CHAPTER ONE

CHILDREN’S THEATRE: VARIOUS PRACTICE MODELS
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Children’s Theatre: Various practice models

Games, simulations and role plays are not new to education and learning. It is only recently that technology has been added to games, giving them a different character. Similarly Theatre is considered as an important resource for the purpose of entertainment and education of people. ‘Education should have both a societal purpose and purpose for the individual: theatre with its multiple methods and strategies is able to fulfill this requirement’ (Dewey: 1938). The instructor or teacher could use theatre as a classroom resource to complement the other teaching methods they employ. Theatre is participatory and democratic in its methodologies.’ The various processes of theatre open possibilities of allowing children to display different skills and help them to learn from diverse sources’ (Singh: 2007). Thus, the medium of ‘children theatre’ could be exploited as an important tool in this regard for the overall development of the children.

Children’s Theatre:

The term ‘Children’s Theatre’, refers to performance given by children or adults, professional or amateur actors for children as an audience. Children's theatre is a dramatic technique that provides children the opportunity of involvement by encouraging them to answer questions regarding the characters or their situation. According to Goldberg, “children's theatre is a formal theatrical experience in which a play is presented to an audience of children”\(^1\). It does also cover professional acting by
children in public and the use of drama as part of the educational curriculum. Generally, it is directed rather than guided; practice dialogue is memorized from the prepared script and costumes and scenery play an important role in its enactment. Usually, in children’s theatre, performances are carried out for child-centered audiences. As Nellie McCaslin observes, “The term Children’s Theatre refers to formal productions for children as the audience, whether acted by amateurs or professionals, children or adults, or a combination of both, it is directed rather than guided”\textsuperscript{2}.

Peter Slade includes an educational aspect to children’s theatre; he states, “Children’s Theatre is a term covering performances given by adult performers or amateur actors for children either in theatre or in schools or elsewhere. It does also cover amateur performances by school children in public or the use of drama as part of the educational curriculum in schools”\textsuperscript{3}. According to Jed H. Davis and Mary Jane Larson Watkins, “A Children’s Theatre exists whenever a production of a written script is directed specifically for the child audience. The players may be children or adults but preferably they are a combination of both – adults in adult roles, children in child roles, and any activity which does not provide the child audience with a true theatre experience is not children’s theatre”\textsuperscript{4}.

Thus, Children’s Theatre can be defined as a non-specific, universal term representing the general field of theatre as applied to children. Under the canopy of children’s theatre there are different genres which operate at different levels with diverse functions and processes. In genres like Creative drama, Drama therapy and Role Play, the process is more important than the product as only children are involved in it with the guidance of the teacher, whereas in Theatre in Education, the process and production get equal importance as it has the function of understanding
the curriculum content and dissemination of it to the other children. Among all these genres, Grips Theatre has production orientation as it is primarily produced for children by adult actors.

**Significance of Children’s Theatre:**

The scope of theatre as a developmental tool for children has tremendous possibilities. It facilitates development in areas such as children’s cognitive skills, social skills and communication skills. It offers flexibility and creativity combined with discipline which provides the best combination for a learning process. In addition, children’s theatre offers development of reflex, confidence, concentration, motivation, persistence, self exploration, decision making skills and physical skills.

Since ages, the power of theatre to influence human behavior and relationships is well known. Furthermore, what theatre experience can impart to the child audience is vast and varied. Through the process of identification with the characters of a theatre event, children will gain insight into their own actions and as they understand themselves better, they will begin to understand others. As per Nellie McCaslin, “children gain much from attending good children’s theatre, besides the thrill of watching a well-loved story come alive on stage; there is the opportunity for a strong, vicarious experience as they identify with characters who are brave, steadfast, noble, loyal and beautiful”\(^5\).

As children identify with the characters, they share the adventure and excitement of the plot. In a good theatre experience, apart from learning socially and culturally acceptable patterns of response children learn facts in a natural manner through the process of identification. This is further confirmed by Jed H. Davis and
Mary Jane Larson Watkins: “The accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the ages can be painlessly, even joyously conveyed if emotional involvement is aroused, what is learned through experience and with the heart is absorbed into the personality almost unperceived, scarcely even recognized”\(^6\).

To understand the various aspects of children’s theatre, it is essential to look at the general indication of certain terms about different stages of children’s age, like infant, toddler, children and teens; their patterned and predictable stages of child behavior which is very important to everyone, who would like to know about and who plan to work with children. Joseph Sparling and Isabelle Lewis have classified children based on age group as

1. Infant: Ages from zero months to one year and five months. (0-1.5),

2. Toddler: Ages from one year five months to four years (1.5-4),

3. Middle childhood: Primary school/Elementary school age: ages from five to ten years,

4. Prepubescence, a subset of the above: Ages from ten years to eleven years (10-11) approximately.

5. Preadolescence: Preteen or middle school age- Ages from eleven years to thirteen years (11-13) approximately.

6. Teenager: Adolescence and puberty: This is from thirteen years to seventeen years (13-17)"\(^7\)

Though current research work is focused mostly on children in the age group ranging from seven to twelve (7-12) years, depending on the needs and requirements
of particular performance, sometimes, children of lower and higher age groups are also considered. Theatre groups engaged in ‘Children’s theatre’ usually plan their productions to focus on audiences of children and interested adults. Nevertheless their focus is on the participating children too as only with their active and enthusiastic involvement can a performance be successful.

Before embarking on the meaning and functioning of Children’s theatre, it would be appropriate to evaluate different expressions, basic definitions of some important terms in theatre with and for children and their interrelation. Within the scope of my research interest, the terms, child play or drama in its natural state, creative drama or play making, children’s theatre and theatre-in-education are considered for further study. Though these forms exist as independent disciplines different from each other they all have some common characteristics and are related to one another and can often be used interchangeably. According to the Children’s Theatre Association of America this “children theatre continuum” can be represented as shown in Fig.

![The Children Theatre Continuum](image)

As the objective of this research is to explore the educational potential of games through play and theatre, accordingly the continuum highlights the four forms
of play beginning with child play, each stage representing a higher level of activity than the previous one. In the first form of the spectrum child play, the main focus is on fun and entertainment with no perceptible learning or educational value, and as the play form moves forward to a higher degree, the entertainment quotient decreases as the focus on learning and educational value increases progressively along the spectrum.

**a. Child Play or Drama in its natural state:**

Child play begins early, if we observe a baby toddler and the activities he or she engaged with, we find that many of the earliest experiments of the baby are evolving forms of drama. All the child’s activities are fluid through which he/she explores the world. Early creative movement of the hands and feet, kicking, spreading out of fingers and the beat of the hands and nodding head to different beats, when a sound is cherished it will last at length and this may be accompanied by cheerful laughter. Making faces for likes and dislikes, all these activities of a child are embryonic forms of drama. ‘Dramatic play is fragmentary, existing only for the moment it may last for a few minutes or go on for some time. It may even be played repeatedly, if the child’s interest is sufficiently strong; but when this occurs the repetition is in no sense a rehearsal. It is, rather, the repetition of a creative experience for the pure joy of doing it. It has no beginning and no end and no development in the dramatic sense’ (McCaslin, 1990:4). Thus, it can be said that child play is the free play of the young children through which they explore their surroundings, observe and imitate others around them and it is a natural manifestation of human growth.
b. Creative Drama:

Creative Drama is also called ‘Creative Play’. The primary purpose of Creative Drama is to foster personality growth and to facilitate learning of the participants rather than to train actors for the stage. As per Davis, Jed H. and Mary Jane Evans. “Creative Drama is an improvisational, non-exhibition, process-centered form of drama in which a leader to imagine, enact and reflect upon human experiences guides participants”. Creative Drama for children is not primarily concerned to learning theatre skills, although this may occur later, but most importantly, Children learn about their world. The purpose of Creative Drama is to use the natural dramatic impulse to facilitate learning in an unlimited number of fields and areas. As Nelllie McCaslin, the author of ‘Creative Drama in Classroom’ states, “The term creative drama is used to describe the improvised drama of children from age five or six and older, but it belongs to no particular age level and may be used just as appropriately to describe the improvisation of high school children. At the same time, it is participant centered and not intended for sharing, except with the members of the group who are not playing and are, therefore, observers rather than audience”. Children naturally act out their perceptions, try out roles and play, it is the primary way the very young learn about their world. In this the leader guides the group to explore, develop, express and communicate ideas, concepts and feeling through dramatic enactment.

Creative drama is the informal activity in which children are guided by a leader to express themselves through the medium of drama. Performance is not the goal, but rather the expression of the child’s creative imagination. In Creative Drama, the group improvises action and dialogue appropriate to the content it is exploring using elements of drama to give form and meaning to the experience. According to Adam
Blatner, “Creative drama tends to view cultivating imagination and spontaneity as having their own values, apart from using drama to help learn a subject. Generally, creative dramatics is used by those in the primary grades, and theatre arts classes in secondary schools are generally focused on the learning of competent skills for scripted and rehearsed plays”\textsuperscript{11}. It can help children learn to think creatively and to work together. Creative drama is the key method of finding personal rhythm in a child and even in an adult. It is often a common problem-solving exercise. Creative Drama may be used to teach the art of drama and or motivate extended learning in other content areas. Participation in Creative Drama has the potential to develop language and communication abilities, problem solving skills and creativity to promote a positive self-concept, social awareness, empathy and a classification of values, attitudes and an understanding of the art of theatre. Creative Drama requires both logical and intuitive thinking, personalizes knowledge and yields aesthetic pleasure. Creative Drama offers a rich range of activities, which can be applied in the service of developing spontaneity and a broader role repertoire. While scripted, rehearsed forms of theatre may be useful to a limited degree in this respect.

c. Drama Therapy:

The term ‘Drama Therapy’ refers to drama as a form of therapy. Dramatic processes are worked with in ways which facilitate therapeutic change, these ways are inherent in drama and theatre forms. Drama therapy focuses on and emphasizes these healing aspects of drama and theatre. Drama therapy is involvement in drama with a healing intention. It facilitates change through drama processes. The drama does not serve the therapy; the drama process contains the therapy. It uses the
potential of drama to reflect and transform life experiences to enable clients to express and work through problems they are encountering or to maintain a client’s well-being and health. Clients make use of the content of drama activities, the ‘process’ of creating enactments and the relationships formed between those taking part in the work within a ‘therapeutic’ framework’ (Jones, 1996:1-6).

Drama therapy is a creative arts therapy method that integrates role play, stories, improvisation and other techniques taken from the theatre with the theories and methods of therapy. The result is an active, experiential process that draws on the child’s capacity for play, utilizing it as a central means of accessing and expressing feelings, gaining insight, and practicing successful approaches to difficult situations. Drama therapists also assess children who need additional services and can make appropriate referrals. Some specific benefits likely to be achieved in drama therapy with children include reducing feelings of isolation, developing new coping skills and patterns, broadening the range of expression of feelings, experiencing improved self esteem and self worth, increasing sense of play and spontaneity, and developing relationships’ (2007).

Drama therapy is the systematic and intentional use of drama/theatre processes and products to achieve the therapeutic goals of symptom relief, emotional and physical integration, and personal growth. Drama therapy is an active, experiential approach that facilitates the client’s ability to tell his/her story, solve problems, set goals, express feelings appropriately, achieve catharsis, extend the depth and breadth of inner experience, improve interpersonal skills and relationships, and strengthen the ability to perform personal life roles while increasing flexibility between roles.
d. Children’s Theatre:

The term Children’s Theatre is used here to describe formal productions where the entertainment of an audience is the focus. There is usually memorized dialogue and a stage director directs the production. The production can be acted and produced by adults or children, or by amateurs or professional actors’ (Anderberg and Kathie, 2005:39). Children's Theatre refers to the professional performance (in theatres or in schools) of self-contained plays for younger audiences (i.e., up to about 12 or 13 years of age) (Jackson, ed. 1993:7). Theatre by children and youth is a particular event of 'Theatre for young audiences' in which the performers are children and teenagers rather than adults. The teenagers are well trained by a director in their primary task of bringing the dramatic material to life for the audience.

Organizations engaged in 'Theatre by children and youth' ordinarily plan their productions to focus on audiences of younger children, and then the performers, plus interested adults. Theatre for young audience is a term encompassing ‘Theatre for children and Theatre for youth’, thus stressing the distinction based on the age differences of the intended audience. Even though adults frequently attend theatre for young audience, either as teachers accompanying classes, as parents with their kids, or merely as interested patrons, the focus on the performance remains on the young people in the audience.

Professional children’s theatre and children doing drama and theatre themselves, represent two different but equally important aspects of children’s theatre. These two kinds do not compete with each other, but rather complement various elements in a child’s experience of the art. As with all other types of work with high impact and good results, professionalism is of greatest importance. The
professional children’s theatre workers/artists with their knowledge, experience and well developed methodology can write and perform from the perspective of children in order to interact better with the children in the audience and create moments of learning and reflection in their communication. Experience in the project area proves that professional theatre creates concentration among children and involvement in the content presented on stage’ (Jansson, 2009:59-61).

Theatre and drama training can be a method for active learning in art, literature and other subjects. It is a tool for education and for strengthening children to function in a group, making them responsive to fellow friends and society, as well as making them reflective of their own situation and possibilities as individuals. In the context of theatre, as an audience or when active themselves, children gain the opportunity of reflecting and learning through art.

As an audience and as part of a group doing theatre, children gain the opportunity of being part of a context where they can listen, express themselves and win confidence. In the audience situation they have the chance of listening and relating within their own thoughts to what is said and done on stage – they are intellectually confronted and a learning situation appears through the idiom of the art. In some cases it is also possible for actors to communicate with children so that they are able to ask questions and express themselves in the venue after a performance.

Thus, it can be concluded that children’s theatre develops imaginative constructions, improves spontaneity, helps as a way of relaxation and finally develops the ability to bring out the hidden expressions of consciousness and helps the child to develop into a complete being. Plays serve as one of the important means
of education and prepare the young for adult life.

There are two categories under this rubric; they are Participation Theatre and Grips Theatre;

i) Participation Theatre:

Generally, children prefer to participate in all and any kind of activity rather than just watch it. Participation theatre is a form of children’s theatre in which along with the actors, the audience also takes part in the performance. The term ‘Participation theatre’ is a category of theatre that has been coined by ‘Brain Way’ in England. Organizations involved in 'Theatre by children and youth', generally do not use people below 8th grade level (about 13 years old) to perform scripted roles in 'participation theatre' because of the demands of the effective creative drama leadership.

According to Matt Buchanan, this form of theatre consists of “the presentation of specially written, adapted or devised drama with an established story line constructed to involve limited and structured opportunities for active involvement by all or part of the audience. Participation may range from simple verbal responses to an active role in the outcome of the drama”\textsuperscript{12}. Usually this kind of Theatre is done with very young children, but it is becoming increasingly popular in adult theatre too.

Nellie McCaslin, says “Participation Theatre permits the audience to become vocally, verbally, and physically involved in the production. Children are invited to suggest ideas to the actors from time to time during the enactment of play. Frequently, the audience, if not too large, is invited to come into the playing area to
assist the cast in working out these ideas, skillfully handled, and this can be an existing technique. Participation may range from simple verbal responses to an active role in the outcome of the drama. In the participation segments, adult actors function as creative drama leaders, guiding the audience. The seating configuration is dependent on the nature and degree of participation expected and most of the times the performance takes place in public places or school premises or residential areas. While such theatrical events can be constructed for any age; child or youth or adult, participation takes place and builds towards that wonderful atmosphere which is only experienced where the right attitude encourages children’s real drama. It can be a good step towards the right conditions and it has qualities of its own.

ii) Grips Theatre:

‘Children theatre’ is by and large associated with fairy tales and demons, trick scenes and jokers. The concept of realistic problem-oriented children’s theatre was introduced by Grips theatre of Germany. The German word ‘Grips’ means a quick grasp over a situation, coming to grips with a challenge. Grips theatre has developed into an emancipator; a non-escapist theatre that literally encourages the kids. Grips theatre not only theorized, but also boldly practiced and developed a novel concept of children’s theatre which dealt with children’s problems and aimed at creating awareness among children.

The Berlin-based Grips theatre is a major professional children’s theatre group in Germany. It grew out of the student’s movement of the late sixties, with a professionally political objective of empowering and making children conscientious, who is perceived to be a suppressed class within their own society. Over the years
Grips has retained its characteristic of approaching social issues and problems from the point of view of the child or youngster, and is now identified with certain characteristic features which typify their plays, such as using adult actors to play children’s roles and a strong emphasis on songs and humor. Immensely popular with children, they are an excellent means of exploring and coming to terms with everyday problems from the child’s perspective’ (Seagull Theatre Quarterly, 1997:4).

Grips’ plays portray the world through the eyes of the kids and not adults. They deal with contemporary situations and the topics of their plays are problems that children and youth have with their surroundings—authoritative education, school problems, prejudices, pollution, hostility towards foreigners, longing for friendship and love etc. Grips do not teach in the conventional sense, nor does it give answers. It shows how to ask the right questions. Grips education operates at the subconscious level. It makes children think. Grips like to make the audience laugh; to laugh is to understand. But the most important fact is that a Grips’ play means fun, music and entertainment’ (Ibid).

Though the basic aim of social reform through awareness among kids has remained unchanged, the Grips plays have undergone a gradual maturation. In the early years of Grips, children were considered part of the oppressed class, who had to be empowered against the tyranny of the establishment. This was considered to be part of overall social reformation. The early plays believed in the uncomplicated ideology of a straightforward ‘childish’. They portrayed the conflict between adults and children. Though rebellious and effective, these plays were somewhat oversimplified and loud. But as the years passed, the Grips plays began to mature. Instead of dismissing all adults as ‘bad folk’, the plays began to explore the reasons
for their behavior. Thus, the plays progressed from revenge to research.

A Grips play provides the children with many moments that they love. It tickles their humor. It thrills them with suspense. It makes them feel strong. But surprising as these moments are, they are logical and convincing. There are no fabricated accidents or strange coincidences. The play proceeds as a natural flow. It is not to suggest that Grips theatre dislikes fantasy, but it certainly recognizes and respects the children’s demand for fantasy. To satisfy this demand Grips employs a novel type of fantasy—‘social fantasy’. By forming a team, the reformist children and the childlike adults in the play become active against the ills of the establishment. It looks for solutions to problems in the play. The solutions suggested by Grips are creative and imaginative, but at the same time concrete and practical. Grips Theatre sees itself as shaping values and attitudes by communicating with young minds at a formative stage.

e. Theatre - In - Education:

‘Theatre in education is a unique hybrid which combines the skills and techniques of traditional theatre with modern educational philosophy and practice to create a medium for learning with direct educational impact upon the audience’ (Jackson, 1980:25).

The major objective of Theatre-in-education is that of a safe and trusty atmosphere that encourages free and honest participation of children through this medium. According to Tony Jackson, the editor of ‘Learning through theatre’, “T.I.E. began, to all intents and purposes, in 1965 at the Belgrade theatre, Coventry, where a number of ‘pilot’ projects in schools demonstrated vividly the value of
theatre as an educational method and led to setting up of a full time T.I.E. unit backed by money from the Belgrade theatre and local authority”. T.I.E. is kind of a blend of Theatre and Creative Drama. It is usually a complex program involving some formal performance by professional actors, teachers, some classroom creative Drama work and an opportunity for all the participants to interact with the professional performers in role, It’s true that Theatre-in-Education is very complex, but very effective, if done well. Usually the outcome is not predetermined, and in well-constructed TIE, the actor-teachers will go everywhere the children take them-they are not constrained by a limited number of versions.

Nellie McCaslin states, “T.I.E. is a British concept that differs from traditional Children’s theatre in its use of curricular material or social problems as themes. Performed by professional companies of actor-teachers, it presents thought provoking content to young audiences for educational purposes rather than for entertainment. It must entertain to hold their attention, but that is not the primary purpose. The intent is to challenge the spectator and push him or her to further thinking and feeling about the issue”. The teacher is to be a key person in helping children to derive maximum benefit through participating ‘in role’ with children in performances. On the basis of the academic findings and the experience in Theatre - In – Education with teachers, the strategies and the attitudes of the T.I.E. trained teacher are attempted to be researched and shown. The teacher himself uses and applies systematic tools and methods of T.I.E. as a primary principle in the teaching of his subject.

‘Essentially TIE seeks to harness the techniques and imaginative potency of theatre in the service of education. One of the major and most cost effective
features of TIE is the structured active participation of the children in the drama’ (Jackson, Ed., 1993:1). ‘The TIE programme is not a performance in schools of a self-contained play, a ‘one-off’ event that is here today and gone tomorrow, but co-ordinate and carefully structured programme of work, usually devised and researched by the company, around a topic of relevance both to the school curriculum and to the children’s own lives, presented in school by the company and involving the children directly in an experience of the situations and problems that the topic throws up. It generally combines elements of traditional theatre (actors in role and the use of scripted dialogue, costume and often scenic and sound effects); educational drama (active participation of the children in improvised drama activities in which ideas are explored at their own level); and simulation (highly structured role-play and decision-making exercises within simulated real-life situations’) (Jackson, Ed. 1980:9).

The aim of TIE is to provide an experience for children that will be intensely absorbing, challenging, and even provocative and an unrivalled stimulus for further work on the chosen subject in and out of school. Subjects dealt with have ranged from the environment, racism and local history to language learning, science and health.

**Difference between Children’s theatre and Adult Theatre:**

Since Children’s theatre has definite differences from Adult Theatre, it has been categorized separately. Children’s theatre where the performers and audience are both children or adults perform for children has themes very much different from
adult theatre, for e.g., present social problems cannot be performed as they may have a negative impact psychologically as young children would have difficulty in comprehending the meaning and hence lack conviction to perform. Some argue that, social, economical and political themes have nothing to do with the children’s theatre, restricting it only to teach ethics and moral values. Though it is partly true, a distinction should be made on the basis of the of the potential audience and age group of the performing children, to decide on what needs to be the theme, whether or not the message can be conveyed or communicated to all concerned in simplest possible way, as it is the very essence of children’s theatre.

Children’s theatre employs all the elements of a performance for adult audiences, actors, scenery, script, costumes, lighting, props, but focus is on a younger audience. Plays are written specifically for youth, using stories that are of interest to that age group: fairy tales, fantasy, legends, but can also deal with social issues, where a value or a moral is well told to the child.

Children should not be taken to the theatre 'to be seen' even if their parents are going primarily for that reason. If the child cannot appreciate a play, if he is bored by it or will not understand it, he should not go. Children do not need any help deciding that theatre is boring and they would rather play a game. Fortunately, it is usually the case that children viewing 'adult' theatre do so in the company of their parents and other adults, who presumably made a considerable decision about whether the individual child is ready for the play.

Generally speaking, the different perspectives on children’s theatre are determined by the extent to which it is ‘participatory’ – that is, the degree to which it involves children. At the very least, children can be mere spectators; at the most they
can be performers, this is evident in “the three broad categories of children’s theatre: (i) Theatre for children and young people; (ii) Theatre with children and young people; (iii) Theatre by children and young people”16.

An important ingredient here, as indeed in any kind of theatre, is the need to talk to children about what they will be seeing and about what they have seen. Since practically any kind of story (other than the extremely violent) that children can understand and process in a healthy way is appropriate for them, it is obvious that discussing the plot of a particularly complex story before hand or having an open dialogue about sensitive issues before seeing a play about them can make an otherwise inappropriate play appropriate. After viewing a play, if children know they are allowed to ask questions and talk about their concerns, they will bring to parents and teachers’ attention issues that have disturbed them or that they don’t understand. In this context, applying positive, rather than negative criteria is crucial for choosing plays for children. One can’t use positive criteria without really understanding the nature of a piece of entertainment. When an adult really understands the issues and contents of a play or film and its structural and stylistic characteristics, it almost doesn’t matter if he makes the ‘right’ decision about whether to allow children to see it, because he will be well equipped to deal permanent trauma while viewing an entertainment in the company of a caring adult who acts appropriately towards him.

There are however, special requirements that must be met if the children’s play is to hold their interest as well as be worthy of their time and attention. The script contains some basic elements - characters, dialogue, plot - but not all material appropriate to the adult audience is suitable for children action, for example, it is particularly important that the playwright writing for children remembers that it is
more important to 'show' than to 'tell'; speeches should be short, long, verbose dialogue is lost to the audience. Although vocabulary is necessarily adapted to the age level of the audience, it should not be over simplified but rather add enrichment and an opportunity for learning new words.

Children’s Theatre is specially designed and formulated for children to meet their needs. Therefore, writing for children requires special techniques as well. Writing for children demand special or basic training in theatrical production and a good knowledge of child psychology. This is very important as the child is still in his formative years and is being molded for the future. Essentially, Children’s Theatre is a developmental process in a child’s growth which involves all aspects of life that he will later become exposed to in the nearest future such as music, painting, arts and crafts, drama etc.

**Child Psychology and Play:**

On researching the word ‘child’, many other synonyms came up such as babe, baby, infant, offspring, progeny etc. In this context, the word ‘child’ ranges from early toddler to early adolescence. A toddler begins his quest for knowledge through sensitivity and awareness of his environment. He can amuse himself through special aids, such as toys, games or by play. ‘Writing Drama for Children: Techniques and Principles’ by Adedina Nkemdirim Olubunmi says, “As a child progresses, he is hungry and open to information got through other channels like, television, playmates, home environment etc. he absorbs them and this later forms part of his personal experiences”17.
Play could also just address the fundamental need for experiential activity that serves as an alternative to the monotony and drudgery associated with work. Play psychology consists of multiple parameters that fulfill the specific needs of those participating in it; these include exercise, socialisation, exploration and sensory gratification. According to Nellie McCaslin, “some psychologists have viewed play as a way of working through unconscious pressure: Some have discerned a close relationship between play and the creative process, signifying that arts are actually one aspect of play. Regardless of theory, however, there is consensus on play being a profoundly important activity in the process of human development.”

Drama is another manifestation of play, an integral part of human existence; drama is a way of life right from infancy to adulthood. The child learns and lives through imitating actions which he sees early in adults. This very beginning of drama in the child is pivotal to his growth and development of sensitivity and awareness. This is the point at which children are constantly open to explorations, adventures and expression as they grow in skill, experience and sophistication.

The development accrued by the child through imitations for play can be identified as follows:

i) The extension of the imaginative situation

ii) The sense of patterning in activity and the utilization of space.

iii) The introduction of stories that have a strong dramatic shape in terms of plot and incidents.

iv) Sustaining roles and improvisation within the role” (Olubunmi, 2006:86-90).
It is clear from the above that children’s plays must be targeted at reaching them. Furthermore, the actions involved must be rightly channeled for effective communication.

Theatre, which is an elaborate art form, has the ability to transform the children into individuals of their own expression. Apart from the sciences that give reasoning and knowledge for life; theatre gives an understanding, a warming to the social life ahead to be experienced by the children. Hence, theatre in education adds life to the students in today’s alienation where only textbooks play a major role.

**Practice Structures of Indian Children’s Theatre:**

The project set forth with the twin objectives of introducing the concept of children’s theatre to children in the classrooms and at the same time attempting to identify and recirculate age-old traditional games by transforming them into appropriate theatre games for the children. In this context we are looking at a meeting ground for these two disciplines and devising a way that complement each other and come up with an effective practice drawn from the combination of important characteristics of children’s theatre and traditional games.

To begin with the Children Theatre context, the standard practice followed for introducing theatre to children is by exposing the medium by involving the children; in this regard theatre practitioners and instructors adopt different methods. In the introductory phase; gaming, narrating the story, asking children to tell a story and other such techniques are used. In the next level, the methods employed are: improvisations (small situations involving music and movement), taking children on a journey,
enactments, working with them in familiar activities, exercises etc. At a higher and advanced level, children are given specific games with specific objectives which is followed by taking them into play/ with costumes etc.

All the above mentioned practices are largely followed for introducing the concept of theatre to children in different forums such as theatre workshops, non formal contexts, classrooms and in children’s theatre organizations. The National School of Drama (NSD) has ‘Theatre in Education’ programme a practice followed by many theatre organizations which is different from regular ‘fairies, kings and queens’ themes as the idea is not just to entertain but also to educate. The Theatre in Education wing of NSD organises a festival of children's plays every year besides conducting workshops in theatre pedagogy for teachers.

The Pune Theatre Academy along with Dr. Mohan Agashe launched Grips theatre movement in India, which creates real life situations in theatre for children, performed by trained adults. It meant theatre for children but not by children. The topics of their plays were issues concerned with children and youth like education, school problems, prejudices, longing for friendship and love etc, and thus it was issue-based entertainment. It is basically considered to be professional theatre.

Some children’s theatre organizations such as Rangaprabhat, train children in body exercises, voice modulation, singing, storytelling, the art of developing indigenous costumes and make up needed for a play.

**Practice continuum of Children’s Theatre:**

Another aspect of Children theatre is that ‘it is not just about watching or about an audience, it is also about participation, about doing. There is theatre for children and
there is theatre by children. The whole experience of theatre activity – of collectivity and team work, of sharing, of concentration and discipline, of improvisation and agile thinking, of confidence-building and self-expressiveness- is a very valuable input in a child’s development’ (Seagull Theatre Quarterly, 1994:4).

To have the wholesome experience of theatre, it is imperative that children are encouraged to participate in the activities rather than just watching. To achieve this goal, a process tool is required to train children which they like instantly and can take up enthusiastically with minimum persuasion. And it is here that games can be used an ideal means to serve this purpose. It is easier to initiate children into doing theatre through games as this is an activity children readily pursue and enjoy. In this context, traditional games could be introduced transforming them into appropriate games suitable for school children. The focus should be on adaptability for the schools as the idea is ‘theatre at the doorstep of children’ rather than ‘children to the theatre’ as it has several constraints in terms of time, money and convenience. Besides, schools have wider reach and have the advantage of engaging as many children as possible and as many times besides the flexibility in scheduling the event. Towards realising this goal, a set of traditional games are selected for transforming them into theatre games for school children based on the criteria of familiarity, adaptability, number of players (preference is for group games involving many children), space required, and equipment needed to play such games.

Consequently, the transformed games are to be introduced to children in schools as part of the regular curriculum for their overall development, for proper social interaction, effective communication, and to develop the ability to interact and be at ease with others. The children thus trained turn out to be better learners and with
outgoing personalities who can be introduced to other theatre methods like storytelling, miming, improvisation, enactments and finally theatre. Children theatre practice continuum can therefore be devised beginning with Games, Storytelling, Improvisation, Enactments/Skits, and concluding with Children theatre.

**History of Children’s Theatre:**

The progress of children’s theatre in western countries has been steady. From the year 1900, plays suitable for child audiences began to appear more frequently in New York commercial theatres. By 1915, plays such as Peter Pan, The Blue Bird, Little Women, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Alice in Wonderland and Treasure Island had been enthusiastically received by thousands of children.

According to Davis, Jed H. and Mary Jane Larson Watkins, “The established children’s theatre programs which thrive today can most accurately trace their ancestry to an enterprise which began in 1903 among the Russian-Jewish immigrants in New York. The Children’s Educational Theatre, guided from 1903 to 1908 by Alice Minnie and Herts Heniger produced two plays a year on the little stage of a building which belonged to the parent organization—the Educational Alliance. Dramatic activities with and for children came to be recognized for the values they brought to average and underprivileged youngsters. As the community theatre movement began to sweep the country, several leading organizations began to include a play for children in their regular seasons”.

‘Grips theatre’ Berlin is arguably the best and by all accounts the most popular children’s and youth theatre in Germany. The origin of ‘Grips Theatre’ can
be traced back to the progressive students’ movements in Europe during the 60s. The students initially used the medium of a sharp, hilarious, sarcastic, political caber to reach the public. Some of the workers later turned to children’s theatre. The proposition was ‘using children’s theatre as a tool of the political movement. They also began to manifest a richer variety of themes. The plays dealt with subjects like male chauvinism, racism, economic justice and problems of the handicapped. The plays were addressed to specific age groups like 5 to 9 years, 9 to 13 years etc. Grips plays have been produced over 1200 times in countries on all continents from Canada to Kenya, Iceland to New Zealand, and Japan to Argentina.

With regards to western theories and researches, they generally conform to children’s theatre as it relates to the personal development of child. One of the most popular theories of play was advanced by Herbert Spencer, who expressed the idea that play both in animal and human behavior is the result of surplus energy. This theory is illustrated in the physical activities of the young of all species, who are yet to feel the burden of responsibility and whose bodies are young and resilient. Other psychologists explain play as a way of achieving relaxation and rest, not a refutation of the surplus energy theory but a further observation.

While only a few of the children who perform in children’s theatre will ever find their way to the professional stage, all of them will find their way into the society which nurtured their development. Further Davis, Jed H. and Mary Jane Larson Watkins says “The understanding of people which comes from the concentrated study of characters, their backgrounds, their motivations, their frustrations and aspirations form a solid basis which child participants will find helpful in establishing their own interpersonal relationships in the future”.21 (Ibid).
‘Performing for child and family audiences’ by Kevin M. Reese says “When a child is watching a play, they are completely engrossed in what they are seeing and hearing. The actors are basically guiding the young imaginations through a fantastic journey which the child willingly follows. Most actors spend years and years training to performing for adult audiences, but usually "fall into" performing for kids. Children love slapstick humor (adults really do, too, but they don't like to admit it). Slapstick consists of one-liners and puns, physical humor (falls, bumps, slaps, etc), and situational incongruities (working up to a sneeze and then hiccupping, crying loudly and stopping abruptly to say something, etc). The audience participation is good for checking retention and reinforcement“22.

Children’s Theatre in India:

Children’s theatre has flourished in various regions at different times. In particular, there is no definite period, which exactly dates back to the origins of children’s theatre. But as children’s theatre has been evolved as a strong branch of theatre, its beginning is almost that of the theatre as adults and children were as much part of the target audience as they were part of the performing groups. Independent India has gone through many changes on the cultural front. Soon after independence, the Government of India established ‘Sangeet Natak Akademi’ (SNA), the national academy for music, dance and drama; to support, encourage and promote performing arts in the country. In 1959, to meet the growing needs for developing a National Theatre in the country, the ‘National School of Drama’ (NSD) was established, the School has two performing wings – the Repertory Company and Theatre-in
Education. One of the objectives of National School of Drama at the time of its inception was to develop Children’s Theatre in India. NSD’s children’s theatre programme is a complete and independent programme which conducts its own activities for the all-round development of children and discovers their talents through the medium of theatre at various levels. In 1978-79, the international children’s year, NSD’s then presiding Director and renowned theatre practitioner, B.V. Karanth, began with his initiative of the children’s theatre programme’(2006).

In addition, NSD also started a Theatre in Education Company in 1989. Apart from this NSD frequently initiates workshops for children and teachers to disseminate the idea of children’s theatre. Every year NSD conducts theatre workshops for children in the age group of 6 to 15 years, in Delhi and different parts of the country.

The children’s theatre scene in the state of Maharashtra is highlighted by the works of leading Indian playwright Vijay Tendulkar, who is a highly influential dramatist and theatre personality. Some of the popular plays written by him such as Chimna Bandto Bangla (The He-Sparrow Builds a Bungalow), Raja Ranila Gham Harve (The King and Queen Must Work Hard), Chambar Chaukaschiche Natak (The Play of Unnecessary Questions), Bobbychi Goshta (Bobby’s Story) and Baba Haravel (Father is Lost) are enjoyed even today by children and adults alike. The other popular Playwrights, actors and practitioners include Sai Paranjpe, Sudha Karmakar, Ratnakar Matkari, Sulabha Deshpande, Sudhakar Prabhoo and a few others.

Dr. Mohan Agashe spearheaded the Grips project in India, which intended to introduce the Grips approach and method to other theatre practitioners in India with Theatre Academy, Pune, in collaboration with Max Mueller Bhavan and Grips
theatre, Berlin, by conducting a series of workshops and adaptations in different Indian languages across the country. Its format, founded by Volker Ludwig in Germany, was based on the premise of creating 'real life situations in theatre for children', not performed by children but trained adult actors. The popular plays ‘Max and Milli’ and ‘Mannomann’ have been successfully adapted into different regional languages.

In 1992, a children’s production theatre company named ‘little prithvi plays’ by ‘Prithvi Theatre’ was launched. They dedicate a complete season for theatre for children by conducting various shows and plays for children.

In Kolkata ‘Nandikar’ one of the better known theatre groups, initiated a project called ‘In Search of Children’s Theatre’ in 1992 which works for street and slum children as it is believed that slum children are absolutely culturally captivating and alive. Another theatre group ‘Sutrapat’ based in Kolkata, introduced Grips theatre to Bengali audience through its Bengali version of Max and Milli, called Care Kori Na which has completed 100 shows.

The State of Karnataka has a rich tradition of theatre. Not so long ago it had the Gubbi Theatre Company, the travelling company which was the training ground for B.V.Karanth and B.Jayashree. In 1970 B.V. Karanth staged ‘Panjarshale’ a play based on Tagore story and toured Karnataka extensively, laying the foundation of a children’s theatre in the state. In 1974, he started a theatre group named ‘Benaka’ with a special wing for children’s theatre. Karanth did ‘Ispeet Rajya’, Tagore’s Tasher Desh a production with music and direction by Karanth himself. Prema Karanth inspired by Bal Bhavan’ initiative conducted her own theatre workshop for children in the summer of 1979, with help from stalwarts like B.V.Karanth. He
directed several children's plays including *Panchara Shale*, *Neeli Kudure*, *Heddayana*, *Alilu Rama* and *the Grateful Man*. They produced a play ‘Alibaba and Forty Thieves’ with 120 children, which was a huge hit. Prema Karanth made these productions oriented workshops a regular feature of summer vacations.

Around the same time the new theatre movement started by Barry John in Delhi was gaining momentum. Their ideology made the child the playwright, director, musician, set designer and production designer. The creativity of the child became paramount. He stressed the value of the process of theatre as a creative and as a character-building activity.

Theatre organizations like ‘Rangaprabhath’ of Kerala, one of the few permanent children’s theatre functioning in India, gave prominence to children’s theatre and involved the children and practitioners in cultural festivals at state and national level. The children are taught body exercises, voice modulation, singing etc. they practice storytelling and the art of developing the indigenous costumes and makeup needed for the play.

Recently, professional theatre for children, with only professional actors on stage, has been produced for the first time within the project ‘Children’s Voice’ commissioned by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in collaboration with The Swedish International Theatre Institute/ITI. The project aims at developing and establishing professional children’s theatre in India and in Bangladesh. The stated development objective is to contribute to that “children will enjoy basic rights, including the right to theatre”²³. The project objective is that professional basis for children’s theatre should be established. For the Indian part of the project, the intention is that the project objective shall be achieved in the two
states West Bengal and Karnataka and for the Bangladeshi part in the southern and north eastern areas and the areas in and around Dhaka. In India, the professional theatre groups that participated in the project are the ‘Nandikar’, an experienced independent group in Kolkata, and the governmental national theatre ‘Rangayana’ Theatre in Mysore, where a children’s ensemble has been created at the theatre with support from the project. The project works with two issues, first to develop a professional children’s theatre in the areas mentioned above and to carry out drama training for and with children and youth in the same areas, to strengthen not only their creativity but also their self-confidence. In both India and Bangladesh there has during the last twenty years existed amateur children’s theatre, where children have produced theatre plays for a child audience, once or twice a year, often linked to a celebration. This has been the only theatre directed to a child audience, and also one of the very few forms of art directed specially to children (Markensten, 2007:23).

In Andhra Pradesh, the origin of the children's theatre movement is still more recent. Mention should be made about the Balamitra Sabha of Guntur which produced plays enacted by children. The stage actor late Suribabu was a product of that association. The Ramavilas Sabha, Chittoor has also encouraged juvenile talent in the classical drama Prahalada and Krishnaleela. The credit for encouraging Children' Drama in an organized way goes to the 'Andhra Balanandam Sangam, which started in 1947, what was known as Dasara children's festival. During those festivals one-act play competitions were held and prizes were given to the best team and the best actor. In 1966, when the Jawahar Bal Bhavan came into existence, it had definite houses on weekends whose motive had something to do with children’s theatre, but its implicit contribution cannot be overlooked. Therefore, it can be said
that beyond the annual day functions of the schools, the children’s theatre at present, is steadily witnessing a progressive phase.
End Notes


8. The theatre continuum mentioned in ‘childdrama.com’ (according to the Children's Theatre Association of America) has participation theatre and theatre in its second half of the continuum, which are replaced by children theatre and theatre in education respectively in conformity with the focus area of the researcher i.e., games, theatre and education.


