it to other people "because it was a real good play...there was lots of sadness, humour...happiness...all sorts of feelings." However, she did have one suggestion for improvement.

She had felt that it was not clear what location the area around the ladders was supposed to represent; she did not know if that "was still inside the house or...outside of the house because there was no door or anything." Her suggestion was that they explain the area through the lines of the character: "Well, explain...the story more, like if they were outside to...get...fresh air or something." Hazel explained that when she had been waiting to leave the gymnasium, her friends had asked her about this area. She had replied that she thought it was supposed to be outside. But despite this problem she felt that "The Bittersweet Kid" "was really interesting".

#### The Letter

Hazel's letter was neatly and legibly printed. There was evidence that she had corrected a few errors with an eraser.

Although she had not at first understood the term "message" when asked about the message of the play during the interview, when the question was repeated in class prior to the letter writing, she did not ask me to clarify it. I assumed that she understood it from the interview discussion.

Her description of the message of "The Bittersweet Kid" was much more clearly stated in her letter than in the interview:

I think the message of the play "The Bittersweet Kid" was that all people should deal with their disease the proper way. Not trying to avoid it or if your afraid of it talk it out with your parents or a good friend.

I feel that this statement indicates that Hazel did understand a portion of the underlying message of the play.

Her statement concerning the part she liked in the play did not change from her response during the interview: "I liked the part when Mr. Wise was cooking the soup." Hazel also mentioned some of the things he worked with--the tomatoes, the carrots and the margarine. Interestingly enough, Hazel felt it was important to voice her complaint as well, although not asked to: "But one thing I didn't understand was when they sat on the ladders with a piece of plywood in the middle was that inside or outside the house." I believe that Hazel may have added this because of my emphasis to the class that the artistic director would want the students to be honest.

Hazel ended her letter on a positive note: "That was a real interesting play. I hope you will be

performing many more at our school."

#### Findings and Interpretations

Hazel thought that "The Bittersweet Kid" was "a real good play", and her appreciation of it was for different and often contrary reasons. Hazel did appreciate the humour, evidenced in her decision to draw the lunch scene, one of the more amusing moments of the play. She commented, "I like humour...it's funny". Hazel also noted Josie's "funny" character. This supports Jones (1973) findings drawn largely from grades four, five and six which indicated that most children would prefer a funny play with funny characters.

However, the humour of "The Bittersweet Kid" did not make the strongest impression on Hazel. On the contrary, it was the seriousness of the subject matter, diabetes, and its effect on the family which most concerned Hazel. Her sensitivity to the gravity of Shannon's position and its influence on both the secondary characters contributed to her overall response to the play. While not typical of youngsters, this sort of response is typical of theatre audiences in general. Kennedy (1978) states that in live theatre "we are invited to identify with someone who appears

before us..." (Kennedy, 1978, p.222). He explains further that at a simple stage this identification may occur only because the character is the central person in the story, but once this character is identified with, he/she

offers up the opportunity to discover 'what it is like to'--to be in that setting, to be that type of person, to be faced with those dilemmas, and to take those actions (Kennedy, 1978, p.226).

Like a more mature viewer, Hazel took advantage of this opportunity, arriving at a fairly complex understanding of Shannon's dilemma, and the others' relationship to her and her problem.

Hazel described the sequence of events in the play completely from Shannon's viewpoint, recognizing the steps to the character's final acceptance of her disease. Hazel understood that Shannon's fear of the diabetes was caused from the belief that her friends would consider her "an odd person" and that this fear was the cause of arguments with her best friend, Josie. Vigneault's and Russo's (1972) study investigated audiences' reactions to characters. In the present study the child's reaction is one of identification with the problems of the main character. Although Vigneault's and Russo's study considered the method of

staging as having an effect on involvement with characters, this has no bearing on this study. Hazel was quite far from the stage and therefore the action was much more removed from her than it was for the younger children who had "front row seats". It seems instead that Hazel's ability to concentrate on whatever is the focus at any given time aided her involvement with the play's characters. Although there were girls around her talking and writing notes, Hazel's attention was on the stage.

Hazel's identificaton with Shannon is evident in the choice of her favourite thing about the play. The scene which Hazel liked the most was near the completion of the play when Shannon injects the insulin herself which would "probably make her life a lot better". Hazel understood that Shannon had made the right choice concerning her disease, and recognized that Shannon would be happier in the long run. Hazel identified strongly with Shannon's difficulties, continually stressing throughout her interview that Shannon had been afraid of her disease but had learned to live with it.

Hazel's constant involvement with the main character suggests that Hazel appreciated the play for

its realistic story line. Research conducted in Eastern Europe suggests that children around the age of ten prefer more realistic productions dealing with their own personal concerns. Although Hazel does not have diabetes herself, she understood that the play was communicating the idea that it is important to take whatever medicine is given to you. She also comprehended that a disease can cause related problems with which a person must also deal. Hazel made one statement which was particularly revealing in terms of her acceptance of the reality of the situation presented: "Well, it was up to her if she wanted to have a shorter life or not, and if she did take it [the medicine], she would probably live longer..."

Hazel's attention to the more realistic elements of the play and concrete objects manifested itself again in both her picture and her letter. In her picture Hazel was careful to draw the smaller details of the set, even through the use of shading techniques. As well, she added a stove to the set, not unrealistic considering it is an appliance found in most kitchens. Her picture reflected not only the realism of the set, but also aspects of real life. In her letter Hazel reiterated her concern with the set mentioned during

the interview. She believed that the ladder area should be more clearly defined for the audience, perhaps through the characters' lines. She was concerned that her friends had been forced to ask her what that area was supposed to represent because it was difficult to understand.

The framework, Cognitive Complexity, gleaned from Gourd's (1977) study, suggested that cognitively complex people see characters in more than a "like/dislike" fashion, and can make distinctions between the types of characters they like or dislike. Although the present study did not determine whether Hazel was a cognitively complex person, it is obvious that she is a very bright girl, not only evident in her class marks, but also in the thought she gives to everything with which she is involved, whether it is Girl Guides, baseball or school work. She considers everything around her as significant, deserving her utmost attention, and this attitude is reflected in her comments about the characters.

Hazel not only identified strongly with the play's main character, Shannon, but was also able to analyze the motivations of the supporting characters, Mr. Wise and Josie, vis-a-vis Shannon's dilemma. Shannon liked

the father character better than the others, not because he was funny, but because "he would always wisen them up" and "if [Shannon] did something wrong...he wouldn't really punish her but tell her to do it right". It is obvious that her comments about Mr. Wise still related to her understanding of Shannon; she felt that the father could help Shannon more by "wisening her up" rather than by punishing her. Hazel also understood that Mr. Wise did silly things during the lunch scene because he empathized with Shannon's predicament, and he wanted "to make her happy again". This agreement with Mr. Wise's real motivations supports the Problem Analysis framework which suggests that children of this age have a better ability to understand causes of events and motivations for behaviour than do younger children.

Perhaps it was easy for Hazel to understand this scene because she connected it with her own life. Hazel recollected that when she had been small, her father had tried to cook and used to do "dumb things" with the ingredients. Interestingly enough, Hazel felt that her father's motivation was identical to Mr. Wise's.

Similarly, Hazel identified with Josie's support of her friend. She saw that despite Shannon's fear of being deserted by her friends, Josie maintained their friendship. Hazel commented that she believed that her own friends would support her if she contracted a disease because "I've got some real good friends, you know." Hazel also agreed with Josie's reaction to the argument over the ding dong; she wanted to make Shannon feel bad enough that she would not eat it. Josie knew the possible consequences of Shannon eating sweets. When Hazel was questioned about this friendship, she felt that good friends always fight sometimes. This made sense because "they each had separate problems".

In spite of supporting Josie's actions, Hazel felt that Josie was the odd person in the play, not really part of the family. Josie did not belong because the Wise's difficulties were "a family matter". My impression is that Hazel has been taught that certain household information should be kept in the home.

Hazel's explanation of the message of "The Bittersweet Kid" was what Kadushin (1966) referred to as "psychological interpretation" (Kadushin, 1966, p.27). Her interpretation was similar to the company's statement of theme for the play. Hazel thought it

showed that there was nothing wrong with having a disease, that people should not avoid dealing with it, and that there would be problems first, but these could be solved.

All in all, Hazel considered the meanings of the play very seriously, a reflection of Hazel's own character. It is not a surprise that she should consider "The Bittersweet Kid" an "interesting" play taking into account all that she obviously took from it.

Tim

Tim is one of the smallest boys in his class, easily noticeable with his bright red hair and a faceful of freckles. He is always dressed in rugby pants and a matching t-shirt. Occasionally he dons a baseball cap. He is a friendly boy who seems to be congenial with both the girls and boys in the class.

Tim does not appear to have a close friendship with anyone in his class. When class work is in small groups, Tim will gather with a group of boys. One of the boys with whom he spends time when involved in group work is a lower achiever of the class.

Tim himself is an average to above average student. Through a study of both his Novel Studies and Science notebooks, and discussion with Mr. N, I discovered that Tim had had some difficulty with his work earlier in the year. Because of his desire to finish ahead of the rest of the class, his assignments were never done with enough detail. He has worked hard at correcting this and the improvement is obvious in his assignments, which are now done more carefully with greater attention to detail. Even his title page for a unit on the solar system was colored neatly with close attention to all the elements of the picture.

In the morning Tim always offers a news item. During the time I was observing he was quite interested in hockey, just as were most of the boys in his class. When choosing a biography to read for a class assignment, he chose a book on Bobby Hull. Tim actively participates in class lessons and is generally attentive.

Tim sits at the end of a row of desks and is surrounded by students who are potential distractions. In front of him are two girls who chatter incessantly; beside him is a small native boy who shows little interest in school work except during art class. However, Tim works quietly and independently, concentrating on his work no matter what is taking place around him.

On the morning that the letters of permission were returned Tim approached me after morning recess to ask which two students would be involved in my assignment. Tim seemed quite pleased when he was told on May 7th that he would be a part of my work.

#### The Observation During the Performance

Tim entered the gymnasium where the performance was taking place, quietly following the line of his classmates. After sitting down on the gymnasium floor,

Tim did not talk to his classmates, but scrutinized the set for the performance and watched the remainder of the students being seated. When the actor stepped out into the playing area to begin his introduction, Tim and the boys around him answered the actor's hello.

Although Tim at first sat cross-legged, he relinquished this position as the play began. Tim had difficulty seeing the staging area, and he spent much of the play sitting on both his legs. This allowed Tim to raise himself to his knees when his line of vision was blocked, or the staging of the play made it difficult for him to see. Like many of the smaller boys of the class Tim was constantly shifting his position.

Tim became very frustrated as the play began and his vision was obstructed. As he adjusted his position, he became absorbed by the play. At one point a classmate tried to attract his attention, but Tim would not even turn his head. Tim simply brushed the boy's hand off his arm as he concentrated on the stage.

Unlike Hazel's face which was often expressionless, Tim's face revealed delight quite openly. He watched much of the play with a smile on his face, and laughed quite freely at anything which

amused him. The father character, Mr. Wise, seemed to hold the most interest for Tim. There were times when although another character was speaking, Tim would be watching the father.

Although it was sometimes difficult to see Tim because he was blocked by those around him, I believe he concentrated his attention wholly on the performance. I have made this assumption based on the fact that I did not view any disruptions in the students around him.

#### The Drawing

Since Hazel was interviewed first, Tim began his picture immediately after the performance. After receiving the materials, he was asked the same question as Hazel concerning which event he would draw from the play. Tim replied, "Probably the lunch scene, especially where the father was squishing the tomato." This was the same scene that Hazel had chosen to draw, and she had mentioned the same event with the tomato. It was this similarity between the answers of both students which later prompted the structuring of the class' letters: students were asked what they liked the most, in order to find out if the majority of the class' responses reflected a similar liking for this

scene.

Tim asked if he could have as much time as he wanted, and assured me that his parents were not expecting him home at any specific time. Tim completed the picture in fifty-seven minutes, finishing exactly at four o'clock. He chose the largest piece of paper provided and covered the entire piece with his drawing, depicting the gymnasium wall, the refrigerator, two cupboards, the kitchen table, and the rug, which were not in proportion to one another. He used a total of five of the sixteen colours of crayons: black, brown, orange, red and purple.

When I first looked at the picture, I asked Tim to describe what was in it: "Well, there...the (cough) the wall that is behind there, the cupboard, the fridge, the mat, the table (cough). Instead of drawing the people I'm drawing the counter...and the food." Unfortunately, I was unable to find all these items and asked Tim to describe the picture a second time, pointing at each of the objects as he mentioned it. The description changed slightly: "These are the...the cupboards, the fridge, the mat, the table, the...cutting board. I'm still drawing the food and...the...people." The counter was replaced by a

cutting board which made more sense in terms of what Tim had drawn. However, despite this more careful description of the picture, it still took extra study of the picture to understand it; I could not grasp the way in which he had drawn it.

Tim used an orange-red colour for the rug, matching the one in the set, but he chose unusual colours for three of the other objects. The gymnasium wall is a standard beige colour, but Tim used a black crayon for it. There was a curtained off area behind the set which was made with black cloth. The refrigerator, although an older model, was still basically white in colour, but Tim used purple crayon. The same colour was also used for the cutting board, although it was actually the colour of light wood.

Although Tim contradicted himself about drawing the people, there were no people in the completed picture. Like Hazel, Tim asked if he had to draw the people, and he was given the same reply; he would have to decide for himself. He was visibly relieved when he realized that I was not going to force him to draw people.

Except for the food on the cutting board and the design on the gymnasium wall, there is no detail in

Tim's picture. It seems he has drawn a general overview of the set, not being particularly concerned with the smaller items, even though they were a part of that scene.

### The Interview

Tim had never approached me directly during my observation of the class, but he was responsive if I spoke to him. He spoke to me only twice before the interview. At one point during a discussion between Hazel and me about school, Tim interrupted us from the middle of the room to inform me that he and Hazel had been in the same classes since grade two. The second time he asked me whether I had chosen which two students would be involved in the study.

Since I had not had much conversation with Tim, I was unsure as to how he would react to the interview. However, he swung his feet back and forth during the interview, and he seemed quite relaxed. He answered questions comfortably, and sometimes offered information which had not been asked for. In contrast to Hazel, he embellished answers on his own, without requiring encouragement from me and admitted without hesitation if he did not know the answer to a question.

Since I was interviewing Hazel first, I gave Tim the drawing materials and asked him the first question: "If you were asked to draw one of the events from the play, which one would you draw about?" He replied that he would draw the scene where the father was making the soup. So I left him to begin his drawing, telling him that I would return for the interview when I had finished with Hazel's. When I did return to interview Tim, he began with a description of his picture: "It's the guy. He's making the...soup...he's making the soup for...for lunch for, ah...Carrie, naw...her daughter and...his daughter's friend." He was asked to describe what had happened during that scene:

Oh, he was making a lot of wise cracks about the food. About...chopped off his finger, then he put a carrot on it, then he went and flipped it...and humm...when...And he was joking about whenever he was cutting the onions...he would make a joke about it and they started to laugh. Then after he finished that he was making the soup so they can have it for lunch.

It was obvious that this scene made an impression on Tim, for it was mentioned many times in relation to different questions. In his description of Mr. Wise later in the interview, Tim said that the character "was really funny". When asked what Mr. Wise had done which was so funny, he replied,

Well, he was chopping up the onions and she said, "No, no, not my legs!", and he was choppin'em and choppin'em. And she was laughing. And he said...he said...he said lots of jokes like, "ET phone home," when he was getting the stuff out of the refrigerator. And, uh...he...he put a carrot on his finger then flipped it and he, she thought he had no finger, so.

However, this lunch scene did not include all the funny things that this character did and said, although Tim clearly associated him with that particular scene. Tim also identified this scene as the thing he liked the most from the entire play.

Since Tim was so fascinated with this scene, I asked him if the father had a reason for behaving in such a funny manner. He did understand the father's motivation: "Well, to make...his daughter feel better about...not being left out and...friends and everything."

Like Hazel, Tim appreciated this character for his humour. The only other funny thing that he mentioned about the play was in his description of Josie. He identified her as a "big mouth", and remembered that Frankie had broken up with her because she talked too much. Other than that all Tim's comments about the amusing aspects of the play revolved around the character of Mr. Wise.

Tim's fascination with this character was evidenced again when he was asked to describe the personality and physical characteristics of each of the characters. He could not remember any of the character's names, and only described the girls in general terms. In contrast, his description of the father was vivid and detailed:

He shouted a lot and he was laid off one time and he sent them outside so he had to talk and talk. He was always on the telephone too. So...he got mad at her for a long time too [he is referring to Josie here]...And he had a beard, he wore glasses, he wore jeans all the time, and he had a different top every scene. Like he had pajamas and he had his work clothes. And he was advertising for a job. He...for a breakdance and all that stuff. He just tried to do it. He was really funny too.

In spite of this close attention to Mr. Wise, when asked if he liked one of the characters more than the rest, Tim said no. He commented, "They're all good."

Mr. Wise reminded Tim of his own father in two different ways. First of all, when Tim was asked to explain the meaning of the term "laid off", he replied, "Ahmm...means...they...well, my father got laid off because he, he had to move a place but he didn't want to because we didn't have the money, so he got laid off because of that." The second thing that Tim mentioned was Mr. Wise's shouting. He mentioned that Mr. Wise

yelled at the daughter's friend "when he was angry because his daughter didn't take the insulin and she was...she was talking to him at the wrong time." He explained "the wrong time" as Mr. Wise "feeling down" about Shannon's difficulties with the insulin. Tim explained that his father used to yell at his friend, Andre, about various infractions, such as stepping on his mother's flower bed.

Mr. Wise's losing his job was one of the minor conflicts in the play that Tim identified. He realized that being out of work was a serious problem "because they needed money for the insulin and the operation and the medical care that she [Shannon] needed". Tim also understood that Shannon felt guilty about having diabetes because she realized that her father had to pay for the medication, yet he was not working. Although her father had told her that there was nothing to worry about, Shannon "felt blamed for it". Tim even quoted a telephone conversation that Mr. Wise had had with his friend, Pete, about giving him work. He misunderstood, however, a scene where Mr. Wise was reading the want ads; Tim thought Mr. Wise had put the advertisements in the paper himself.

Another minor conflict that Tim recognized was Shannon's desire to become healthy again and not have the diabetes. He realized that Shannon drank a lot of 7up because it always made her feel better for awhile. She wanted to feel better because as he stated it:

she wanted to do things that other people do like run around, eat candy and everything, and talk, and not about things that she's feeling down about, like she has insulin. She feels left out because she has that disease and everybody else, most of the people don't.

A third problem discussed during the interview was the argument between Shannon and Josie about the "candy". Unlike Hazel, Tim did not see the underlying reasons behind the argument. His interpretation of the scene focused on the surface occurrences. Tim thought that Shannon had demanded the candy because she was jealous of her friend, and Josie had given it to her because she felt sorry for her. Tim thought there was a better method of handling this problem: "I'd tell the father that she's been asking for candy, and she wasn't supposed to...cause he'd give her a little bit of heck." Tim believed that Shannon would then understand that she should not feel left out about not being able to have candy.

Another problem mentioned by Tim, closely connected to the previous one, was the unsteady relationship between Shannon and Josie. He said that they had two fights, the second discussed above. The first fight started when Josie kept talking about Frankie, her boyfriend. In this scene Shannon had become so angry that she had kicked Josie in the leg. Tim felt that he would simply walk away from a friend who kept talking about somebody else all the time, or he would talk this problem over with his friend and arrive at a compromise.

The last problem Tim pinpointed was mentioned only briefly. He was not sure it was really a problem, but he recognized that it was something that Shannon had wanted to do: "She wanted to rollerskate in the championship, and she couldn't."

When asked about the main problem of the play Tim answered,

It was about the insulin and how she got it and how to be treated and what it can do to you, and everything. It can kill you, and it can make you really sick and you'll have to stay in the hospital. You wouldn't, you can't do the things that other people do.

Tim was also asked about the message of the play, but his response was similar to the above: "Well, how people have diabetes, and what it can do to you."

Like Hazel, Tim felt that he would recommend the play, especially to people who have diabetes. He thought it was "a good play, all together." However, he did have two complaints. His first suggestion for improvement was identical to Hazel's: "Well, I'd put some background into it like trees and a fence 'cause every time they went out of the kitchen, they just walked out..." His second suggestion involved the second to last scene where Mr. Wise goes out to search for his daughter. Tim commented that "when he went out to search her in the truck there coulda' been a noise like a truck starting and leaving." I found this particularly interesting as there was no suggestion anywhere in the play that Mr. Wise owned a truck, or any vehicle.

At the end of the interview Tim was asked what he remembered most about the play and he said, "Well, it's about taking the medicine and needles." All in all, he seemed to have enjoyed it and his final remark was "it was a good play, in general."

### The Letter

Before Tim gave me his letter, he showed it to Mr. N. Tim was very proud of the fact that he had been able to write almost a full page and a half. His was

the last letter to be handed in just as the recess bell rang; he had worked on his letter for forty-five minutes.

Tim took great care with his letter, writing slowly and neatly in large, rounded letters slanted to the right. The tone of his letter was more informal than the majority of his classmates' letters. He told Mr. Foon that he had been asked a lot of questions about the play (referring to the interview), mentioning that he had been asked, "What was the message of the play?" His answer was similar to the one he gave during the interview: "'The message I thought was' you should always take the shot because if you don't you can get very sick and die!"

The introduction to his second paragraph was quite friendly: "When I was watching the play I was looking for a scene I liked. Guess what? I found one." Again the scene he described was the same one he had outlined in the interview: "I really enjoyed the part when Mr. Wise was cooking for the two girls." Like Hazel, he also referred to some of Mr. Wise's actions with different vegetables. However, Tim also chose another scene which he had not mentioned during the interview as one of his favourite scenes: "There was one more

part I liked. It was when Joesie had gotten in trouble because she come in at the wrong time. It was because Mr. Wise was in a bad mood and she really got shouted at." It makes sense that Tim would have liked this scene since he related Mr. Wise's shouting at Josie to his own father's shouting at Tim's friend. Tim ended his letter with, "Those were the best scences I enjoyed."

#### Findings and Interpretations

Tim thought that "The Bittersweet Kid" "was a good play, all together." He missed more of the subtle nuances of the play than did Hazel, occasionally not understanding a reason for a particular character's actions. However, for the most part, Tim was able to interpret accurately the events of the play. In terms of the Problem Analysis framework, Tim was able to give a detailed account of these events. As had Hazel's, his description revolved around Shannon, the main character, but Tim also related the roles played by the secondary characters to these events, tying all the members of the play together. The following is a section of this lengthy description:

Let's see. Then they went on, then, they went back outside. Then the doctor phoned again and he, father, answered it and he was talking about it and he just found out that,

his daughter had...insu-- uh, diabetes. So...he had to...take her to the hospital, right away for ten days and she had to say goodbye to her friend.

In spite of the fact that Tim did not understand some of the things Hazel did concerning the main character, he did offer a fairly comprehensive understanding of Shannon's dilemma. He recognized that Shannon wanted to get better so she could do the same things as her friends; he commented that "she got left out lots of times". Although there was no indication of this in the play, Tim may have been referring to Shannon's own fear of being left out, an idea which was stressed by the events of the play. Tim also realized that Shannon felt guilty about having diabetes because her father had to pay for the drugs; she felt she was to blame. He understood how Shannon was feeling but sometimes was unable to connect these feelings with her actions. For example, he did not see the underlying reasons behind Shannon's and Josie's arguments.

Tim's inability to recognize some of the underlying causes of events seems consistent with his personality. Although Tim had begun to put more detail into his school work, there was still evidence that he often viewed only the superficialities of a situation, understanding the surface occurrences before anything

else. This was evident in his picture as well, which presented an overview of the set rather than the little details. On the other hand, he was able to describe the sequence of events fully, but did not know either the characters' names or the name of the play. It was obvious in class work that Tim had had to learn to give more thought to tasks; this was also evident during the letter writing. Perhaps if he had had the time to consider the presentation in more detail, much of what he appeared not to understand would have emerged. Another significant fact is that Tim thought Shannon cried too much; he referred to her as a "sobber". There was no sympathy in this remark, and perhaps this attitude influenced his interpretations of this character.

The one character with whom Tim identified was the father, Mr. Wise. His fascination with Mr. Wise was obvious as Tim was watching the play. His eyes were riveted on this character whether Mr. Wise was speaking or another character was interacting with him. Tim's reasons for identifying with Mr. Wise became obvious during the interview. His father, like Mr. Wise, had once lost his job. Tim used this personal experience to define the term "laid off". He described how his

own father had lost his job at one time and explained possible reasons for this. When Mr. Wise tended to take his anger out on Shannon's friend, Tim was again reminded of his own father when he used to shout at one of Tim's friends. Tim's description of Mr. Wise was comprehensive. In contrast, his descriptions of Shannon and Josie were lacking in detail. There was no doubt which character had attracted his attention.

Tim's reaction to this character is also understandable in terms of the Attention Getters framework. Mr. Wise, a very loud, vocal person, was the character of the play who was involved in most of the amusing events presented. He often changed his voice, used sound effects, and for the most part he was on stage during fast-paced scenes. All of this was particularly obvious during the lunch scene, which Tim not only chose to draw, but also picked as his favourite thing of the play; this scene was definitely one of high action.

Tim was attracted by the "funny people" (Jones, 1973, p.12) of the play, as were the subjects in Jones' study. The lunch scene featuring Mr. Wise represents one of the funniest moments in the play. Tim also focused on Josie, the more amusing of the two female

characters. Tim was able to describe her more accurately than he could Shannon, the main character of the play.

Although Tim was initially attracted to Mr. Wise because he was funny, Tim also understood the problems facing him. He comprehended Mr. Wise's period of "feeling down" and was able to understand that this character's reactions to events were motivated by this frustration. He knew that Mr. Wise was trying to make his daughter feel better about having diabetes. It seems that Tim's identification with this character enabled him to understand in greater depth Mr. Wise's motivations.

As was Hazel, Tim was concerned with the realism of the play. His first suggestion for improvement was the addition of "some background...like trees and a fence" so the audience would know that the area around the ladders was supposed to represent a backyard. Tim also had a second suggestion: there should be a noise "like a truck starting and leaving" when Mr. Wise exits to search for his daughter. There was no indication in the play that the family owned a truck, but this was an obvious assumption Tim made, perhaps one based on his own homelife.

Similar to Hazel, Tim also understood the significance of diabetes and its possible effects: "It can kill you...". Although Tim thought the message of the play concerned diabetes and how to treat it, he made a very revealing statement when asked if he would recommend the play: "To somebody who had [diabetes], what it can do to you, how people would treat you and so you won't treat them like that...".

In conclusion, although it seemed that Tim's primary interest lay with the comedy of the play, especially as represented by Mr. Wise, he was able to make some very intelligent statements about the meaning of the play. However, as Kadushin (1966) discovered, it is not necessarily the cognitive meaning which is appreciated by the audience members. There is no doubt that while Tim understood what he was watching, he preferred simply to enjoy it. He is not as serious as Hazel and did not take as much from the play as Hazel did.

### The Class' Letters

Mr. N's class wrote their letters to Dennis Foon, the artistic director of Green Thumb, on the morning of May 8th. Forty-five minutes was allotted for this task, and Mr. N left the class with me to direct the writing of the letters. The total number of letters written was twenty-six, thirteen each from the boys and the girls. This includes the letters written by Hazel and Tim.

The first question the students were asked to discuss in their letters was, "What was the message of the play?"; this question had originated with the interviews and had received differing responses. Also, since I had chosen Green Thumb Theatre because of its educational material, it seemed important to know if the students had understood the play. Since there was some confusion about the meaning of the word "message", the question was restated in a different way: "What was the play trying to say to the audience?" For some of the students this second question clarified the issue; others still found it difficult to answer the question. After I had refused to give them the answer a number of times, the remainder of the students having problems with it sat down and began to compose their own

answers. I was pleasantly surprised that despite their problems with the question few of the students attempted to get the answer from a friend. They had been asked quite specifically not to discuss their answers with other classmates.

In analyzing the data, the answers to this question were divided into three categories: those which mentioned diseases and doctors in general terms; those which reflected the main topic of the play, diabetes; and those which reflected an understanding of the underlying message in "The Bittersweet Kid", a play about "learning to live with a disease and how to accept being different". A few of the students gave answers which belonged in two of the three categories.

There were responses from seven girls and four boys in the first category. Hazel's response is included here. These responses alluded to other diseases, doctors and medicine. The students in this category felt that the play was warning them that they should do whatever is asked of them if they get any kind of disease. In "The Bittersweet Kid" Shannon had disobeyed her doctor's orders and had ended up back in the hospital. This event was reflected in the responses in this category. A typical answer was,

I think the message of the play "The Bittersweet Kid" is everyone is sick sometime. But when you are sick if you want to get better you must take your medicine & follow your doctors orders or you will get worse.

Some of the students mentioned the more drastic consequences of disobeying a doctor: "And because you don't take it you may get worse and go to the hospital or even die." The students whose answers fell in this category made a connection between the play's main topic, diabetes, and diseases in general.

The responses which belonged in the second category numbered fourteen, seven girls and seven boys. Tim's response is included here. These students thought the play was specifically attempting to teach them about diabetes: what it is, what it is like to have it and what can happen to you if you get it. A typical answer in this category was, "I think the play was very good it taught me about diabetes and what it was about. The play also taught me what it was like to have diabetes." One boy thought that the message of the play "was about a diabetic who never lissened to her father." In this category there was a very special letter written by one of the girls. Rather than addressing her letter to Foon, she wrote to one of the actresses whom she knew from another production in

which her brother had been involved. "The Bittersweet Kid" had left a strong impression:

How do you feel about diabetes? I, my self wouldn't want it, but I know lots of other people that have it and they say that they hope the doctors find a cure...Your play deeply touched me and showed me how diabetic people have to live every day.

Thanks!!!!

The third and final category included responses from one girl and three boys. These four students came the closest to understanding the underlying message of the play as explained by the company. The girl's response reflected part of the play's concern: "That message was 'Be kind to sick people'..." One of the boys had a similar concept but from the viewpoint of the person who is sick: "The message from the play "The Bittersweet Kid" is...don't put yourself down because you have diabetes or some other kind of disease." The other two boys grasped the main idea of the play, stating it concisely:

I think the message was really great, I thought that it was trying to tell you that every body was different.  
I think that the message of the play from "The bittersweet kid," was that people with diabetes are no different than people without diabetes.

The majority of the responses to the first question were found to belong in the second category.

This makes sense considering that the entire play dealt with a person's inability to accept the fact that she had diabetes. The play revolved around this disease with facts about the disease included in the characters' lines. The students were also given factual information about diabetes before seeing the play.

The second question the class was asked to answer in their letters was, "What did you like most about the play? Why?". The responses to this question constituted six different categories of elements mentioned: scenery, technical tricks, the entire play, seriousness, characters, and humour. Individual student's responses often belonged to more than one category. Many students mentioned a number of things they liked about the play.

Two girls said they liked the scenery of the play. In both these letters this was not the first element that they mentioned but was an added response. A third girl commented in her letter, "I think that there could have been an out door scenery." This was the same complaint that both Tim and Hazel had made about the production.

Two boys and one girl said that they liked the technical aspects of the production. There were three things mentioned here: the doorbell, the telephone, and "the 'switching' trick with the needles". This interest in the technical aspects of the production was obvious during the question period after the play as well. Five out of seven questions asked were concerned with how these tricks were accomplished.

Four of the students, one girl and three boys, added to their letters that they had liked the whole play; "It was a really good play." One of the three boys finished his letter with, "When I grow up I'd love to be in Green Thumb." Another girl added some encouragement: "Keep up the excellent plays!!"

Another category included comments made about the quality of the acting. There were responses from one girl and four boys. These students were really impressed with the believability of the characters. Two answers mentioned the actors in general terms, two referred to the father's shouting, and the girl was impressed with the main character:

The best part I liked was when shannon would grow very weak from drinking pop or eating a ding dong she'd get very weak. I liked that part of the play because she really acted like she had diabetes.

The fifth category included answers from six girls, including Hazel. These girls liked the serious elements of the play. Four of the responses referred to the scene "when Shanon took her medicine." They liked this scene because she had finally learned to "handle it". One of the girls liked the fact that "Jill" helped Shannon, although "she should have told her father." The last response in this category did not refer to any specific scene: "The thing that I liked the best is the seriousness...I like the seriousness because it tells you more what ther'e trying to get at."

The final category had the largest number of responses from four girls and eight boys. Tim's response belongs in this category. These students appreciated the humour of the play. Three girls and two boys mentioned the lunch scene when Mr. Wise was making the soup; the majority of them mentioned particular details of the scene. Three more of the boys liked different actions of Mr. Wise's. The remainder of the responses referred to various funny moments in the play.

There were also some responses which did not seem to fit into any of the categories. They referred to

different elements of the play such as the rollerskating and the girls going out on Hallowe'en. One student added at the end of her letter, "I hope you make more plays and come to our school again."

#### Findings and Interpretations

Did the students understand what the play was trying to say? Unfortunately, it was evident that the students had trouble understanding the term "message" used in the question. However, after some discussion with the class, and a rewording of the question, most of the students seemed to grasp what was being asked.

I had expected that the answers would be more diverse than they were. In light of the frameworks, the results of the pilot study and my own personal expectations, it was a surprise that all the responses constituted only three categories. As Kadushin (1966) found in his study, the students did not necessarily appreciate the play for its cognitive messages. When they were given the two questions, the first one elicited a chorus of questions and confusion, and even after further explanation, many of the students had to give it a lot of thought before being able to respond. When asked what they had liked the most, there was a flurry of hands as a number of students wanted to tell

the class their answers. They had to be reminded that this was an individual assignment and they were to keep their answers to themselves. The second question generated a lot more enthusiasm than did the first one. This was reflected in the written answers as well; the students had much more to say in answer to the second question. Many of the students liked a number of different things.

Although few students really understood the underlying message, there is no doubt that the students learned a lesson from the play. For the majority of the students this lesson regarded diabetes and how it is treated. This was the most obvious thing that the play was about, so these students were analyzing the play accurately on a superficial level.

A significant number of students--fourteen out of twenty-six--were able to see a lesson beyond this level. In his discussion of identification, Kennedy (1978) mentions that "Stories [in theatre] are the preeminent means for introducing us, via characters we can identify with, to themes and causes we can learn to take to heart." (Kennedy, 1978, p.224). The responses in the last two categories indicate that these students recognize that there is a theme beyond the obvious

topic of diabetes and how to treat it. These students' responses indicate an ability to see beyond the surface of the presentation and discover some learning for themselves which may not be immediately obvious. They mentioned the seriousness of such a disease to the person who contracts it, and the effect it can have on his/her life. However, even this interpretation of the production's message is still on a very simplified level. It would be worthwhile in future studies of this kind to consider the comprehension level of some of the younger members of the audience to see if they are likely to understand less or more about the play's purposes.

It is obvious that some of the children were impressed with the realism of "The Bittersweet Kid". Five students commented on the believable acting by the cast, another three were concerned that the backyard of the set was not represented clearly enough, and six girls said that the thing they liked most in the play was one of the serious scenes. The students like portrayals of reality if they are presented in a convincing manner. This is supported by the East European research on children's theatre (Goldberg, 1974) indicating that children of this age prefer

realistic productions.

As noted above, six girls chose serious moments of the play as the thing they liked the most about the production; this was not found with any of the boys' responses. Mabie and his colleagues (1952) had found that men and women preferred scenes which highlighted their own sex; this seems to hold true for children as well, because the scenes which the girls liked involved Shannon. Overall, few boys mentioned any scenes which highlighted the female characters.

Moments of humour were definitely the favourite for both the boys and girls of the class. However, the number of responses from the boys in this category was twice the number of those from the girls. In the discussion of the Age/Sex Preferences framework, it was stated that "comic situations were rated very interesting by both sexes and preferred to serious situations" (Mabie, 1952, p.241). For children this is only partially true; while comic scenes are enjoyed by both, girls do seem to like serious scenes at this age.

In terms of the amusing scenes they did like, the children in this study mentioned the character of Mr. Wise most of all. Six of the students, three boys and three girls, preferred the lunch scene over any other

funny scene. This penchant for humour supports Jones' (1973) results as well. She found that children prefer "funny people" and "lots of action" (Jones, 1973, p.12). Also of note is that the majority of the boys preferred a scene where somebody was either yelling, or something unpleasant was occurring. As one boy stated, "I liked the part when Sharron had to give herself a needle in the gut...because everybody in the audience was grouched out and scared." This sort of thing seems to be interesting to boys of this age group.

There were a number of voice sound effects in the lunch scene that the students enjoyed. There was also evidence in the students' letters that the technical effects used throughout the play had been appreciated. These effects were the focus of the audience's questions as well, not only during this study, but also after a performance that I had previewed a month earlier. This seems to support the results of television research discussed in the Attention Getters framework. Children are not only drawn to interesting effects, but they also want to know how these effects are created.

Spelman (1972) believed that "instinctive feelings" (Spelman, 1972, p.310) would characterize

audience responses to a theatrical production. This seemed to be the case in the present study. Children reacted spontaneously and eagerly to the question concerning what each person liked the most. More analytical thought was not undertaken by most of this group. I felt that some of the students answered the question about the "message" of "The Bittersweet Kid" because they had been asked to; I believe that some of them wrote an answer without really being sure what they were answering. Some of the responses did not answer the actual question at all. However, the diversity of answers to the second question about what they liked the most in the play suggests that each student reacted on a personal intuitive basis; most of the students gave no reasons for their choices. Children at this age seem to know what they like, but not why!

This result is supported by Kadushin's (1966) work as well. He found that among audience members the levels of interest and understanding varied widely. The data in this study definitely indicate different levels of interest and understanding within this one class of students. Students saw diverse implications of the events of the play, and they favoured very

diverse elements of the production. Even when two students liked the same scene, each would appreciate it for something different. Kadushin was also able to draw a parallel between an individual's background and his response. Although this study was not designed to investigate such a question, from Hazel's and Tim's interview responses, it seems likely that a child's background can affect his enjoyment and comprehension of the play. Each of these two students understood some element of the play on the basis of some personal, similar experience. Two of the students knew members of the cast from previous productions and this affected what they had liked. A number of students indicated that they knew people who had diabetes; again, this may have supplied them with an understanding that the other students did not have.

In conclusion, the frameworks have, in many cases, helped in the understanding of the information gleaned from this study. This study suggests that students at this age (grade six) do not analyze a theatrical production in a complex way; at this age they do enjoy realism, but all of the components of the production must be lifelike portrayals; the students want the mystery removed from technical effects; the majority of

this age group prefer high action comic situations, although the boys are attracted to them more than are the girls; and girls are interested in serious scenes, while the boys do not pay much attention unless there is something unpleasant about them. Without conducting an in-depth psychological investigation these conclusions do seem reasonable in the light of child development theory, which suggests that at this level of growth children tend to analyze events on a literal level. However, it is important to remember that this study was carried out with a limited data base, and the information gleaned from this research is not necessarily generalizable to similar situations.

## CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter offers conclusions based on the research, and discusses the implications of these conclusions. It also makes suggestions to both children's theatre practitioners and school boards.

## Conclusions About Methodology

As Rist (1982) suggests, the qualitative approach to research addresses the question, "What is going on here?" (Rist, 1982, p.440), a question which proved in the present study to be at the same time "disarmingly simple and incredibly complex" (Rist, 1982, p.440). The methodology used here and the answers which it supplied have posed not only an invitation for further, more directed study, but also suggestions for other methods of gathering data.

The qualitative researcher is primarily concerned with "how the world is experienced" (Rist, 1979, p.19) by the participants. In the case of this study, the "world" was that of a theatrical presentation, and the question which focused on participants' experiences of it was, "How do two children respond to a specific children's theatre presentation?" The presentation was Green Thumb's "The Bittersweet Kid", and the subjects

were two grade six students. Four data gathering methods were used--observation, interviews, pictures, and letters.

The observations were informal and offered information about subjects' attention to the theatrical presentation. They also supplied a wealth of descriptive material concerning the school, the classroom, and the two students chosen for the study. This was appropriate since in order to derive as much information as possible from the two case studies, it was important to understand the total environment of which the subjects were a part. This environment had implications for the choice of the two students; because of the relaxed nature of their classroom environment, it became important to choose two students who could handle unsupervised work. Also, an understanding of each individual enables both the researcher and the reader to comprehend more clearly each student's response to the presentation.

The interviews supplied the most comprehensive data, allowing the researcher to explore not only the ideas raised by the theoretical frameworks, but also other notions than those which emerged from the interviews. These supplied the largest amount of data

for the case studies.

Although the pictures were not rigorously "analyzed" as this term is used in research, they did confirm the information gleaned from the interviews. They also suggested another research problem. Even though each of the two subjects drew the same scene for the play, their pictures were quite dissimilar, suggesting that children actually see very different things when presented with the same material.

The last form of data, the letters, became more important as the fieldwork terminated. When the study had first been proposed, the only letters which were going to be a part of the data were those of the two subjects. However, because of two suspicions raised by the interview responses, it was decided that all the class' letters might offer some comparative data. The first concern was with the educational nature of the program; there was a suspicion that not all of the students would have clearly understood the play's message. The other suspicion involved the two subjects' responses to the picture; I suspected that because the members of the class were of similar ages they would have been attracted by the same scene, the lunch scene with Mr. Wise. To check out these hunches

all of the students were asked to discuss the message of the play as well as the thing they liked the most about it. It was fortunate that this route for obtaining data was pursued, as it did partially support the researcher's suspicions, but most importantly, it expanded upon the information supplied by the two case studies and indicated that the students chosen for the study were representative of their classmates.

#### Recommendations for Methodology

The significance of the methodology chosen was the opportunities it offered the researcher to practice that which she purported to believe in, that "the most powerful...way to understand human beings is to watch, talk, listen and participate with them in their own natural settings" (Rist, 1982, p.440). It was obvious from the literature that many people felt it was important to understand human beings and their relationship to a theatrical experience and even more important to consider the responses of children to this type of cultural experience because it might determine how they responded as adults to the theatre. This supports a belief that if children "haven't been impressed by the theatre brought into their schools, they are going to choose [other entertainments]"

(Robertson, 1977, p.51). People had tried different methods of discovering how much children were impressed by theatre, but few had taken the time to ask the children directly. Talking with children was essential for this study.

Observation is important, whether carried out formally or informally. However, it is obvious now that more time should be spent in the environment in which the study is taking place than was spent in this study. Although the students as a whole were quite comfortable with the researcher after a week, the two case study students appeared to be self-conscious about the researcher's presence. It would have been desirable to have had time to "chat" with individual students on a more personal basis so that the interview would not seem as formal to them. This situation, however, may have been instigated by some nervousness on the part of the researcher. Extra time in the field gaining more familiarity with students and the situation might help alleviate this limiting factor.

The interviews were a highly valuable part of the methodology. It is believed that more comprehensive detail was gleaned from the interviews than from the questionnaire used in the pilot study. However, as

suggested above, more time in the field with perhaps "practice interviews", might have improved the methods. The students could then become more comfortable with the give and take of the qualitative interview. Another consideration is whether there should have been group interviews with a number of students from the class. In a research study recently published, Redington (1983) used group interviews to elicit student response to a TIE program. She felt that these interviews provided a wealth of information, invaluable to the TIE team which was able to use it to evaluate its own effectiveness and make improvements. Redington also interviewed teachers, which this researcher would have liked to have done, even informally, had there been sufficient time.

The pictures would not be recommended, except perhaps with younger students. The two pictures drawn by the subjects in this study suggest that grade six children feel self-conscious about responding in an artistic mode and are perhaps constrained by it. Drawings would assume greater importance in data interpretation if studying what grasps children's attention, and how individual children "see" a production were the main intent.

The letters proved to be an invaluable source of information. In this study they were used as comparative data to answer something specific rather than simple or uninformative thank-you letters. However, as Redington (1983) concluded in a much larger research project than this one, spoken material is much easier to obtain in a school. Teachers already have too much to do without the added burden of taking time out from their busy schedule to get students to respond in a written mode.

In conclusion, the research methods undertaken for this study did provide the information necessary to answer the research question. Furthermore, with more time spent in the field and a greater familiarity with the program, it would be possible to expand this research question to do a comparative study amongst different grade levels. Possible changes to this methodology would depend on the narrowing of the research question; certain methods would most likely prove to be more efficient for specific questions.

#### Conclusions About Children's Responses to a Theatrical Presentation

This thesis began with the question, "How do two children respond to a specific theatrical presentation?" Because of the addition of the class'

letters to the data, the answers found reach far beyond this question, yet at the same time present other questions. The results also raise some notable issues both for the practitioners of children's theatre and for those who hire such companies to make them a part of children's education.

The most obvious answer to the question above, considering the compilation of the data is, "Children respond very differently." This seems to be especially true when they are asked what they like the most about a presentation. In this study there were twenty-six different responses to this question. Some students could not even choose just one thing; they liked two or three different things. What should be noted and has implications for children's theatre companies is that, for the most part, children do not appreciate plays for their seriousness.

This seems significant considering that more and more children's theatre productions are dealing with "the realistic problems of children in contemporary society" (Spencer, 1978, p.68) in a serious manner. The assumption underlying this increased use of serious material is that "here-and-now concerns certainly are important and should be dealt with..." (Evans, 1978,

p.122). Last year, Green Thumb Theatre for Young People developed a program about sexual abuse; this year the topics were nuclear war and diabetes. Another Vancouver company is dealing with the subject of divorce. Today's children's theatre practitioners would most likely applaud these presentations as being relevant and worthwhile, but I wonder if a child wants to face life problems again and again on the stage.

Another concern is whether the way the material is presented actually transmits the message children's theatre companies want their audiences to receive. If it is not necessary for children to understand the exact message the company has set out to communicate, then there is nothing missed in the majority of children's theatre presentations. It was obvious that the students had learned something from "The Bittersweet Kid". It appeared to be evident, however, that the subtle nuances of the play were missed by many students. For example, neither Hazel nor Tim seemed to understand that Shannon could not have canned soup because it lacked in nutritional value; yet promoting understanding of "the cause of sickness" was one purpose for the play. Only two students in the class understood that the message was about being different,

yet the play is described as a play about this theme.

Perhaps the subtlety of the play was missed because of its organization. Similar to television, which is broken up by commercials, "The Bittersweet Kid" is a series of fast-paced, short scenes with one quickly leading to the next. The facts about diabetes incorporated into the play are mentioned briefly, as are other facts important to the comprehension of the play. At the end of the presentation, rather than encouraging the audience to discuss the meaning of the play, the cast simply asks, "Any questions?". This is where the real interests of the students become evident. For both of the performances watched by this researcher, the majority of the questions directed to the actors were about the technical aspects of the production, such as sound. The students were interested in "the tricks of the trade". Surely the cast who has just finished a performance of a meaningful play which ends with a very dramatic moment would like to know if the students have understood their efforts. The children would only have to be asked; they respond well when asked direct, specific questions.

The real interests of the students were obvious in the class letters as well. Such sensational events as Shannon sticking the needle into herself, or particularly humorous scenes, are what attracted the audiences' attention. Almost fifty percent of Mr. N's class preferred a sensational or humorous element over the rest of the play. Mr. Wise was the character whom most of the students enjoyed, largely because he was funny. After being attracted to Mr. Wise and his humour, both of the students in the case studies did focus on him sufficiently to understand the motivations behind much of his behaviour. They seemed to understand his problems, and both identified with him because of his similarity to their fathers.

However, there was little interest in the character around whom the play revolved. Only a few of the girls in the class showed any concern for Shannon, the main character. When Hazel and Tim were asked about the age of the two female characters, they both believed that they were teenagers between fifteen and seventeen. The characters were supposed to be eleven years old. The students who were approximately the same age as that represented by the characters obviously do not perceive themselves behaving in the

manner indicated in the play by the two girls. Interestingly enough, the clothes worn by the girls --bright sweat shirts, leg warmers, punk glasses--did not seem to the audience to represent the students in Mr. N's class, although it is probable that urban children could identify more with this image. However, many of Green Thumb's performances do not occur in large urban centres. I also found that Shannon and Josie behaved in an identical manner to the children represented in Green Thumb's nuclear war show; this is a phenomenon familiar to many children's theatre companies. Perhaps Levy's criticism is accurate, that "most of the characters in children's plays are drawn with such large and simple strokes that they are not really characters at all, but two-dimensional cartoons" (Levy, 1978, p.3).

All of this leads to the inevitable questions which children's theatre practitioners have been discussing since its inception: "What is the purpose of children's theatre?" and "What is the best way of presenting this material to achieve this purpose?" Brian Way (1978), an internationally recognized figure in the fields of children's drama and theatre, has been investigating these questions for many years. He

believes that within the context of the play, children are capable of understanding complicated language, story content and character relationships, even if it is only on a level of "intuitive understanding rather than intellectual comprehension" (Way, 1978, p.57). He feels this "intuitive understanding" for children watching a performance is just as important if not more so than intellectual comprehension. He concludes that given this, a wide range of experiences is possible for all ages. As one teacher he spoke to stated:

When I play my children a piece of music or show them a picture, there is only one question I do not ask: 'Do they understand it?' I believe...the same view is important with poetry and plays (Way, 1978, p.57)

If one accepts this view, then it becomes possible to concentrate on the theatre experience itself. There is no doubt in my mind that not only the students of Mr. N's class, but also the majority of the children in the audience of the gymnasium watching the performance had an "intuitive experience". Even though I was watching only two students, there was a peripheral awareness of the reactions of four hundred other students. The younger children were enthralled with the live characters before them, the older children with the technical effects, and all of them enjoyed the

antics of Mr. Wise. During the last scene, when Shannon finally gives herself an insulin shot, I looked up from my writing because of the realization that the entire gymnasium had become still. Every mouth was silent and every pair of eyes was riveted on the needle in her hand. This is the "power of the theatre" and an example of why there are those who believe, "There is no audience in the world like a child audience" (Seiler, 1978, p.130). Green Thumb for Young People has achieved a purpose although it may not be exactly the one they had set out to achieve.

Is an "intuitive experience" enough for an audience of children found in a school? My personal belief is that it is not! Perhaps it is enough for the Saturday morning show at the local theatre company's building, where the children (and parents) will choose whether to go to the production or not. But the audience in a school setting is a captive audience, both teachers and students, and neither should be taken advantage of by a company who cannot prove that their work is educational. Schools were built for the purpose of educating; therefore everything brought into them should be for the purpose of education. That does not mean that children's

theatre must deal with "didactic messages about metrics or Metis" (Doolittle, 1977, p.59); it is just as important to entertain the audience. However, if children's theatre claims that it can teach, then "Its value...is proportional to how well and how broadly it carries out its function" (Kartak, 1978, p.132).

#### Recommendations for Children's Theatre Companies

There is no doubt that when the economy suffers, so do the arts. Some of the children's theatre companies in Canada barely survive season to season. So how does a children's theatre company continue to perform in schools when the economic reductions in education are causing the demise of many different programs in the school system? Above all else they must present theatre of the highest quality, theatre not just interested in the message being communicated, but also theatre which is concerned with the traditions of "good" theatre.

This theatre is all too often saved for adult performances, but as Corey (1978) points out, the quality of theatre for children should be of greater concern:

The only distinction I would make between theatre for children and theatre for adults is that for children it must be better. Not all adult theatre will engage the attention

of children, but theatre good enough to earn the attention of children will entertain an adult (Corey, 1978, p.94).

Unfortunately, much of children's theatre today would not entertain an adult. Many companies have turned to "cheap tricks", especially those used on television, to attract their audience members. It was these types of tricks which attracted the attention of the students in this study; my experience with other companies indicates this reaction is a common one.

This has consequently led to children's theatre companies being accused of undervaluing children's intelligence by relying on a simplistic approach to productions. Reviewers of children's theatre have expressed concern about "flashiness substituting for substance, failure to develop intrinsically motivated action, costumes that looked like gleanings from the thrift shop, [and] lack of dimensionality in characterizations" (Evans, 1978, p.121). Educational institutions do not have either the time or the money to waste on theatre having these characteristics.

The message being communicated is also of importance. If children's theatre really is "the great teacher" (Kartak, 1978, p.132) that it claims to be, then it must present material in the schools which

reflects its educational value and this value "is proportional to how well and how broadly it carries out its function" (Kartak, 1978, p.132). If the audience cannot understand the message which the company claims to be communicating, then there is no point to having the company visit the schools. More and more, the material is becoming an important criterion in school districts' choices of visiting companies, and if the districts feel that they have not received their "money's worth", the companies will not be invited back.

This means that the productions must "achieve the highest possible quality in each area of theatrical endeavor" (Goldberg, 1974, p.24). This is of special concern when playing for an audience of children, who lacking in the politeness of the adult theatre goer, are quick to react to anything which they find boring or inconsistent about the production. Understandably but regrettably, the lack of attention paid to the quality of children's theatre is linked to the difficulties of the trade as it is practiced in this country.

One problem which has plagued children's theatre practitioners is the necessity of touring to augment

the funds supplied by governmental agencies. The more places in which the company can perform the more money which can be raised. Unfortunately, a show which is designed for a particular group of children on request may not be appreciated by children in another city who are not concerned with that topic. That is one of the reasons why TIE developed; TIE teams design their programs around a particular geographical area and stay within it. Another problem arises for the company members themselves who must travel long hours in between performances, constantly tired, often performing two or three times a day. This has been my own personal experience, and knowing the touring schedule for "The Bittersweet Kid", it seems that this would be the experience of that cast as well. It is difficult to perform at your "best" all the time when part of the day is spent on the road and another part is spent setting up and taking down the set.

Unfortunately for the touring children's theatre, this is a vicious circle. Companies will not be able to stop touring (and some would not want to) and have permanent homes until they are afforded the same respect as the Russian TIUZ's, an improbable happening in a country whose government budget reductions have

affected the arts appreciably.

#### Recommendations for Schools

"Some schools and boards...still seem to regard the arts as a frill" (Robertson, 1977, p.46), an attitude which has not helped to improve the position of children's theatre in Canada. If educators are going to bring theatrical companies into the schools, then they must be prepared to meet the companies halfway in making sure that the theatrical experience is a worthwhile one for all concerned. This means that teachers must capitalize on the opportunity to use a different teaching tool, as well as offer their honest opinions regarding the presentations so the companies can work towards perfection in their work. It would also mean that the teachers must understand the companies' requests and live up to them.

Green Thumb asks for a maximum of two hundred and fifty students in a audience, as do many touring companies; some will not accept this many students. Companies request this for valid reasons. As Way (1978) discovered, it was important that "all members of the audience could see the actor's faces...[which meant] confining the numbers in the audience" (Way, 1978, p.53). There are also those who believe that if

children are too far removed from the stage then they tend to "tune out". My own experiences sitting in audiences of children support this belief. However, schools persist in demanding that their entire student body be allowed to attend the performance. In the two performances of "The Bittersweet Kid" witnessed by this researcher, there were over four hundred students in each audience. Attention problems always occurred in the back rows, which unfortunately is always where the upper grades sit. Is it possible for the students at the back of such an audience to comprehend fully what is onstage? For example, in "The Bittersweet Kid" a black, rubber mat is used to suggest the back door of the kitchen; Tim, Hazel and Mr. N did not see it. Tim and Hazel complained that it was difficult to understand where the actors were supposed to be when they left the kitchen area.

Schools are now "the largest consumers of our theatre for young people" (Doolittle, 1977, p.58), and because of that, could have much to say about the quality and content of the children's theatre brought into their schools. More than once, I have seen a staff of teachers who would decide not to invite a company back to the school, rather than tell them

honestly what they did not like about the production. I have never met a cast of a company yet which did not want to hear constructive feedback. But what is worse is that if a staff does not like a production, the teachers pretend it did not take place, and therefore there is no opportunity for the students themselves to express their opinions. Schools need to take a greater responsibility for ensuring that students learn something about theatre, and both good and bad productions can teach about it.

The students' learning from a theatrical presentation could be enhanced by the proper instructions given to the students regarding the viewing of such a production. The instructions teachers often give students before a performance refer only to their behaviour, and not what they should be watching for in the production. Children are told that they must be "a good audience"; many teachers use this term to tell children that they should be quiet during a performance. Students should instead be taught how to be "a critical audience", "for [schools] stand to benefit from the reactions of the children after the performance" (Robertson, 1977, p.46). Students need to say themselves what they think of a production. If

children were asked what they liked and disliked and why, both the companies and the schools would benefit from the answers. Only children really know what they like, so it is important to ask them; the answers might come as a surprise. If companies must perform in schools, then educators should use the experience as an extension of learning, not an afternoon off. On the other hand, companies should make sure that "Whatever is played in a school...should be a demonstration of the work of theatre, and not just a repetition of an easy moral lesson" (Robertson, 1977, p.48).

#### Summary

This study attempted to answer a question concerning children's responses to a theatrical presentation. Although it has illuminated various aspects of such a production, more elaborate and wide-ranging research needs to be done to make generalizations. Furthermore, if children's theatre is going to continue to be used as an educational tool in the schools, then further research could be an aid to both children's theatre companies and those who hire them.

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Appendix A  
Letters of Permission

# Green Thumb

THEATRE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

1150 Homer St., Second Floor,  
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 2X8  
(604) 682-4664

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APPENDIX A

May 1, 1984.

Ms. Leona E. Reid  
4065 Lockehaven Drive  
Victoria, B.C.  
V8N 4J6

Dear Ms. Reid,

You have permission to use Green Thumb Theatre's name in your study. I very much look forward to seeing the results of your study.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Dennis Foon.

Dennis Foon  
Artistic Director

DF/clc

Dear Parent:

Your child has been chosen to be part of a research project being undertaken at his school. The study is exploring children's responses to a theatrical presentation. Such a presentation is taking place at your child's school on May 7th, 1984.

Your child will be observed as he watches the performance, and will be asked to draw a picture about the play. He will also be interviewed immediately after the performance with questions pertaining to the presentation, not to his personal life. The interview will be tape-recorded. Lastly, your child will be asked to write to the theatre company, which is a class assignment.

The involvement of your child in this study is entirely voluntary. If you give your permission, then your child will be asked for his permission as well, and the procedures will be explained to him.

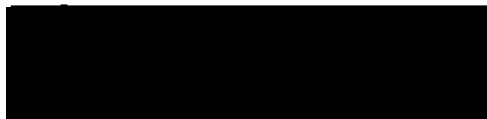
In the final report to be written based on this research, fictitious names will be used for both your child and the school.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at the school. To give permission, please fill out the form attached and have your child return it to his homeroom teacher.

Thank you very much for your anticipated cooperation!

Sincerely yours,

Leona E. Reid  
Master's Candidate



Antoinette Oberg, Ph.D.  
Thesis Supervisor

I, \_\_\_\_\_, give permission for my child \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, to be part of the research study being undertaken  
in his school on children's responses to a theatrical presentation.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix B

Figure 1 - Hazel's Picture

Figure 2 - Tim's Picture

MR. WISE COOKING

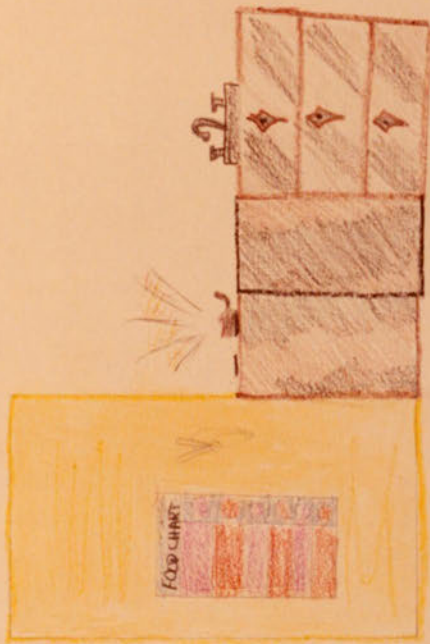
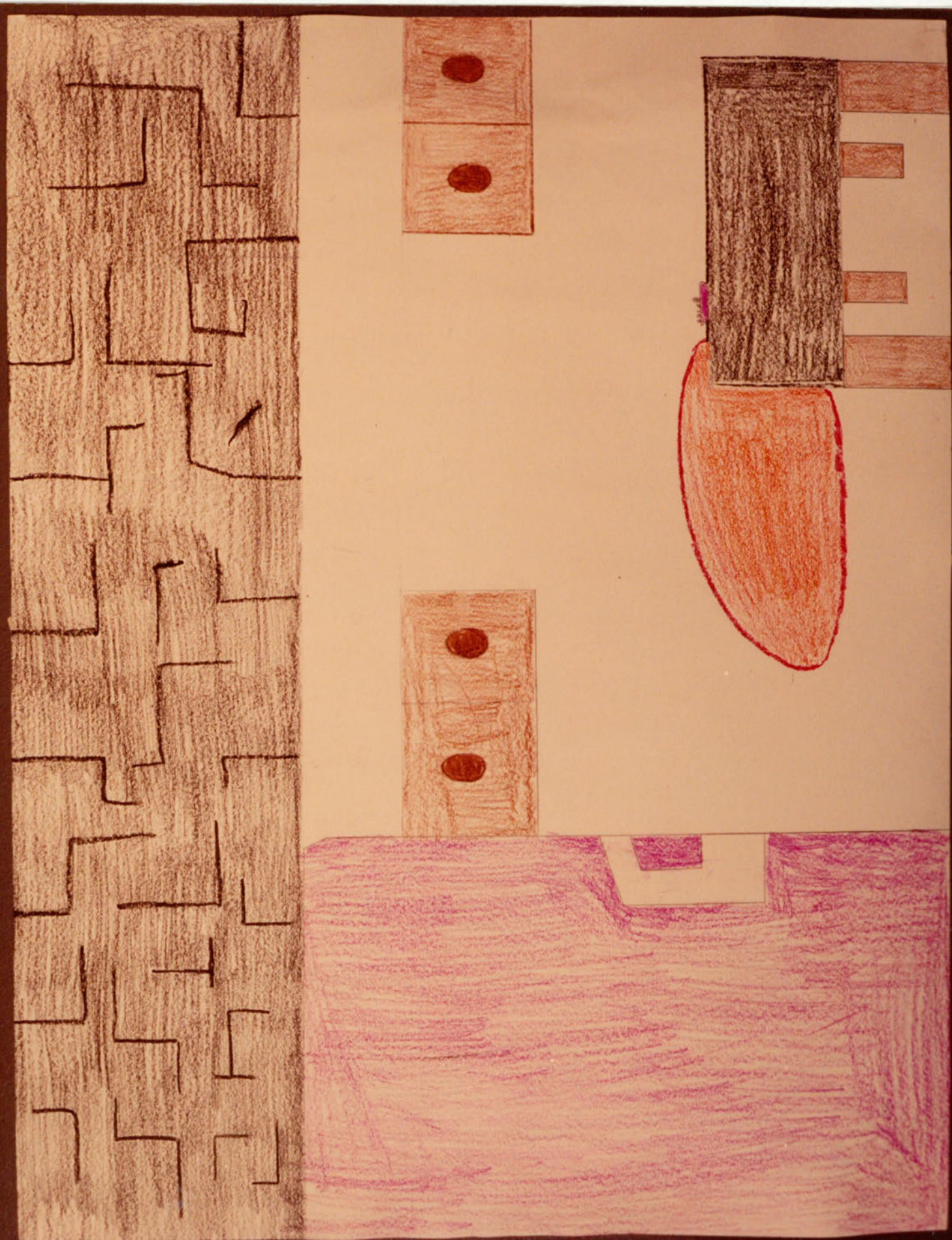


Figure 2



Appendix C  
Interview Questions

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. If you were asked to draw one of the events from the play, which one would you draw?
2. What do you think the message of the play was?
3. Describe [what happened] in the play [the sequence of events].
  - her friend?
  - he's out of work? he's laid off
4. If you were the director of this play, is there anything you would change?
5. (a) What can you tell me about the characters of the play? Sh fights with J. - he's always on the telephone?
  - (b) Is there any particular character you liked better than the others?
  - (c) Is there any one of the characters you didn't like?
6. Did anything in the play remind you of your own life?
7. What did you like most about the play?
8. What did you dislike about the play?

Problem Analysis

9. (a) What was the main problem in the play?
  - (b) What was one of the minor problems in the play?
10. Why was the play called "The Bittersweet Kid"?

VITA

Surname: REID

Given Names: LEONA ELAINE

Place of Birth: KINGSTON, ONT.

Date of Birth: September 4, 1956

Educational Institutions Attended, with Date of Entering and Leaving:

WILFRED LAURIER UNIVERSITY, WATERLOO, ONT. 1974 to 1975

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO, WATERLOO 1975 to 1977

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, KINGSTON 1977 to 1978

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA, B.C. 1983 to 1984

Degrees, Diplomas, Etc., Awarded, with Dates and Names of Institutions:

B.A. 1977 University of Waterloo, Waterloo

B.Ed. 1978 Queen's University, Kingston

Honors and Awards:

Ontario Scholarship, 1974

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CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO A SPECIFIC THEATRICAL PRESENTATION

Author:

LEONA ELAINE REID

August 31, 1984