

Article No. 12

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS: ACCESSING CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE OF AESTHETIC ENGAGEMENT

By Penny Bundy (Australia)

Abstract

This paper reports the findings of a research project conducted with four classes of children (Years 7, 5, 3 and 1) in a Queensland primary school. Although the ultimate aim of the project (as it continues) is to attempt to understand the aesthetic engagement of children in response to drama/theatre experience, here the focus was on exploring ways in which interview techniques might be used to encourage children to articulate the nature of their experiences. In particular, the paper focuses on how children express their experience of *connection* and *heightened awareness*, and how interview and analysis techniques might allow the researcher to know if these have been experienced. The stimulus material used to elicit their responses was the film *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. This paper describes the project and reports findings focused on the following questions:

- Do children experience connection to an *idea* of a dramatic work at a metaphoric level? If so, in what way do they communicate this and how as researchers can we know it?
- Do children experience heightened awareness of the *idea* of the drama? If so, in what way do they communicate this and how as researchers can we know it?

Extrait

Cet article présente les résultats d'un projet de recherche conduit avec quatre classes d'enfants (en quatrième, sixième, CM1 et CE1) dans une école primaire du Queensland. Bien que le but ultime du projet (toujours en cours) soit d'essayer de comprendre l'engagement esthétique d'enfants en réponse à l'expérience de l'art dramatique/théâtre, l'objectif était ici d'explorer la manière dont les techniques d'entretien pourraient être utilisées pour encourager les enfants à articuler la nature de leurs expériences. En particulier, l'article se concentre sur la façon dont les enfants expriment leur expérience de *connexion* et de *conscience accrue*, et comment les techniques d'entretien et d'analyse peuvent permettre au chercheur de savoir si celles-ci ont été ressenties. Le matériel stimulant utilisé pour susciter leurs réponses était le film *Harry Potter et la pierre philosophe*. Cet article décrit le projet et présente les résultats centrés sur les questions suivantes :

- Les enfants font-ils l'expérience d'une connexion à une *idée* d'un travail dramatique à un niveau métaphorique ? Si c'est le cas, comment communiquent-ils ceci et comment pouvons-nous le savoir en tant que chercheurs ?
- Les enfants font-ils l'expérience d'une conscience accrue d'une *idée* de l'art dramatique ? Si c'est le cas, comment communiquent-ils ceci et comment pouvons-nous le savoir en tant que chercheurs ?

Resumen

Este documento informa sobre los resultados de un proyecto de investigación conducido en cuatro clases de niños (en los grados 7, 5, 3 y 1) dentro de una escuela primaria de Queensland. Aunque el último fin del proyecto (que aún continua) es intentar comprender la participación estética de los niños en respuesta a la experiencia de ellos con el drama/teatro; aquí el punto de enfoque fue explorar las técnicas de la entrevista que podían utilizarse para animar a los niños a que comenten sobre la naturaleza de sus experiencias. En particular, el documento se concentra en la manera como los niños expresan sus vivencias sobre el aumento de la conciencia y la conexión; y de la manera como las técnicas de la entrevista y de análisis pueden permitir al investigador para saber si estos se han experimentado. El material de estímulo usado para producir sus reacciones fue la película *Harry Potter y la Piedra Filosofal*. Este documento describe el proyecto e informa sobre los resultados centrados en las siguientes preguntas:

- Pueden los niños hacer la conexión de experiencias de una *idea* a un nivel metafórico? Si es así, ¿de que manera comunican esto y de que forma nosotros como investigadores podemos tener conocimiento sobre ello?
- Experimentan los niños una conciencia elevada sobre la idea del drama. Si es así, ¿de que manera

comunican esto y de que forma nosotros como investigadores podemos tener conocimiento sobre ello?

Author's biography

Penny Bundy is a senior lecturer and drama coordinator at Griffith University in Brisbane . She is a playwright, director and drama facilitator, especially in the fields of applied theatre and theatre for young people. Penny has received several awards for her work, including the American Alliance for Theatre and Education Distinguished Dissertation Award and an ASEA Arts Recognition Award for her work with young people. She is a current recipient of two Australian Research Council Linkage Grants.

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[EDITOR: The sections of tabulated dialogue and analysis in this article are incorrectly formatted, owing to platform transcription issues. We apologies for this]

Introduction

What is it 'to be aesthetically engaged'? What is actually happening 'inside us' when we are profoundly moved by an arts experience? What is the link between the work (its content, form and context) and us that enables us to undergo such significant experiences? Is an aesthetic experience in itself an educational one? These questions were a focus for me in earlier research, focused on the experiences and reactions of adults to a range of drama events including participatory drama and live theatre. ¹ The conclusions I drew were that experience of aesthetic engagement consists of three key characteristics: animation, connection and heightened awareness.

Animation is the feeling of invigoration and stimulation we might have as (and sometimes after) a work is experienced. When we experience animation, we feel more alive, more alert. Some people may equate this with aesthetic engagement, but for me this is insufficient. Two further characteristics (connection and heightened awareness) must also be present. *Connection* occurs when the percipient of an arts experience connects to an *idea* (or *ideas*) stimulated by the artwork, but not necessarily directly contained in it. Ideas are concepts occurring at a metaphoric level and formed in the mind of the percipient as they experience the work. These concepts relate to what it means to be human.

Heightened awareness occurs when connection continues beyond the immediate experience of the work and leaves percipients pondering questions about humanity which have not previously been consciously contemplated, or for which they have no easy answers. It is the questions which continue.

I wanted to know whether these same qualities or key components might be present in the aesthetic experience of primary school children. I also wanted to know how a researcher might use interviews following a performance to access the nature of the children's experience. The study I am about to describe focused on two questions:

- Do children experience connection to an *idea* of a dramatic work at a metaphoric level? If so, in what way do they communicate this and how as researchers can we know it?
- Do children experience heightened awareness of an *idea* of the drama? If so, in what way do

I chose as a stimulus a work that is known to have engaged children: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. While I acknowledge that response to film, video, book, theatre and participatory drama experience will not be identical, the immediate purpose of this project was to find a way of talking to children (after a performance event) that might throw light on the experience they had undergone.

How the study was conducted

The research was conducted in one Brisbane state primary school over a one-week period. Two researchers (Ellen Appleby and myself) worked with four classes of children: one Year 7 class, one Year 5 class, one Year 3 class and one Year 1 class. All children who had parental permission to take part in the research viewed *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* on separate days in their class groupings. Each audience was videoed and the researchers took observational notes of the children as they watched the film. Following the class viewing, the classroom teachers randomly selected groups of children to be interviewed. Taped interviews of approximately 20–40 minutes were conducted with each group in the following manner:

- two individual interviews (one girl and one boy);
- two groups of two (two girls/two boys);
- two groups of three to four children.

The research began with the older Year 7 children. Using the understanding we developed from these interviews on the first day, the questions were modified or refined before the research was conducted with other classes.

Interviewing the children

We adopted Ginsberg's (1997) approach to interviewing children. He argues for an approach to interviewing which is more akin to conversation (Ginsberg 1997: 44). In this approach, the researcher begins with open-ended questions that aim to discover the child's world-view (Ginsberg 1997: 49). The initial response offered by the child is then followed up in conversation as appropriate. The intention of such an approach is to attempt to follow the child's thought in whichever direction it leads. The purpose of such a conversation is to probe the meaning that the child is making in the context. Rather than having

fixed and identical questions which are asked of each individual in the study, this approach recognises that each child is 'an autonomous constructor of knowledge' (Ginsberg 1997: 116), and each must be encouraged to respond as openly as possible.

Following brief discussion aimed to contextualise the research for the children and gain their agreement to participate, our opening questions were intended to provide the researchers with knowledge regarding the children's familiarity and prior experience of *Harry Potter* — as a book (either read to them or by them), as a movie (on the big screen) and as a video viewed in a range of contexts.

Following this, we drew from a range of possible questions and statements that could act as starting points. These were divided into sections according to our purpose in asking them. For example, some of the initial purposes listed included determining the language children use to:

- judge quality;
- make links between their judgments of quality and the properties of the film;
- discuss elements of form.
- discuss their reactions to character.
- describe the nature of engagement during and after the experience of the film.

The responses given by the older students informed the redevelopment of the key questions which were asked of the younger children as the study progressed. After day one, questions designed to contextualise the research for the children and gain their agreement to participate, and to provide the researcher with knowledge regarding the children's familiarity with *Harry Potter* remained the same. Other questions were rewritten and regrouped as follows:

- to focus the children and encourage them to talk freely;
- character, identification and feeling response;
- viewing focus;
- judgment of quality and/or critical judgment of the work.

Analysing the data for connection

The interviews were transcribed and analysed. I began my analysis with the Year 7 interviews. Using the transcripts, I identified segments of the interviews where the children directly expressed some form of connection to an *idea* that was beyond the work but stimulated by it. Focusing on the direct expression contained in the transcript appeared limiting. For the interviews I conducted, I had recall of the way the children had expressed themselves as well as the words they said. I needed to access more than their choice of words.

I returned to the taped interviews and listened for the way they expressed themselves and communicated understanding. On the transcripts, I marked the inflections, the enthusiasm, the matter of factness, the laughter. There were different types of laughter. Sometimes a laugh seemed to indicate embarrassment, not knowing what to say. At other times, it appeared to indicate a reliving or recall of a moment found amusing.

I worked with the newly transcribed Year 7 interviews looking for the notion of connecting to an idea. I compiled a list of the ideas that emerged.

I put the Year 7 work aside and began the same process with the Year 5 transcripts. The interviews certainly contained the animation and the enthusiasm of the children. I intuitively felt they were engaged by the work. I attempted to identify when the children expressed connection to an idea stimulated by the work — and could pinpoint nothing. It seemed unreasonable to believe that children in Year 7 experience connection but those in Year 5 do not.

This encouraged me to return to the Year 7 transcripts, and in particular those segments where I felt connection had been indicated. I reanalysed the Year 7 data, asking:

- On what grounds did I make the assumption that connection occurred?
- In what way did the child communicate this sense of connection to me?

By re-analysing in this way, it became evident that each time I had made the assumption that a child was connecting to an idea, certain qualities were present in the dynamic of the question and interview response. These were:

- identification of a specific (e.g. moment, event, character, place) in the work;
- explanation of the specific;
- imaginative projection:
 - the child put themselves in the moment as they described it; or

- the description of the moment was coupled with an animated response such as laughter, shivers (as though reliving the moment); or
- the child articulated how they imagined the character to be feeling in the moment;
- judgment — an emotional or conceptual assessment of the moment as it applied to them (e.g. it was unjust, sad, impossible but desirable).

Sometimes one of these four aspects was implied in the question — for example, a specific moment may have been identified by the interviewer, or the question may have identified and asked them to comment on a feeling they had experienced.

Using these four emerging categories, I returned to analyse all of the transcripts to determine whether they were present. Whereas initially I had been basing my assessment of the fourth category, 'judgment', on their direct expression — for example, a statement that something was 'unjust' — this analysis was extended to include further interpretation on my part. In the following I have chosen four moments (one from each year level) to indicate the process and the way I was interpreting. They are not intended to be representative of the response of all children, but rather to illustrate the categories and the process of analysis.

Two Year 7 girls were discussing 'flying'. One of the girls, without prompting, stated that she wished she could do that. She then assessed the moment or the thought of doing this as 'fun'. As the conversation continued, she became more wistful, judging the situation to be impossible but desirable. Here, although two children are responding, I am focusing on the collected statements of Hannah only. The first category (identification of the general) was inherent in the lead-up conversation.

HANNAH: I mean I'd like to fly like that, it would be just so fun.

2: identification of the specific (flying)

3: imaginative projection (wishfully placing herself in the position)

PENNY: So do you imagine that feeling, that sense of thrill and excitement, as you watch? What feeling do you have watching it?

CHARLOTTE: Like I wish I was there [animated and connecting].

HANNAH: Yeah like that, doing that, yeah like, oh I wanna do that [stresses []]. Not so much like that, you'd be like —

3: imaginative projection continues 4: conceptual judgement that the

that would be so fun, 'cos like those movies where people are flying on the broomsticks, like that would be so fun, I'm never gonna do that. Like you know it's never gonna happen [wistful []].

specific identified is impossible but desirable

In the example I have chosen from the Year 5 transcripts, one girl was being interviewed. Gina appeared to identify with the idea of humiliation — of being made to feel small by someone else's behaviour. She had been asked if she felt the same way as the characters when she watched them, or if she felt differently. She stated that it was sometimes the same and sometimes different. She was asked if she could give an example of when she might feel the same and replied:

GINA: When Hermione was like showing Ron that she could do it and he couldn't.

1&2: she identifies the general and the particular

I sort of felt like how Ron would feel in that kind of situation. Like I'm so annoyed

3: imagines how Ron would have felt and puts herself in his shoes

because they wouldn't be able to do it.

4: she judges the behaviour of the

other character in relation to how she has positioned herself

In the next example, four Year 3 children were being interviewed. The children were having a reasonably animated discussion about their favourite characters and the characters they found most interesting. Tina claimed to find Snape the most interesting, but Hermione was her favourite because 'she was helpful'. The other children in the group disputed this, and said Hermione was a bossy boots. Here Tina appears to be connecting to the idea of self-sacrifice and being friendly by protecting others.

ELLEN: What was the moment that made her change from being Miss Bossy Boots to being friends with everybody?

1: the question identifies the general

TINA: when the troll came

2: she identifies the specific moment

[quite animated] she helped them not get into trouble. She made herself get into trouble after the troll thing.

4: she judges the behaviour and actions of the character (the idea of self-sacrifice)

3: she is animated and adamant as she defends her position against the others.

Ellen: That's right, I remember now.

Tina: She did not want them to get in trouble. might be feeling

3: she imagines how the character

4: she makes another judgment about why the character has done something — protecting others

Ellen was interviewing a group of Year 1 children — one girl and two boys. The children were asked if they were ever left thinking about something after a movie was over. Here, Bruce is connecting to the idea of loneliness or human need for other people. He was not focusing on the friendship but what would happen when that was taken away.

GEORGE: I was thinking it was a bit sad [said slightly wistfully]

3: expresses an emotional reaction as though recalling the moment

BRUCE: Me too

GEORGE: Cos Voldemort tried to kill Harry Potter.

2: identification of the particular

*ELLEN: but did Harry Potter ... did it come right at the end?
Was it a happy ending?*

2: identification of a new particular

[Both shake their heads]
response indicates emotional reaction

3: the solemn nature of the

ELLEN: No? Why do you say that?

GEORGE: Because it was sad

3: reaffirms emotional reaction

*BRUCE: kinda sad because Harry needed Hermione and
Ron*

4: Judgment — an emotional or
conceptual assessment of the
moment relating to human need for
others

The ideas

Analysing all the transcripts in this way revealed some interesting similarities and difference between children of different ages in response to *Harry Potter* .

The Year 7s appeared to connect to ideas related to:

- magic, the context, the place and all its possibilities:
 - the mirror and its potential;
 - the possibility of flying;
 - unexpected possibilities of the place;
 - the characters;
- the ordinary boy who does extraordinary things;
- the imperfect character;
- being bullied;
- danger;
- bravery fear and facing the scary;
- sacrifice;
- the futility of character behaviour;
- disgusting.

The Year 5s appeared to connect to *ideas* related to:

- being rich and famous;
- wizardry or the idea of having the powers of wizardry;
- feeling small or being made to feel small;
- being picked on or put down;
- being bullied/ being the victim in some way;
- bravery coupled with vulnerability;
- the imperfect or infallible character;
- safety;
- paying someone back.

The Year 3s appeared to connect to *ideas* related to:

- the character — Harry;
- disgusting;
- self-sacrifice;
- the one who is best at everything;
- the hero who will save the day;
- the extraordinary and amazing;
- loneliness.

The Year 1s appeared to connect to *ideas* related to:

- the excitement of winning;
- potential danger;
- the fallible character;
- the idea of the magic and the magic world;
- love;
- a character's vulnerability;
- being bullied — someone being mean to us;
- facing the challenge of the new;
- the hero who works for the sake of others;
- paying someone back;
- standing up for ourselves;
- loneliness and needing other people.

Whereas the predominant points of connection for the older children were the extraordinary potentials of such a world and the ordinary or vulnerable character doing extraordinary things (with the stress on the extraordinary), the younger children were more focused on the vulnerability of characters.

Searching in the gaps

In addition to focusing on when the four categories of response were present, I was also interested when

one or more of these characteristics were not evident. I wondered whether it was the interview process and our use of questions that offered or denied the possibility, or whether the children had not experienced the work in this way.

For instance, during the following interaction I had a sense that Charles was possibly connecting to the *idea* of danger but the questions didn't allow me to quite get at it. Here there is insufficient information in the interaction between the interviewer and the child to allow me to determine whether he is making a conceptual judgment of the moment he has identified beyond it being scary.

Charles had identified certain characters as 'bad' characters:

ELLEN: So how did you react to those characters, how did you feel about them?

1: identification of the specific — implied in the question and the previous conversation

CHARLES: well, [slight pause] not much really

ELLEN: no? Did you react to them when they came on to the screen?

CHARLES: er ... Only with Voldemort [chuckle]

2: specific — Voldemort is identified

3: 'the chuckle' as he recalls the moment

ELLEN: And how did you feel when he came on to the screen?

CHARLES: Like ... er ... probably [slight pause] I just felt a little ... like ... shivery

3: Imaginative projection — putting himself in the moment as he recalls feeling 'shivery'

A similar occurrence was evident in this Year 1 interview:

ELLEN: What about some of the fantastic things that happened in the movie, some of the things that really don't happen in the real world, they just happened in the pretend movie world?

PAULA: Spells ...

1: identifies the general

and the wall breaking up into Diagon Alley

2: identifies a particular

ELLEN: What do you think of when you see those things?

PAULA: I wish they were true.

3: imaginative projection

In both interactions, there is insufficient information to know whether connection is occurring and the specific nature of it. Did either child make some conceptual judgment of the moment as it applied to human existence in the world beyond the movie? To ascertain this, the questions needed to be continued.

Analysing the data for heightened awareness

At the beginning of this paper, I said that heightened awareness occurs when connection continues beyond the immediate experience of the work and leaves percipients pondering questions about humanity which have not previously been consciously contemplated or for which they have no easy answers. To determine whether the children continued to think about the movie after they had seen it, we asked:

Sometimes after I see a movie or a play or read a book I am left thinking about things after it. Does that happen to you? ... Did that happen to you with Harry Potter? ... Did you go away thinking about anything? ... Wondering about anything?

Ellen added a particularly useful additional question:

Do you ever think about things differently after you see a movie, read a book or watch a play?

All children appeared to understand the questions, and most claimed that they had experienced this in response to 'something' in the past — though not necessarily after seeing *Harry Potter*.

None of the older children (Year 7 and 5) indicated they had experienced heightened awareness after seeing *Harry Potter*. Yet they had experienced this after other movies. One Year 7 girl used the example of a film about slavery in America to describe how she was left wondering how people could do that to other people and how this question stayed with her for a long time after seeing it.

The sense of heightened awareness following *Harry Potter* seemed stronger for the younger children. In response to the questions we asked, some of the Year 1s talked about the way they were left considering how anyone could cope if they were forced to experience a family situation similar to Harry's. The children continued to contemplate the idea by projecting it beyond the limits of the work and considering it in relation to 'real life' as they understood it.

It is possible we may be left contemplating questions about humanity without them being significant enough to us for us to really notice. One thing that emerged in this data was that when the children were aware that they had been left thinking about an idea emerging from the work, they appeared surprised by the thoughts themselves. For example, some children seemed surprised to be left considering how another child might cope with a cruel parent. They appeared surprised by the questions they were left pondering. When I contemplate the way this might happen for me, it seems that there is a sense of surprise in the response and it relates to the moral position I hold about the idea itself.

One explanation for the different responses of the older and younger children may relate to the ideas to which they were connecting. As I said earlier, the older children were more focused on the extraordinary potentials of such a world and the ordinary or vulnerable character doing extraordinary things (with the stress on the extraordinary). The younger children were more focused on the vulnerability of the characters. The further questions that arise from a focus on the extraordinary and wonderful possibilities of such a world are more likely to relate to what can possibly happen in the future in such a world. On the other hand, children who have focused on the vulnerability of the characters are more likely to have continuing questions that relate to this.

I was particularly interested in the responses of the Year 3 children to these particular questions. In all the Year 3 interviews, without prompting from the interviewer, the children responded by saying 'yes' and then talking about playing. They described writing spells, making spell books and wands, building Lego castles, playing the movie, drawing pictures and creating cartoons. Their responses indicated to me that, for them, playing is a thinking thing and thinking is a doing thing. They don't separate the concepts.

Experiencing *Harry Potter* in different media — an aside

In the introduction to this paper, I acknowledged that responses to a book, film, live theatre and other participatory drama experiences are different. All of the children who were interviewed had prior experience of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* — as a book and as a film. All had seen it on the big screen and all but one had previously seen it on video. While our intention in asking questions about prior experience had been to gain some contextual understanding of 'this viewing', the children's responses revealed an interesting finding that I had not been expecting. Before turning to the conclusion of this paper, brief mention of this may be of interest to readers who work with young people. The children differed in whether they preferred the movie or the book. Children who claimed to prefer the movie generally described themselves as non-readers. These self-declared non-readers then explained that when you read you either don't get a picture in your head or if you do it's more two-dimensional — perhaps like a cartoon image.

Charlotte in Year 7 described it like this:

It's more because it's a movie. It's like as I said before I can read absolutely fine but I just don't really enjoy it. I like to be able to see it and hear it and I just like that a bit better ... Because I could actually see what happened in the movie. In a book it doesn't give me a really clear image. Like it will give me a sort of an image but not a really clear image. If I can actually see it for myself I would enjoy it more.

Gina in Year 5 described it like this:

Sometimes, like since you don't really get the picture, sort of, you sort of think something a little bit different like if ... Sort of ... you ... since you, like before, don't have the screen you don't understand some of the bits. Like I know some of the books that we've read in reading time I don't really understand it.

James in Year 3 stated that he preferred the movie:

Cos the book you don't get much pictures. They don't move and stuff.

Two Year 1 boys described it like this:

BRAD: *Cos you can see the pictures and you just look at words, reading.*

ELLEN: *Hmm, any other ideas why you might like the movie better than the book?*

TONY: *Because you can see the people*

BRAD: *You can see all the people like acting, and everything.*

TONY: *And you can see all the people bigger.*

Conclusion

If our intention in interviewing children is to determine whether they have experienced connection, we need to plan and conduct the interviews in such a way that children are offered an opportunity to disclose to the interviewer information which addresses the four predetermined criteria outlined in this paper.

The first two criteria (identification and explanation of the specific) allow us to know what from the work itself the child is thinking about — it might be a character, a place, a relationship or an event. The third criterion indicates that the specific they identified has had some form of impact on them at both an emotional and a cognitive level. This is easier to determine with children who tend to be more openly animated in their responses. With more reserved children, questions need to be asked in such a way that they are offered the opportunity to discuss how they imagine the character might be feeling in the fictional moment.

The fourth — and probably most important — criterion is also the most difficult to access. It tells us whether the child has made a leap beyond the work. It is easier to determine with older children and others who have the language to describe this directly. For example, some children were able to articulate their judgment by directly claiming that an action or event was 'unjust'. Often, however — particularly with the younger children — this may have been experienced but could not be articulated with such clarity. Some children used analogy or a longer description. We need to be open to and read their analogies and descriptions, and attempt to tease them out further. We need to direct our questions (without leading) to determine whether they are thinking this way at all.

While we need to begin with what we intuitively feel children are responding to, questions need to be framed and continued in such a way that we seek to find out whether all of the four aspects are potentially present in their response.

Some of the questions we asked were of more value than others. I have often heard children being asked 'what they liked and didn't' following a theatre performance occurring in a school context. An interesting

response I noted in the interviews we conducted across all of the grades was that being asked what one found interesting and what one liked elicited different responses from the same child. Children were quite literal about the word 'liked'. They could find a scary scene interesting. They found someone's inappropriate behaviour interesting, but they would not have said they liked it. They liked Harry Potter. They found Ron and Hagrid interesting. In addition, when children made a statement about what they 'liked', follow-up questions often elicited little more than 'because it was nice', or a shrug, or 'I don't know — I just liked it'. On the other hand, when the notion 'interesting' was followed up with a question such as 'Why was that interesting to you?' they could more easily elaborate and explain.

The group interviews were useful in that they often encouraged dynamic conversation amongst the children, and on the whole appeared to discourage them from trying to say what they thought we (as researchers) wanted to hear. The children were usually quite happy to disagree with each other. The difficulties associated with the group interviews related to the dominance of particular children and the difficulty of adequately following up and extending individual responses to determine exactly what a particular person was thinking. For example, in the Year 7 group interview, the children had been talking about how important the magic was and Ellen was trying to follow up why magic was so fascinating to them:

- ANDREW: *Then because it's not like a normal movie like just this made up stuff, it's like magic that could be real in a different place.*
- ELLEN: *Why do you think it's the magic that makes it so*
- MARTIN: *The scene makes it really good as well, because it's England, it's nice and green and beautiful, and all these nice places and the buildings are spectacular as well. It's not just magic that makes it good. Like when they are eating dinner how the floating candles and all the floating/*
- BRIAN: *Yeah, all the special scenes that they put in, yeah*
- MARTIN: *it looks really good. Which I think it makes it nice*
- TONY: *in the book when he is going away from the restricted section, he gets his foot stuck in the thing.*

To follow up the thinking of all children on all criteria in this situation is difficult. As soon as we follow the interests and thoughts of one child, we are likely to lose the others because they do not have a shared focus.

When the children in the group situation do appear to share a focus, it is easier to follow all and determine individual responses. In the following Year 1 interview with four children, all ultimately indicate the experience of connection — that is, all four criteria are present in their individual responses, but determining this requires careful analysis.

- T: But for one thing I know what Harry feels like at the end, because at the end he feels like he's going away from home, not going*
- 1+2: identifies the general and the specific
- 3: imaginative projection (she knows what he

home, because the Dursleys don't treat him like he was a part of the family.

feels like)

4: conceptual judgment — leaving home

4: conceptual judgment — how members of a family treat each other

W: Like Hagrid's his father, like Hagrid and Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall

1+2: recognises the general and the particular

4: conceptual judgment — the nature of family

T: yes he felt like he ...

I: I cried.

3: imaginative projection

W: I hate the Dursleys. [said with some ferocity]

3: imaginative projection

E: You would not like to live with them?

G: I would hate to live with them. I would feel like I wanted to run away any second.

3: imaginative projection

4: conceptual judgment — the need to run away

Unless the focus of the research is to determine the individual responses of children, it is perhaps of more value to see the group interview as a way of encouraging conversation amongst the children but for the researcher to focus on the responses of only one or two within the group.

Although not necessarily an outcome of viewing *Harry Potter*, the responses of the children indicate that they do experience heightened awareness as an outcome of undergoing some arts experiences. Many were able to describe this phenomenon with clarity. They also indicated that 'playing and creating' may offer them a way to continue to contemplate and bring to consciousness the idea of a work. Opportunities for children to play and create following an arts experience might also offer the researcher attempting to understand the children's experience of an art work a way of knowing more fully how they are processing the ideas that have arisen for them. Offering such opportunities and then observing the way children play and create could be useful to researchers who seek to understand the children's experiences and the link between the work and its impact.

The data indicated that the experience of heightened awareness does not necessarily indicate a change in attitude. As in the case of the Year 7 child who spoke about slavery, the outcome of such contemplation was a reinforcement of the values she already held. I suspect there was a similar occurrence for the Year 1s who were left wondering how any person can cope in an alienating family situation. As Bentley (1965: 53–54) said, such a process involves re-cognition rather than cognition: 'It does not tell you anything you didn't know ... it tells you something you know and makes you realize.' Heightened awareness allows us to see the world (and our relationship to it) differently. It offers the possibility of making sense of it in new ways. It is because of this that Dewey (1958: 290) could claim that knowledge is transformed in an aesthetic experience.

Some continuing questions

The immediacy of the live theatre/drama experience (including the physical presence of the actors or participants) and the form, content and context of the work impact on both the intensity and nature of the experience. Schoenmakers' (1988: 142–52) research indicates that the nature of the experience of live theatre is not a singular type of response and varies according to the way the spectator or participant identifies. He describes five types of identification: empathic, similarity, wish, participation and theatrical projection. While each involves different processes, the first three forms involve predominant identification with the fictional characters in the work. These forms of identification occur in response to film as well as live drama events. Although the intensity of the experience may vary in response to live action compared with film, if the spectator has engaged in one of these three ways, the language used to articulate the nature of the response is likely to be similar.

The language used to describe an experience involving one of the final two forms of identification articulated by Schoenmakers (participation and theatrical projection) is likely to be different. Rather than identifying with the fictional characters, these forms of identification involve more focus on the experience of participation itself, or on the form and devices of the work. Although connection, animation and heightened awareness are also potentially present when a child identifies in these ways, the focus on response to film used here has precluded the development of understanding of the language children might use to describe these other types of experiences.

The findings also raise further questions about the value we attach to arts experiences. While an arts experience which offers children connection coupled with animation is likely to be enjoyable for them, is this sufficient? Must we be left considering questions about humanity for which we have no easy answers, or which we have not previously consciously considered? I suspect that if we are to claim that the arts experience has an educational purpose, then this is likely to be our aim. Similarly, I suspect that our most profound arts experiences contain all three characteristics of aesthetic engagement.

On the other hand, few of us would deny that we have positively experienced works of art that offered the possibility of animation and connection without the significance of heightened awareness. This was certainly the case for the children from Years 7 and 5 who were interviewed. Nearly all judged *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* to be one of the best films they had ever seen, yet none of them appeared to experience heightened awareness as an outcome. It was not that they lacked understanding of such a concept — nearly all discussed this as an outcome of experiencing other works. Even so, not one of them attached any importance to it in terms of judging the quality of the work or of their engagement.

This paper reported the findings of the research, focusing in particular on the notions of connection and heightened awareness and on how we might best interview children (and analyse those interviews) to determine whether these have been experienced. Specific criteria which enabled the researchers to analyse key components of the children's responses were developed. Several questions remain:

- Will these criteria also work for developing understanding of how children experience live drama, particularly taking into account the different ways a child might identify?
- Will they apply to the responses of children from different cultural backgrounds?
- Is it possible to determine whether any of the criteria are present in a child's response to an arts experience through means other than an interview — for example, through a child's artwork or their play?

Note

A list of publications reporting the earlier research is included in the references that follow this paper.

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