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## Toward a grounded dramaturgy, part 2: Equality and artistic integrity in Theatre for Early Years

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### ABSTRACT

Theatre for Early Years (TEY) has grown in popularity in recent years, but while diverse practices have emerged around the world, coherent and robust theory concerning this challenging field is lacking. An earlier article outlined a possible research study design using Grounded Theory methods to gather data for analysis and interpretation from TEY practitioners. Forming the second part of an investigation funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, this article seeks to contribute to the field by proposing an explanatory theory grounded in these data, and described as the theory of equality and artistic integrity. The development of the theory from two core categories is explained, and its relevance and theoretical contribution are then considered. The theory may offer a new framework for examining TEY as a set of uniquely sensitive practices. The model is designed to provide relevant knowledge to practitioners, drama students and tutors/teachers, programmers, and audiences.

### Introduction

Theatre for Early Years (TEY) emerged in the late 1970s (Brown 2012; Speyer 2004), filling a perceived gap in performance for the youngest children within the larger field of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA). Today, more than 100 new productions are staged each year for newborns, babies, and toddlers (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2014). As has been noted, “the younger age group [from birth to three] is the least homogenous and subjected to experimentation” (van de Water 2012a, 128). The phenomenon is coming under increasing scrutiny and is “perhaps the fastest growing aspect of TYA in research and practice today” (van de Water 2012b, 4). It is therefore important to understand its development and explore potential theoretical foundations.

This article aims to provide a theoretical underpinning for current practice within TEY as embodied in the development and creation of theatrical performances by professional artists. TEY has progressed organically into myriad practices over almost four decades, but theory has not yet been interwoven with these practices to create a useful praxis for established and emerging practitioners alike. This investigation explores embodied knowledge as a repository of skill, while also recognizing the external factors that impact creative production, from belief systems to training, from the search for funding to the struggle for recognition, seeking to

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identify whether the varied practices of contemporary TEY artists can be analyzed and compared to reveal a common core, which may point towards a coherent theory of TEY. In turn, such a theory might permit the exploration of a grounded dramaturgy, meaning a dramaturgical framework derived from the coding and analysis of qualitative data via the Grounded Theory Method. A full grounded dramaturgy is beyond the scope of this article, but it is to be hoped that a new theory of TEY may point the way towards its explication.

## Methodology

An earlier paper (Fletcher-Watson 2013a) explored the emergence of the Grounded Theory Method (GTM), demonstrating its suitability as a tool to interrogate practitioner discourse and generate robust theory, in keeping with Robin Nelson's statement: "New knowledge may be produced about the disciplines of the performing arts... in terms of better understanding of their processes and products" (Nelson 2006, 111). Grounded Theory may be used to distill complex and varied data into theory of practical value to researchers, practitioners, and the public.

In brief, opposing the tradition that theory could only be constructed through deductive reasoning, the founders of Grounded Theory (Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss) developed an inductive method of data collection and analysis which is self-reflexive and responsive to emergent detail. Their tenet of "constant comparison" allows a researcher simultaneously to gather data, analyze, reflect on analysis and, crucially, the process of data collection, gather further data, and continue to analyze until theoretical saturation is reached, where new data simply reinforce the theory, no longer adding anything (Birks and Mills 2011). Alongside and within this process, the diligent writing of memos, or short thematic paragraphs linked to coding, sensitizes the researcher to evolving theories (Glaser and Strauss 1968).

Thus, the researcher "does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge" (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 23). Some researchers choose to begin their investigation without knowledge of the core issues, permitting research questions to change throughout the study if required (Glaser 1978). In keeping with this method, there was no precise research question posed at the outset, but rather a broader question: What defines the phenomenon of contemporary Theatre for Early Years in Scotland?

The Grounded Theory Method, being inherently constructivist, also acknowledges the biases and prejudices present in all researchers, while emphasizing that they must not be allowed to "force" the data. For example, my research imperative presupposed the legitimacy of this controversial art form, arguably moving beyond a typical researcher's neutrality, and much of my published work has striven to explicate this legitimacy. I was also conscious of my belief in radicalism of practice, the centrality of developmental milestones in creating praxis, and Scottishness as a likely key identity for participants. However, by acknowledging and memoing these ideas, they became "sensitizing concepts" that proved useful in creating the first set of questions for early participants, and in generating initial codes.

## Findings

Data were collected between April 2012 and February 2014 from twenty-six TEY practitioners developing work in Scotland. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, producing

over 190,000 words of raw primary source material for analysis. Each transcript was approved by the interviewee to fulfill ethical requirements, then uploaded into Dedoose analysis software. Analysis was carried out alongside ongoing data collection, producing emerging themes that were fed back into the interview process. Throughout this period, memos were used to record impressions of interviews, explore codes, and expand categories. Eventually, a key stage was reached, known as theoretical saturation, “when no new codes emerge, and all comments are incorporated into a web of categories” (Fletcher-Watson 2013a, 136). At this point, around 180 initial “open codes” had been created. These were checked and rechecked, combining them where possible, and seeking larger labels under which they could be gathered. In the end, six common categories were derived (also known as “axial codes” (Strauss and Corbin 1998) or higher-order labels) with two intertwined “core categories” finally emerging.

The cohort was sizeable, encompassing almost all artists making TEY in Scotland at the time, with a wide range of creative roles, including performers, directors, producers, designers, and composers; they also displayed a diverse set of artistic practices, including music, visual art, devised theatre, puppetry, screenwriting, and community/youth work. The sample represented an average cross-section of the Scottish arts community, with an even mix of emerging and established artists, and a range of primary roles with an emphasis on theatre makers.

### **Gender**

With eighteen women and eight men, the gender split was roughly 2:1 female to male, a reversal of the typical 2:1 male to female ratio observed in European theatre (Sedghi 2012; Van Langendonck et al. 2014). It is also higher than the 5:4 female to male ratio across the Scottish theatre sector (Granger 2012, 8). This may indicate that TEY is an overtly gendered field, possibly due to historical assumptions about child rearing, or it may be due to an increase in female employment in the arts. This is a complex issue, beyond the immediate scope of this article, but worthy of further research.

### **Status**

The study included fourteen emerging artists, and twelve established or mid-career artists. Funders and support organizations use a variety of terms to describe the various stages of artistic careers, including “emerging,” “early career,” “mid-career,” and “established.” The distinctions between these stages are rarely clearly defined, and several interviewees expressed uncertainty about their exact status: “I feel half-stuck in my chrysalis, emerging for a long time,” for example. Current status was inferred from various statements within interviews, including the number of projects on which artists had worked and the sources of funding discussed. The definitions assigned are therefore tentative. Nonetheless, the even split between emerging and established artists suggests that, as an art form, TEY has become relatively well-established in Scotland. It is not solely the preserve of emerging artists, nor has it fallen out of favor or become a dwindling genre, as may be the case with Theatre in Education (TiE), for example. Distinctions between emerging and established artists appear not to be a defining characteristic of TEY. There is, for example, little sense of “earning your stripes” before being commissioned to create new work for the very

young—indeed, some artists expressed surprise at the welcome they had received when making their first pieces, suggesting that traditional UK theatre forms may have more defined hierarchies which must be adhered to, rather than the looser, more egalitarian structures within Scottish TEY.

### **Primary roles**

The participants included sixteen theatre makers, four musicians, and six others (performer/director/designer/producer, etc.). While many interviewees possessed the wide-ranging skills typical of freelance artists—performing as well as directing, or designing as well as producing—the majority defined themselves as “makers,” meaning they focused their artistic practice on the production of new artworks. A minority trained as musicians and composers, and began to create theatre pieces in response to the strongly musical content of much TEY work. Almost all participants held higher-education qualifications relevant to their practice, and all had also worked in theatre genres other than TEY.

### **Geographical location**

The locations represented were Edinburgh and surrounding area (thirteen), Glasgow and surrounding area (eleven), Fife (one), and Inverness (one). Most artists were freelancers or ran their own companies, meaning that they moved freely about Scotland and internationally to make work. Only three participants were employed full-time by venues (in Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Inverness) and geographically tied. The overwhelming placement of TEY artists in the Central Belt is perhaps unsurprising, as this is where the majority of Scotland’s population resides and where most arts venues are located (Granger 2012), meaning that the national professional arts ecology is rooted in the Edinburgh-Glasgow corridor. Almost all artists underscored their international touring credentials, and noted that they also regularly toured Scotland with their work. This emphasis on the reach of TEY can be read in two ways: firstly, artists seeking to stress the broad appeal of Early Years work; secondly, an industry-wide acknowledgement of the current hegemonic status of Scotland’s Central Belt in terms of arts provision.

### **The theory of equality and integrity in TEY**

Overall, this investigation suggests a shift in tradition, proposing that theatre makers based in Scotland who create work for the very young do not subscribe to the instrumentalist or pedagogical points of view common in the previous century, believing instead that babies should be given access to the highest-quality culture from their earliest months. They recognize that there may be educational, health, or other benefits to children (and indeed their carers) from attending theatre, but these are intrinsic to the experience, bound up within it rather than being deliberately applied from outside. This has close parallels to recent studies into theatre for older children from other countries, such as Australia: “[artists] have maintained a focus on the children as being, rather than the adults they will become. Practitioners are inclined to see the goals of their work in ‘intrinsic’ terms” (Johanson and Glow 2011, 60). A discourse centred on a belief in equivalence between adults and children may therefore be seen as international, promulgated and supported by

shared practices. Sites of cultural exchange, most notably major children's theatre festivals such as ASSITEJ World Congresses, could be contributing to the spread of this discourse around the world.

However, a belief in equality is complicated, or even compromised, by the struggle to retain artistic integrity—skill and experience seem to automatically place the artist above the child in any theatrical hierarchy yet, at the same time, cooperative and collaborative practices in Scottish TEY are an important aspect of artistic identity for many participants. The equality/integrity (also perhaps definable as audience/aesthetics) split is a defining binary of TEY in Europe, the US, and perhaps around the world: “Do we foremost need to keep the audience in mind or is our first responsibility to create a work of art?” (van de Water 2012a, 131). It is proposed that, rather than delineating two separate schools of thought, the creative tension between equality and artistic integrity may begin to explain the practices and perspectives of contemporary TEY practitioners as a whole.

Artists identified a range of performance practices that contribute to the aim of equality for very young children. These included: resisting theatrical conventions such as the actor/audience divide; exploiting familiar settings and scenarios in order to subvert them and surprise spectators; developing dramaturgical mythologies which extend the performance experience beyond the auditorium, from the foyer to the home environment before and after the performance; ensuring that audiences are made to feel as comfortable and safe as possible, acknowledging their vulnerability; collaborating with the youngest children to create uniquely personalized and unrepeatably live theatre experiences; employing testing or piloting with invited audiences to ensure that each moment engages. These practices were described as mentally taxing or even exhausting, the efforts of artists to accommodate their audiences taking a toll physically and psychologically. Such practices are not individually distinctive, as they occur frequently in other artistic genres (for example, immersive theatre by companies such as Punchdrunk tends to trouble the notion of a tightly bound, prescriptive performance space (White 2012)), but their combination and profusion suggest a coherent, developed set of practices within TEY that may eventually begin to define a contemporary dramaturgy of theatre for the very young.

Similarly, being recognized as an artist with finely honed skills, as opposed to an educator or entertainer, was important to all participants. Perceptions of prejudice against TEY from peers can be argued to have led to the appearance of a form of defiance, where practice becomes to an extent oppositional against adult forms of theatre as well as genres such as TiE, seeking to prove its legitimacy via ever-greater radicalism. The forms favored by practitioners varied widely (from narratives with dialogue and characters, to avant-garde installations without performers or scripts), but all agreed that performances should be scrupulously tailored to their audience, generating a “shared experience” that responds to the needs of children and adults alike. Artists believe that babies and toddlers should be part of cultural events which respect their needs and capabilities and, furthermore, that the practices required to create such events are complex, time-consuming, and aesthetically robust, meriting esteem from peers.

Two core categories were developed from the findings discussed earlier: *treating children as equals* and *retaining artistic integrity*. These were constructed from six axial codes emerging from the data:

- *Emphasizing the struggle*, encompassing codes such as *evangelizing* and *overcoming prejudices*;
- *Sharing experiences*, encompassing codes such as *building up a mythology*;
- *Proving “what works” with testing*, encompassing codes such as *learning from mistakes* and *putting yourself in a child’s shoes*;
- *Gift giving*, encompassing codes such as *making everyone feel comfortable*;
- *Treating children as we treat adults*, encompassing codes such as “*There are no shortcuts*” and *respecting children’s capabilities*;
- *Abandoning tradition*, encompassing codes such as *engaging the whole body*.

Figure 1 is a visual representation showing how themes and concepts have been constructed from raw data to create the final Grounded Theory of equality and artistic integrity. The outer ring shows a number of sample open codes, segmented according to the axial code that encapsulates each set. The inner ring demonstrates the ontological relationship between the core categories (where *treating children as equals*, although a more prominent category, interacts with *retaining artistic integrity*), which serves to generate an emerging theory to describe all of the codes. This visual representation can be read inwards or outwards, highlighting individual paths from raw data to Grounded Theory generation and vice versa.

At its center lies the complex interplay between the two core categories, generating the theory that, in the eyes of TEY artists, very young children should be treated as equal to adults, and simultaneously, TEY artists demand recognition for their expert skills in working with children.

## Discussion

It must be acknowledged that there is an inherent complication within treating children as equal to adults, granting them agency to respond as they see fit—while honest responses such as crying are useful, even beneficial, at sharings of works in progress, the same negative contributions are not welcomed in performance. Only certain kinds of reaction are validated by the finished product; namely, the delighted, thoughtful, or cooperative engagement identified by all participants, which derives from adult perceptions of appropriateness. As artists, they may in fact be maintaining an asymmetry between children and adults while seeking to undermine it. It could be argued that there is a compromise that therefore tends to be struck between promoting equality and preserving integrity as an artist.

One interviewee addressed this conflict directly in a discussion about the role children can play in the creative process:

I have to have an idea for two years, three years before it maybe comes to fruition, and if I asked a child of eight at that time what they wanted, it might just be that one child in that one room, and you come back to them two weeks later and they might not be interested in that idea, they might have explored it... you have to trust your instincts a bit and what you understand of them.

This statement suggests that the role of children as co-creators may be limited in scope, despite artists’ claims about *inspiring a questioning of the world* or *collaborating*. The initial inspiration for a production usually springs from the adult, even in cases (such as *Oogly*





**Figure 1.** The Grounded Theory of equality and artistic integrity in theatre for early years, constructed from open codes, axial codes and core categories.

*Boogly* (2003) by Schtanhaus) where the concept relates to children's development. During rehearsals, the very young are then granted a degree of agency to collaborate with artists, whether as participants in a play-based process, such as *This (Baby) Life* (2012) by Sally Chance Dance, or as test audiences. This may not be consciously framed as collaboration, but children retain some control through their presence and reactions: in the words of one participant, "you're being led in your play with a child. . . we're making stuff and the babies are telling us by their responses where to keep looking and where to carry on." In performance, however, co-creative activity is rationed and curtailed by adult desires, seeking only behavior and responses on a relatively narrow spectrum of acceptability. Undoubtedly, this spectrum is wider than the range of behaviors expected within adult theatre etiquette—leaving the space, whispering, and standing up are all tolerated, and some productions can accommodate verbal or physical interjections—yet the quest for artistic integrity, meaning maintenance of self-perception as a highly skilled member of an

elite profession, perhaps overrides the desire for full equality; as a participant stated, “it’s important to respect any audience enough not to reduce your artistic integrity for them, so I would hope that when I’m making work for children, I like it too.” Thus, a new facet of the theory of equality and artistic integrity becomes important: equal access to culture always means equal access to the *products* of culture, but not necessarily to the *making* of culture, sometimes reserving that process for artists.

It is therefore interesting that several participants chose to describe the ideal TEY performer as “without ego,” reflecting the mental effort of catering to an audience who cannot respond as is typical in adult theatre, with warm words and applause. However, as one interviewee noted:

I think for a lot of the really, really good ones, you need an enormous ego to actually do it in the first place. . . . They have to get something out of that experience. Artists have got to be enjoying being in that moment. . . . It’s those ones that get enough from that lack of normal response, or those signifiers that are not as obvious, [who are] able to carry on.

It is perhaps inevitable that, on being confronted with opposition or even hostility, the artists who continue working are those with a certain mental agility, but there is a fascinating synchrony between artists who are able to enjoy non-traditional relationships with their audiences and artists who make work in the face of non-acceptance from peers: “that’s one thing that I love about children—they’ll get up again. They’ll try something else. They’ll explore something else, and that’s the way we should be as artists creating work for this age: we should keep trying.”

The core category *retaining artistic integrity* may be a strategy adopted by artists to combat issues of legitimacy, but is bound up too in another implication of *treating children as equals*. It can be claimed that society does not currently view children as fully capable beings, despite the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989), and so artists who elect to collaborate with the least capable are *de facto* illegitimate. In the eyes of peers, it is arguable that TEY artists likewise take on the mantle of “becomings,” rather than “beings”—their practice is seen as unfinished, immature, or easy to patronize. This is perhaps one reason for the propensity for interviewees to criticize adult theatre as “behind the times,” or to emphasize their credentials as artists rather than educators: “[adult theatre] is so much about words and people being placed onstage, and so much about things being declaimed.” By throwing off the associations of historical theatre for children, such as TiE “dress[ed] up in tinsel,” they can present themselves as radical, forward-thinking, and avant-garde. Their practice is thus legitimized because of its novelty, rather than in spite of it.

However, this formulation can in turn be troubled, as artistic integrity is arguably challenged by the willingness to take inspiration from children, who may be seen as untrained, chaotic, or unfocused. An artist who passes aesthetic control to a child is surrendering part of their integrity, as the final product may lack coherence. Some interviewees confronted this directly, discussing the freedom that children have to explore their own ideas within an aesthetic context: “they find things that we didn’t find. . . . within that framework, they’ve got some agency.” A shift in power relations thereby grants validity to unexpected outcomes where the aim of the piece is to empower, rather than to present a specific idea. The common refrain of identity rooted in being “an artist not an educator” reflects this conflicted desire to move away from didacticism towards an ideal of cooperation and equality, while simultaneously striving to preserve the integrity of the theatre maker.

Relevance is one of the key factors determining a new theory's contribution to a given field. In Grounded Theory, the final construction is intended to be a theory which fits the data collected, works to explain the context of the phenomenon, is relevant both to the field of study and future practice, and is modifiable when confronted with new evidence (Glaser 1978).

The concept of childhood as a state possessing a right to equal treatment is not novel. Since the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the right of all children "to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" has been elaborated by individual scholars and artists. Indeed, this study suggests that the rhetoric of the UNCRC has permeated the cultural life of Scotland as in other countries, producing a Europe-wide or even worldwide cohort of artists who believe that very young children can be as sophisticated as adults in their engagement with culture. In 2011, the Charter of Children's Rights to Art and Culture was produced (La Baracca-Testoni Ragazzi 2011), which reflects many of these findings; in particular, the fifth right ("to enjoy high-quality artistic products, specifically created by professionals for each different age-group") echoes the theory of equality and artistic integrity closely. Similarly, the pan-European network Small Size ascribes to the "deep conviction... that no person is too young to engage and benefit from performance art nor should they be denied what is, in fact, a basic human right" (Belloli, Morris, and Phinney 2013, 44).

Nonetheless, while the theory finds synergy with some existing literature, it contests and challenges much of the prevalent discourse around TEY. For example, Evelyn Goldfinger has asked, "is theatre for babies an artistic installation? Or is it perhaps some other kind of live entertainment?... Can one think of theatre for babies as a more sophisticated kind of game?" (Goldfinger 2011a, 297). Such questions revolve around the conception of children's theatre as "not-theatre" (Bedard 2003, 93), but this study suggests that contemporary TEY may in fact be constructed from a consistent body of dramaturgical practices which could serve to legitimate the genre as radical theatre on a par with current trends in immersive or participatory performance. The theatricality of avant-garde work by artists such as Robert Wilson or Blast Theory has become widely acknowledged, yet TEY, despite bearing notable resemblances to experimental adult work (Fletcher-Watson 2013b), remains on the margins, its practices unrecognized. This may be because its audience is often deemed incapable of appreciating performative acts as anything other than "a more sophisticated kind of game," rather than viewing them as capable, conscious collaborators. Moses Goldberg has declared that "our children deserve to know and experience great moments of artistry" (Goldfinger 2011b, 272), and Scottish artists would apply this statement to the youngest audiences of all.

Similarly, to present children as equal in importance to adults and artists is to contest conceptions of them as theatrically illiterate, in need of cultural education before they can understand or appreciate performance. Shifra Schonmann claims that "just as it is necessary to train the ear to listen to music and to distinguish the sounds produced by different instruments, so the child should be trained to distinguish between actions that are dramatic/theatrical and those that are not" (Schonmann 2002, 144), while practitioners like Gavin Bolton state that children "must learn that bodies on a stage make a statement" (Bolton 1992, 25). Here, the impact on Scottish TEY practitioners of Colwyn Trevarthen and Suzanne Zeedyk, two psychologists based in Scotland, should be noted. They have redefined perception of infant capabilities away from Piagetian universalism or

Vygotskian “scaffolding” towards new models of innate creativity, aesthetic sensitivity, emotional intimacy and intersubjectivity (Malloch and Trevarthen 2009; Zeedyk 2006). According to them, an understanding of performance may be ingrained or even instinctual in humans from birth. Many participants in this study cited the two psychologists as inspirations for their work, seemingly finding the implications for infant capability highly seductive. For these artists, evidence from developmental psychology is a key means of validating their practice and beliefs, and of overturning instrumentalist notions of TEY as a training ground for “real theatre.” For them, equality means that all children should have access to high-quality theatre regardless of age, *ars gratia artis*.

The concept of equality also troubles the traditional practice of participation, commonly used in theatre for the very young. Productions permit moments of joint activity, such as gathering fallen leaves in *Egg & Spoon* (2003) by Theatre Lyngo, or may even allow spectators to become Boalian spect-actors, controlling the action, as in *Le Jardin du Possible* (2002) by 16 Rue de Plaisance. Article 31 seeks to empower children of all ages, but participation in culture is complex when power rests with adults, be they artist, critic, or parent. Free and full participation may be compromised by perceptions of tyranny or inferiority, even in situations where artists seek to promote a child-led approach. The conventional view of the child as not yet worthy of adult rights (“seen and not heard”), or as the necessary recipient of instrumentalist policies designed to develop them into an adult as described earlier, can be argued to disenfranchise the very young (Fletcher-Watson 2015). For children as beings and as citizens, the right to participate “freely” and “fully” in the arts may be seen instead as an end in itself, as the participants in this research appear to believe.

For Scottish TEY practitioners, babies and toddlers are not passive recipients of performance, but active constructors of meaning. Theatrical power structures can be created which grant agency to their participants to engage on their own terms. This includes the ability to withdraw from participation at will, to take control of the theatrical event if desired, and to have the child’s innate imaginative capability formally recognized as comparable to that of an adult. Creating such structures requires a bold step: “an explicit commitment on the part of adults to share their power; that is, to give some of it away” (Shier 2001, 115). Not all artists interviewed in this study sought to co-create experiences with the very young; indeed, for some, artistic integrity and adherence to their own aesthetic vision outweighed the desire for equality, and defined their work. Nonetheless, all spoke of a desire to allow children to interact as they wished, whether in rehearsal, at appropriate points in the performance as in *BabyO* (2010) by Scottish Opera or, in some cases, throughout the experience, as in *Multicoloured Blocks from Space* (2010) by Starcatchers. This has forced artists to design productions which can accommodate unpredictability, sometimes by creating implicit boundaries to restrain spectators’ interactions, or by identifying performers who have the skills to manage and engage the youngest audience members.

The theory of equality and artistic integrity simultaneously addresses children and artists. When children are granted access to the highest-quality arts experiences, the artists creating those experiences demand recognition for their expertise. Many participants saw themselves as pioneers, helping to found a movement. This perhaps has resonance with Evelyn Goldfinger’s statement that “theatre for babies may be an emergent response to artists’ need to explore further than what is already known”

(2011a, 298). Numerous reflective writings within TEY literature suggest that practitioners view themselves as elite artists with unique skills gained through considerable experience (Belloli, Morris, and Phinney 2013; Brown 2012; Schneider 2009). However, the concept of retaining artistic integrity crystallizes this perception, rooting it in a narrative of peer respect.

The theory emerging from this study may have implications in several areas, from theoretical proposals to impacts upon practice. While there are theoretical foundations for TEY from psychology, pedagogy, postdramatic theatre, and other domains, the theory of equality proposes an additional factor, specifically an attitudinal shift away from an instrumentalist culture of outcomes and benefits towards a conception of babies as innately competent theatre-goers worthy of respect on the same level as adults. Previous testimonies have hinted that such a belief system exists for some artists—for example, theatre director Barbara Kölling believes that “the shows which work best are indeed those... which deal with a world which is equally valid for two-year-olds as it is for the thirty-year-olds who accompany them” (Schneider 2009, 157)—but this investigation contends that it is key to the identities of most, if not all, TEY practitioners. Furthermore, equality implies that human rights, especially Article 31 of the UNCRC, have become deeply bound up in the philosophy of the genre.

TEY practitioners in Scotland are bound up in a shared culture, influenced by peers, cultural factors, and support networks, despite the diversity of individual practice. However, categorizing a mixed group of artists with differing levels of experience, varied training, and numerous routes to practice is not straightforward. Out of a profusion of practices, from design to composition to devising, it is hoped that a coherent, robust, and relevant theory has been produced. TEY practice in Scotland, like all artistic genres, has been influenced by many factors, yet from the coding patterns described earlier, a few key similarities have been discovered: a supportive, collegial ecology which values the child as a citizen; a focus on a mutually rewarding, mutually beneficial experience for baby, parent, and artist; and a pride in the integrity of the product which responds to perceived prejudices.

## Conclusion

The theory of equality and artistic integrity was constructed from twenty-six transcripts by participants involved in the creation of TEY in Scotland using Grounded Theory methods, including constant comparison, memoing, and inductive reasoning. The explanatory theory encompasses multiple testimonies and career journeys, from established mid-career practitioners who are held up as inspirations by others, to emerging artists still developing their practice. A notable consistency links the various transcripts, and additionally, findings are supported by other accounts of practice from the UK and Europe, suggesting that many concerns of Scottish TEY artists may in fact be global concerns appearing in multiple cultures. Five key practices were identified as commonalities across the entire sample: sharing experiences, proving “what works” with testing, gift giving, treating children as we treat adults, and abandoning tradition. These practices were grouped under the core category *treating children as equals*, providing an insight into the ontological frameworks adopted by TEY practitioners.

Another challenge for practitioners also emerged rapidly from initial data, reinforced by subsequent interviews: retaining artistic integrity, particularly when confronted with prejudiced attitudes or assumptions of low-status artistry. This has not yet featured in accounts from the wider literature, suggesting that it may be more prevalent in Scotland, although struggles with legitimacy can be found in other artist testimonies.

It is important to note that any hypotheses “are not proven; they are theory” (Glaser 1992, 87), but a Grounded Theory will fit the data from which it emerges. The artists’ testimonies which contributed to this investigation should thus define and control the outcome, losing none of their potency.

As arts education researchers Johnny Saldaña and Lin Wright point out, research “has the potential in this field not only to reveal new insights and to improve our practice, but to serve as an agent for advocacy—to show decision makers that drama and theatre for youth ‘works’” (Saldaña and Wright 1996, 129). Generated via Grounded Theory processes, the theory of equality and artistic integrity aims to explain substantively the central concerns of TEY practitioners. At its root, it seeks to “elicit fresh understandings about patterned relationships between social actors” (Suddaby 2006, 636), providing an original and credible theory which may be of use to practitioners in TEY and fields beyond.

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