**Rethinking Didactic Theatre for a Young Audience**

**Abstract**

Didactic theatre for a young audience (TYA) is perceived as a widespread obstacle to the artistic quality and value of TYA. This article rethinks assumptions that didactic TYA is low-quality, conservative, and unwilling to break taboos, considering changes over the last fifty years. I argue that didactic theatre exploits the medium to deliver a clear message in order to create habitus for young spectators, yet may display professional quality and break taboos. Discourse opposing didactic theatre does not reflect its prevalence, but the desire of artists and scholars to accumulate symbolic capital and prestige for the field and themselves.

Keywords:

**Introduction**

One of the assumptions in the discourse on theatre for young audiences (TYA) is that didactic theatre has a one-dimensional educational message and is of poor artistic quality. It is perceived as reproducing the accepted perception of children as naive, incomplete, passive people lacking active political agency. In this perception, the child is seen as a victim of the adult world who must be protected from the difficulties of life. Therefore, issues such as politics, sexuality, violence, and death are taboo in culture for children, including in theatre. However, in Western culture, this conception of children has been challenged since the 1970s (Jenkins 1998). Following this change, an artistic and complex TYA flourished, which dares to touch on sensitive issues. Therefore, didactic TYA is seen as a stumbling block to be eliminated.

This article rethinks this accepted premise using, among other things, examples from TYA in Israel. It raises the question of whether didactic theatre necessarily of low artistic quality, aimed at preserving the innocence of the child, and avoiding taboos. It looks at whether the profuse discussion of TYA by researchers and others who lament the prevalence of didactic theatre for children accurately reflects the situation in the field, or if it indicates other needs of those taking part in the discussion. I argue that didactic theatre can be of high quality, and in certain ideological circumstances it may also break the taboo against exposing innocent children to difficult content and complex issues. Further, I assert that condemnation of didactic theatre by theatre professionals and scholars does not accurately reflect TYA, given the significant changes that have taken place in the field. Rather, the purpose of this discourse on artistic quality is to accumulate symbolize capital, prestige, and recognition for TYA in general and the discourse participants in particular.

**Didactic Theatre: Definition and Difficulties**

Didactics is a branch of pedagogy that deals with teaching and learning methods and focuses on the questions of what and how to teach. In contrast, the adjective ‘didactic’ has a negative connotation of a pedantic type of education that is patronizing, and delivers an unequivocal and superficial message. Lorenz (2002) distinguishes between didactic theatre and dialectic TYA. She argues that in the first half of the 20th century, didactic theatre was predominant for young audiences. Beginning in the 1970s, dialectic theatre emerged, following social and political changes such as the protest movement against the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and more. Lorenz's distinctions are based on the conceptions of Szanto (1978), who distinguishes between a theatre of propaganda, which upholds the existing order and encourages similar responses in the audience, and a dialectic theatre, which presents a complex picture of multiple perspectives on the existing order and stimulates critical thinking.

According to Lorenz, didactic theatre sketches over-simplistically the various issues in children’s lives, with a black-and-white division into good and evil, and a message that the good, beautiful, and brave always prevail. The plot structure is simple and without subplots. The conflict between good and evil is embodied by one-dimensional characters, leading to a happy ending. Didactic theatre views the young audience as passive and innocent children who should receive and internalize its unequivocal message without independent thought or criticism.

In contrast, dialectic theatre moved away from the concept of naive children, and towards a more complex concept that perceives children as active and intelligent agents who should be approached on their own level, while presenting them with themes such as violence, divorce, sexuality, death, and more. The plot in dialectic theatre offers a multiplicity of perspectives on a conflict, through multi-dimensional characters. Its aim is to stimulate the audience to think critically. It doesn’t formulate a simplistic and clear message.

This division between the didactic and dialectic is often used to judge the artistic quality. The didactic is seen as being of low quality and flawed, while the dialectic is seen as high quality. I will not enter into the complicated question of what determines artistic quality, or whether quality is universal or culture dependent. Despite such debates, questions still arise regarding whether the artistic quality of didactic art is always of poor quality, flawed, and inevitably produces a simplistic experience for the audience.

Throughout the 20th century, feature and documentary films were produced that were inarguably propaganda, yet were of high artistic quality. For example, D. W. Griffith's film *Birth of a Nation* (1915) presents the American Civil War from a racist perspective of the supremacy of white people over blacks, yet is still acknowledged as having high cinematic quality for its time. *The Victory of the Will* (1935) by Lenny Riefenstahl is a Nazi propaganda film that documented the Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg glorifying and praising the Aryan race; nevertheless, its cinematography and editing were of exceptionally high quality for the period. It is important to emphasize that I do not support the horrific racist messages in the above examples. Didactic theatre can and should have an ethical message. My goal here is to note that even this type of theatre may be of high aesthetic quality.

The problem with Lorentz’s distinctions is the lack of separation between didactic theatre’s exploitation of the components of the medium to deliver one clear message that serves the existing order, as opposed to its quality in terms of writing, directing, acting, and design. The quality of the artistic work may be of a high standard. Lorenz notes features of didactic theatre such as one simple plot, one-dimensional characters, a clear conflict, and a superficial message as necessarily indicating poor quality. However, these characteristics only indicate that the work is not realistic. Realism is characterized by a multi-layered plot, multi-dimensional characters, and a complex conflict that resembles “real life”. Performances in other genres, such as allegory, fantasy, and musicals do not necessarily meet this standard of being realistic, yet they may be of high quality according to the internal criteria of each genre.

In the next section, I present two examples of high-quality didactic theatre from Israel produced in two different time periods. In both, the components of the medium are exploited to deliver a clear educational message, but the artistic choices and the level of performance are of high quality.

**Quality Didactic Theatre**

According to Bourdieu (1990), habitus is a collection of thoughts and behavioural patterns that characterize social groups, such as: language use, aesthetic preferences, physical behaviour, habits, and tendencies. Habitus as a collection of traits acquired via socialization and cultural processes in the family, education system, cultural institutions and more. It is internalized and becomes “second nature”. Possessing finesse, aesthetic taste, knowledge, education, and linguistic ability come to seem like “natural” traits. As I will expand on below, Shelly Zer-Zion (2019) claims that in the 1930s - 1950s, the “Children's Theatre Near the Kindergarten Teachers Centre” in Tel Aviv was involved in creating the Zionist habitus for the children of Jewish immigrants.

Following Zer-Zion, I argue that didactic theatre, by definition, always participates in the creation of habitus in various contexts: national (e.g., standard language and national culture) moral (e.g., manners and behaviours) and behavioural (e.g., physical health, road safety), and the like. Therefore, the central characteristic of didactic theatre is that the components of the medium are exploited to deliver one and clear educational message, whose role is to create habitus for the young audience. I further assert that didactic theatre can exhibit a high level of quality in terms of writing, directing, and acting. Traits such as one-dimensional characters, one plot, a clear conflict between good and evil, and a happy ending, do not necessarily indicate poor quality, but rather choice of a genre that is not realistic.

The Zionist habitus, which Zer-Zion (2019) asserts that the Children’s Theatre Near the Kindergarten Teachers Centre was a partner in creating, emphasizes the transmission of the Hebrew language and culture and is based on a conception of childhood that favours protecting the complete innocence of children and allowing them to develop in positive and safe conditions. This children’s theatre was established in 1928 in Tel Aviv by Tova Haskina, a kindergarten teacher who was the head of the Kindergarten Association, Levin Kipnis, a poet, dramatist, and playwright, and Yosef Oxenberg, an actor and director. It was the first professional TYA in Israel. Its goals were national-educational: the transmission of the Hebrew language and culture, the celebration of the Jewish holidays, and the transformation of children into moral and culturally educated people. During this period, most Israeli Jews were non-Hebrew speaking immigrants. Therefore, educating their children in the Hebrew language and Zionist culture was a central and important goal, alongside universal educational goals related to transforming children into moral people and helpful citizens with a broad education.

Those taking part in this theatre, educators and artists alike, unanimously agreed that the productions must be of high quality in terms of writing, directing, acting, and design, because only in this way can they create an experience through which the young audience will appreciate the appropriate values, as embodied in the performance. The creators of the theatre: actor and director Yosef Oxenberg, musician Nahum Nardi, painter Zvi Goldin, actress and choreographer Sarah Levy Tanai, and others, were reputable artists in the adult theatre of the period as well, and they ensured the high level of artistic quality. The plays were staged in the prestigious Mugrabi Hall in Tel Aviv, which was also used as a venue for theatre for adults. Therefore, the Children's Theatre Near the Kindergarten Teachers Centre was founded as a quality didactic theatre, in light of its educational goals, the selection and creation of the repertoire, and the quality of the performances. This task was highly challenging: “In the context of the Hebrew children’s theatre, creating a suitable repertoire in Hebrew was a demanding task not only because of the need to relay the objectives of Zionist ideology and to meet the psychological needs of the children, but also because of the language barrier: it was the first time that such a theatre performed plays in Hebrew,” (Zer-Zion 2019, 4).

Kipnis wrote most of the plays for this theatre. Some of them were adaptations of stories and legends from around the world, and some were original plays with a clear educational-Zionist orientation. Similarly, Zer-Zion notes that Yosef Oxenburg, who was also an actor with the satirical theatre for adults “The Broom” directed the children’s theatre with a repertoire of original plays that feature short scenes, one-dimensional characters, and a light illustrative set design.

***The Hedgehogs and the Rabbit***

In the early 1930s, this children’s theatre performed the play *The Hedgehogs and the Rabbit*, which Levin Kipnis adapted from a Grimm Brothers legend. He “cleansed” the plot of the horrific elements of death and violence and turned them into playful mischief between the characters. The play was in standard Hebrew, but with simple language, easy for the young audience to understand. The story is about a hedgehog who meets an arrogant rabbit, who mocks the hedgehog’s crooked legs and laziness. The hedgehog invites the rabbit to a race to prove that he is faster. Then the hedgehog asks his wife, who looks like him, to help deceive the rabbit. Without the rabbit noticing, the two hedgehogs take turns running. The rabbit becomes exhausted and the two hedgehogs defeat him. The educational message preaches against arrogance and boastfulness, and in favour of friendly behaviour and cooperation. Zer-Zion points out that there was also a hidden Zionist message that promotes the value of physical strength, through the running competition. This counters the antisemitic image of the physically and mentally weak Jew, and aims to create a culture of the body and sports as a means of building the “new Jew” who is physically and mentally strong.

Zer-Zion notes that Oxenberg’s directorial concept for this play drew on children’s games that the young audience knew from everyday life. The costumes were made of fur and reminiscent of stuffed animals, familiar from the kindergarten and home. The race scenes were directed in such a way that each time one of the hedgehogs hid from the rabbit, they were visible to the audience. In this way, they were playing games like hide-and-seek and peekaboo. The “charade” of the two hedgehogs acting as if they are one character reflects a socio-dramatic game that children often play and practice in everyday situations, such as doctor and patient. This style of directing created a dramatic language that was familiar to children from everyday life, which created interest and attracted them.

The artistic quality of the writing, directing, acting, and design in this play was no lower than any of the other plays performed by the Children's Theatre Near the Kindergarten Teachers Centre, a quality didactic theatre whose educational and national messages were delivered through an artistic performance with language appropriate to the children's world.

***Karius and Bactus***

In 1982, Avirma Golan, a journalist and author, adapted the children's book *Karius and Bactus* by the Norwegian author Thorbjørn Egner into a screenplay for Israeli educational television. The screenplay was then adapted into a play, with songs by Misha Belkarowitz. The production ran for over a decade. Karius and Bactus are bacteria (their names hint at this) living in the mouth of a boy, Uzi, who does not brush his teeth and often eats sweets. Karius, played by Dovi Gal, is diligent and industrious. He digs deeply into the teeth to get as close as possible to the root, to protect himself from any toothbrushing. Bactus, played by Motzi Aviv, is lazy and chubby. He devours sweets all day, prepares all kinds of sweet foods, and celebrates constantly. Eventually, Uzi's teeth begin to hurt. He starts brushing his teeth, but to no avail because Karius and Bactus are hiding in cavities. Finally, Uzi goes to a dentist who fills the cavity and “expels” Karius and Bactus.

This play is didactic due to its clear message of encouraging dental hygiene to prevent tooth decay. As in *The Hedgehogs and the Rabbit*, the characters in this play are one-dimensional, there is one plot with a clear conflict between good and bad, a happy ending, and a clear message. However, it also has many comic reversals and jokes. Most of the action takes place inside the mouth of a child, but the child is not the protagonist of the play; the animated and anthropomorphized bacteria are. Karius and Bactus were dressed in overalls and wore grotesque, thorny wigs. The humorous debates between the industrious and the lazy characters echo the vaudeville trope of “the fat guy and the skinny guy” and they consistently drew laughter and enthusiasm from young audiences. The comedic style and creative artistic choices shape the artistic quality of the show. The play was performed regularly throughout the 1980s and even today versions are still performed occasionally. The play is well-known and beloved by many young spectators.

The play’s central educational message encourages dental hygiene to prevent cavities, as well as a social message related to cooperation and the importance of mutual diligence in achieving a goal. Karius and Bactus fail in their endeavour because they lack understanding and cooperation. One of them works diligently, while the other is lazy and gluttonous.

Both the health message and the social message serve the Zionist habitus, which values physical health, strong work values, and cooperation among all members of the nation. The health message relates to more than dental hygiene; it is part of a larger set of values regarding cleanliness of the body and health as a marker of modern Western culture. Daphne Hirsch (2009) shows in her research how Zionism promoted hygienic discourse through health and education institutions, in order to preserve the health of children and the public at large. She views the project of promoting good hygiene as part of the integration of Jewish society into modern Western civilization and its distinction from Orientalism and the peoples of the Middle East. Therefore, didactic theatre in Israel that promotes educational messages for the prevention of diseases and protecting physical health, in fact, has a broader goal than ridding the body of bacteria; it aims to cleanse young viewers from the “pollution” of empathy for and identification with the Orient surrounding Israel.

**Didactic Theatre that Breaks a Taboo**

 In culture overall, and in theatre in particular, breaking a taboo is a transgression that can provoke scandal for addressing sensitive areas such as politics, religion, morality, sexuality, violence, death, mental illness, and more (Shem-Tov 2020). In the history of the theatre, there have been quite a few events that broke taboos and provoked scandals. Some of these were ground-breaking and represented important developments.

One taboo in TYA stems from the perception that children’s innocence must be protected from exposure to difficult content and experiences. As noted by Lorenz (2002), in the 1970s, a genre of dialectical TYA emerged, which dared to raise taboo issues such as: divorce, death, child exploitation, homelessness, and violence. Van de Water (2012) argues that in TYA the number of subjects and issues perceived as taboo is greater, relative to the adult world. TYA artists are afraid to touch on explosive issues because adults, not children, buy the tickets, so the performances must suit the taste of adults no less than the tastes of young audiences. However, there have been contemporary TYA performances that do not avoid these issues and cross boundaries on subjects of sexuality and the like.

How does didactic theatre conduct itself when a central and important national ideology clashes with a taboo such as death? The following case demonstrates a clash between national values in Israel related to Holocaust remembrance and the taboo against presenting death in TYA. In 2010-2020, I participated in an Israeli TYA forum, along with TYA researchers Shifra Schonmann, Smadar Moore and other researchers, artists, and theatre teachers, who presented their research topics in the field (Lapin in press). During the forum, director Rimona Lapin made written presentations on two separate research topics. One deals with human death, for example, the death of a grandfather, and general issues regarding the end of life and the meaning of memory. She raised the question of how this complex issue can be presented to a young audience. Lapin recounts that after she directed the play *The Arkansaw Bear,* whichdeals with the issue of death, the show was postponed or cancelled by teachers and parents. The second topic she presented was a critical study of plays dealing with the memory of the Holocaust, which are extremely popular in the Israeli education system.

During the forum discussion, I suggested that these two issues should be considered together, in order to examine why the presentation of human death in the sense of the natural life cycle, memory and the meaning of life are taboo among parents and teachers and perceived as inappropriate for young and innocent spectators, while plays dealing with the massive, systematic, and most cruel genocide of the modern age are not seen as posing any problem for innocent young spectators.

*The Arkansaw Bear* by Aurand Harris deals with the natural cycle of life. Nine-year-old Tish is facing the impending death of her ailing grandfather. She embarks on an imaginary journey, during which she meets an old dancing bear who is looking for a young bear to learn the tradition of dancing in the circus. After finding a young bear, the old bear can say goodbye and leave this life. Young Tish comes to understand that death cannot be prevented, but that her beloved grandfather can be remembered and his legacy continued.

The play was staged in 2001 at the Herzliya Theatre, a repertory theatre for adults. Under the direction of Ofira Henig, who led an alternative and unique cultural and theatrical line. At this time, the theatre group decided to produce a play for children. Lapin decided to direct this well-known play due, in part, to the struggle of her own nine-year-old daughter in dealing with the death of her grandfather. This may explain why the play was produced in the first place; otherwise TYA troupes and producers in Israel might not have embarked on such an endeavour. Teachers and parents objected to the show, and it closed down after only 20 performances, despite having received approval from the Ministry of Education and the recommendation of child psychologist Dr. Edna Katzenelson. The perception that innocent children must be protected from a sensitive issue such as the death of a grandparent, was and still is most dominant among the adults, who refused to acquire the show.

Nevertheless, a shocking story about a beloved teacher who cared for dozens of orphaned children, educated them in a revolutionary and democratic way, and ends in the horrific murder of all the children and the teacher, is presented without any hesitation to audiences of Israeli students from elementary school through high school. For example, several TYA plays recount the story of Janusz Korczak (1878-1942), the legendary Polish-Jewish educator who was a pioneer of democratic education and worked for the rights of the child. The Nazis murdered Korczak and 200 orphans under his care in the Treblinka extermination camp. Other difficult stories from the Holocaust are presented in TYA. Another play tells the story of Hannah Szenes (1921-1944), a Jewish and Zionist paratrooper who served in the British Army and was captured in Nazi-occupied Hungary and executed. Yet another is a moving play about Anne Frank (1929-1945) based on her famous diary, which ends with her capture by the Nazis and her death from typhus in the Bergen-Belsen extermination camp.[[1]](#footnote-1)

It is difficult to understand how human death that is part of the natural life cycle, as presented in *The Arkansas Bear,* is perceived as taboo and too problematic to present to children, whereas the most horrific genocide in history is presented, without any perceived difficulty, to students in high school and even as young as elementary school. Apparently, parents and teachers have a hard time dealing with natural death, and not want a young audience to be exposed to it. However, they have no difficulty in presenting the story of Janusz Korczak, which ends with the murder of all the characters of the orphaned children who resemble, in many ways, the children in the audience. This is not simple content at all. However, when I presented this contradiction at the academic forum to the Israeli participants, many of whom who were graduates of the Israeli education system, they were astonished at the comparison.

This indicates it is not a psychological issue of age-appropriateness that underlies the decision as to which performances are appropriate for a young audience. Rather, it is primarily the adults’ ideological perceptions of the children. The perception of children as naive and needing protection from the difficulties of world does not only reflect a concern with the process of psychological development. It is mainly an ideological perception that imagines and structures childhood and children in society and culture. Zionism promotes the memory of the Holocaust as part of the ideological justification for the existence of the State of Israel as the nation of the Jewish people; this is perceived as no less crucial, and perhaps even more important, than the protection of the innocence of the child. Therefore, plays about the Holocaust are not perceived as taboo, despite their complex and difficult content.

From this, we learn the extent to which the ideology of the adult world underlies TYA, and not necessarily considerations such as the best interests of the children, their development, and the appropriateness of the plays to their age. It seems that dealing with the imminent natural death of an adult family member, which any child may encounter, evokes a sense of anxiety and alienation among the parents and educators alike. In contrast, death, violence, and cruelty in historical events are seen as relevant to present on the stage, from the ideological perspective of the adult world. Moreover, many Israelis do not perceive the contradiction between these two issues or see any the paradox, because the Israeli discourse separates and structures the two issues differently. The theatre and the education system function as partners in creating the Zionist habitus, which structures the consciousness of the individual. While natural death is perceived as taboo, the Holocaust is ideologically structured to be central and important in the minds of students and the other psychological aspects are marginalized to the point that they are erased. *The Hedgehogs and the Rabbit* and *Karius and Bactus*, habitus is constructed in such a way that the concept of the innocence of children and Zionist ideology support each other. In contrast, in the plays about the Holocaust, these two issues collide. The solution was a complete separation between the issues of natural death and genocide. For this reason, producers of TYA offer dozens of performances about the Holocaust, for students from elementary school through high school, around the date of Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day, which usually takes place in April. From this point of view, these plays build the national habitus, as well as constituting significant business for the Israeli TYA industry.

Strange as it may sound, in Israeli discourse, the Holocaust is not seen as an issue related to violence and death alone, but as an important historical memory that justifies the existence of the Jewish state. Therefore, didactic TYA in Israel is perceived as addressing the Holocaust as part of creating the Zionist habitus for young audiences, without any opposition to the issues of death and violence, which in other cases would no doubt have surfaced, as happened in the case of *The Arkansaw Bear*.

**Didactic Theatre in Theatrical Discourse on TYA**

From the last third of the 20th century through today, many researchers and theatre-makers are troubled by didactic TYA, which they see as something that limits the development of the field. There are complaints about the artistic quality, which are related to the low budgeting of children’s theatre, and the link between theatre and education in which theatre is used as a tool for educational purposes, reducing its professional quality. Additionally, some artists treat TYA as a secondary or default work, and not as a substantial artistic choice.

Writing in the 1970s, Moses Goldberg explains that there should be no difference in quality between the TYA and theatre aimed at adults: “‘High standards’ in the children’s theatre means basically the same thing as does ‘high standards’ in the adult theatre: artistically unified productions that achieve the highest possible quality in each area of theatrical endeavour,” (1974, 23). In the same vein, Lutley and Demmery reject the prevailing notion that TYA is a less valuable kind of theatre: “It is theatre – not simplified Adult Theatre, children are not simplified adults –but theatre of the kind which we have come to believe is right for young children,” (1978, 1).

A decade later, Jonathan Levy calls for TYA that is free from didactics: “When art is used to teach, either the teaching or the art must suffer. The didactic imagination and the artistic imagination work in different ways,” (1987, 8). Writing in the 1990s, Klein emphasizes that didactic theatre does not allow for a meaningful experience for the young audience compared, to quality TYA: “…children should have deeply moving experiences, hold images from these experiences in their memories, and think critically when they attend their next theatrical events,” (1993, 13). At the turn of the millennium, Lorenz (2002) identifies a change in the field, which began three decades earlier, in the direction of dialectic and quality theatre.

Schonmann expresses doubts regarding the extent to which artistic dialectical theatre is significantly present in the field: “…from the early days of the twentieth century, the emphasis in the children’s theatre movement on pedagogical and didactic matters created an instrumental art that remains the major aim at the beginning of the twenty-first century,” (2006, 3).

Matthew Reason notes developments in TYA in the last decade, but remains sceptical about their impact: “While the reputation of theatre for children has risen over the last decade, this idea of quality and its validity as an art form in its own right is not necessarily indicative of widespread perceptions,” (2010, 33). Schulte continues this discussion and expresses dissatisfaction with the current quality of TYA: “While a play is being staged, the biggest concern generally is whether the children can understand the play. Therefore, the quality of theatre is generally seen as secondary,” (2013, 14).

Schonmann adds in an accusatory tone: “I see this [didactic] view as one of the most important causes that prevent the theatre for young audiences from developing its own theatrical genres. [It has] narcotized the imagination of actors and directors and their curiosity to search for new forms of artistic performance suitable for the youngest audiences,” (2006, 17).

To this day, the issue of the poor quality associated with didactic theatre is obsessively debated by artists and researchers, despite the significant changes have taken place in the field of TYA in the past several decades, in terms of perceptions of childhood and artistic awareness among people involved in TYA. Researchers and artists, who often cite excellent examples from recent decades of artistic and creative TYA which is less instrumental and didactic, are still preoccupied with the question of quality. There is no parallel discourse on the quality of adult theatre. I doubt that most plays for adults achieve a high standard of quality and that the situation in children's theatre is the opposite. However, the artistic quality of theatre for adults hardly enters the theatrical discourse. Why?

The field of TYA offers performances across the spectrum of artistic quality, from extremely poor through mediocre, adequate, good, and even excellent, according to various parameters. Therefore, in my view, the preoccupation with complaints about the artistic quality does not reflect what is happening in a field that has undergone extensive changes since the 1970s. The quality discourse expresses the need for distinction, in terms of Bourdieu’s approach (1990), in order to accumulate symbolic capital and to receive recognition of TYA as an art form. Schonmann notes that the didactic theatre undermines the prestige of the TYA: “…the didactic tendency remains and has prevented theatre for young people from flourishing as a performing art that could gain higher prestige throughout the years,” (2006, 3).

The discourse on the quality of TYA tries to differentiate TYA from the field of educational theatre, so it deliberately emphasizes the artistic over the didactic and moves away from the instrumental as much as possible. This hierarchical distinction positions the TYA as an autonomous and high-quality art as a strategy for accumulating symbolic capital, prestige, and recognition. The quality discourse adopts the separation between theatre *for* children and youth performed by professional adult actors from theatre and drama performed *with* children in educational settings. The quality discourse differentiates TYA as an art form unconnected to theatre and drama performed *with* children, which is usually an educational tool.

Analysis of this discourse shows that it creates a binary model of theatre as an educational tool versus theatre in which producing art is a goal unto itself. However, in practice, almost every play and each performance exhibits varying degrees of artistic and educational features. Therefore, the ongoing discussion about artistic quality is not directly related to what is happening in the field, but reflects to the need to differentiate. The question is not how many high-quality or low-quality performances exist in the field. Rather, the quality discourse is intended to differentiate the TYA from other forms of theatre and education.

In practice, there is a spectrum of forms and theatre activities aimed at children, with a significant number of artists and researchers moving along this spectrum:

• Educational theatre / creative drama: theatre and drama activities in an educational framework with a theatre teacher and students. Sometimes they create a show or event; other times, the activity is conducted only among the students, without an audience, for purposes of learning and teaching.

• Educational-community theatre: Amateur theatre for children with adults (often parents) who put on an event or show for community. The performance serves educational needs, such as ceremonies at the end of the school year, or festive events in honour of holidays and other celebrations.

• Professional theatre performed by adults for a young audience. For example, Theatre in Education (TiE) is a group of actors who do performances that deal with various educational dilemmas for students. The young spectators participate in a discussion and offer solutions. Sometimes they are invited to perform with the actors.

• Professional TYA, which includes child actors.

• Professional theatre of adults performing for young audiences of various age groups. Sometimes there is a certain degree of audience participation.

Researchers, artists, and theatre teachers address and move between these various forms along this spectrum. Naturally, they ask questions and raise issues regarding the complex relationship between theatre and children. For example, is theatre only a pedagogical tool to teach knowledge about other fields and to convey educational messages? Alternatively, is theatre an artistic goal in and of itself? If theatrical activity is both for the sake of education and for creating a meaningful aesthetic experience, what is the proper balance between the two?

Another issue deals with the extent to which theatrical activities or performances are appropriate for a particular age group, in terms of their psychological and social development. These key issues are common to all forms along the spectrum. In fact, quite a few professionals work in several genres of theatre, both with children and for children.

Therefore, the discussion about theatre with children and for children is often done in conjunction. For example, in *Key Concepts in Theatre / Drama Education* (Schonmann 2011) dedicates space to all forms along the spectrum, including TYA. The journal *RiDE* publishes articles that address with forms of theatre along this spectrum, with the understanding that they are all under the same theoretical and practical umbrella. For example, Jennifer Andersen (2020) addresses the artistry of actors in theatre with children and for children, without making a strict distinction between them. She cites examples of actors who move across the spectrum, performing as actors in TYA, as well as teaching drama in schools.

Artists involved in theatre with and for children have special knowledge related to children as spectators and as participants. This forms common ground among artists moving along the spectrum. Dan Urian (2011) is one of the few scholars in the field who argues that all forms along this the spectrum should be viewed as part of the theatrical repertoire, without rigid separations and distinctions. He shows that historically, these forms have been created by the same professionals. Van de Water (2012, 145) notes that in Australia, TYA grew out of professional TiE groups who built a repertoire of shows for young audiences. Schonmann (2006) notes, albeit critically, the extent to which Peter Slide, a pioneer in creating theatre with and for children, has influenced artists and teachers across the spectrum.

The question arises as to why, despite the fact that professionals move between the various forms of theatre for children, gain knowledge in the field, and deal with common issues, nevertheless a rigid and strict distinction has been formed in the theatrical discourse between theatre with children and theatre for children. This distinction seems to reflect the need for TYA to break away from the image that it is didactic and amateur in relation to professional and serious theatre for adults. The didactic label serves as a red flag in the theatrical discourse, and is a sign of poor quality, flawed, unartistic, and unprofessional theatre, regardless of how dominant these types of shows actually are in the field.

Therefore, in theatrical discourse, the adjective “didactic” is problematic, mainly because, regardless of the quality of the experiences created by its varied performances in the field, this term is seen as a blot against most of the forms in the spectrum of children’s theatre. Agents in the field of TYA are interested in recognition and prestige as professional theatre, or in Bourdieu terms, accumulating symbolic capital. Therefore, they struggle to differentiate themselves from any mark of didactics, regardless of the quality and actual experience of the various forms on the spectrum of theatre with explicit educational goals.

The distinction of TYA from other forms of theatre that involve children is intended to shake off the didactic image. Artists and researchers insist on the distinction between TYA which is professional, serious, and artistic as fundamentally different from theatrical activities with children that are identified as non-artistic, and sometimes amateurish. The image of didactic theatre, regardless of how prevalent it actually is in the field, or how poor its quality, influences the discourse. It provokes the debate about how much TYA has changed in recent decades, and whether it has achieved an adequate artistic level, or has remained stagnant. Paradoxically, regardless of how accurately this claim reflects the reality in the field, the very fact that this issue is so powerfully and repeatedly presented in the discourse reinforces the didactic image of the field. This preoccupation underscores the insecurity of those involved in the issue, and their fear that the distinction between this type of theatre and the other forms along the spectrum will collapse, and the stigma of being didactic will be applied to TYA. Therefore, the purpose of the insistence in the discourse on this distinction is to differentiate it from other forms of theatre and to stabilize the artistic status (to accumulate symbolic capital) so that it is seen as similar to theatre for adults.

From this we see that this distinction from other theatrical forms on the spectrum leads the discourse to affiliate TYA with theatre for adults, and to insist upon the similarities between them. The aspiration of TYA artists for theatre to be perceived as equivalent to or even better than theatre for adults, in order to educate children to become an audience for artistic theatre in the future, or even artistic creators. However, this comparison is not entirely successful. The quality discourse emphasizes that TYA is an artistic and professional theatre designed for an audience of children and youth and is therefore age-appropriate. This emphasis produces a distinction between theatre for adults and that for a young audience, and raises the question of how to create quality theatre targeted for an audience of young people who are still in a process of psychological development and who lack personal experience. This emphasis on the equivalence to theatre for adults, which is designed primarily to amass symbolic capital, may obscure the differences and especially the educational aspects that continue to exist in TYA, regardless of its quality.

Therefore, Schonmann (2006), who strongly emphasizes the artistic and professional purpose of TYA, disapproves of this, comparison and argues that TYA is simultaneously exclusive and inclusive. It is exclusive in that it is essentially a different type of theatre, because a young audience is different from an older audience. At the same time, it is inclusive in that it integrates aspects of different forms of theatre that exist for adults. Schonmann’s claim regarding the fluidity of the definition of the TYA blurs the rigid distinction between forms of theatre with children and for children. It returns TYA into the spectrum, through the back door. In summarizing her remarks, in the first chapter dealing with the definitions and demarcation of TYA, Schonmann returns to the close connection between theatre and education. She argues that didactics should be avoided, but that the pedagogical goals of TYA should be taken into account. Schonmann seeks a controlled balance between the pedagogical aspects and the artistic aspects, as a unique characteristic of TYA, which is different from theatre for adults. This discussion raises the question of what differentiates between the didactic and the pedagogical. Regardless of any professional response, in theatrical discourse, the former signifies poor quality while the latter signifies the ethical and educational responsibility of TYA artists. TYA cannot evade the educational aspect, because childhood is a developmental period that is differentiated socially, psychologically, culturally and more (Ariáes 1962). TYA is related to a perception of children as different from adults, whether this is a patronizing perception that the child is a delicate not-adult, or whether it is a humane perception that sees the child as a whole entity that grows and develops.

In practice, TYA exists in a third space, between the educational field and the theatrical field. Thus, despite the fluidity between the theatrical field and the educational field, discourse about the TYA is interested in accumulating symbolic capital in both fields, without one marring the other. While belonging to the educational field is seen as reducing the artistic value, at the same time, belonging to the theatrical field is inconsistent with the proper and unique ethical and educational attitude towards young spectators.

In addition, attention should be paid to TYA researchers, who do not wish for their field of research to remain on the fringes of both educational and theatrical knowledge. In this sense, the ongoing and obsessive debate against didactic theatre as reducing the quality of TYA is part of their struggle to amass symbolic capital for their research activities and themselves and to put their enterprise on the map, in academics as well as in practice.

In conclusion, didactic theatre may be of high quality and even break taboos, despite the direct and clear educational message to create habitus for young audiences. Further, the term “didactic” is a marker, in theatrical discourse, differentiating TYA from other forms of theatre with children, and to accumulate symbolic capital, regardless of how prevalent didactic theatre is in the field. In practice, TYA cannot be severed from the pedagogical aspect. It exists in a third space, between the educational field and the theatrical field. This in-between position pushes TYA to the periphery of the field. The discourse on quality of TYA, therefore, reflects the aspiration of artists and researchers to accumulate symbolic capital built on the benefits of each of the fields.

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1. *Korczak - Friend of the Children* (2000) was written and directed by Nitzan Cohen and Zvika Korman, Nava Productions. *Korczak’s Children* (2014) was written and directed by Gadi Tzedaka, Theater of the Hour. *Hannah Szenes* (1996) was written by Aharon Meged, directed by Gadi Tzedaka, The Hour Theater. *The Diary of Anne Frank* by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett has been performed several times in Israel. Some of the productions were intended for both adults and young people (Beer Sheva Municipal Theater 1992, 1998; Habima 1957, 2001; IDF Theater 1967; Orna Porat Theater for Children and Youth 1972) These are just a few examples of the dozens of plays dealing with the Holocaust that were produced in Israel and presented to young audiences. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)